

Thursday, July 1, 2021

Volume 27 #627

"Success is often the result of taking a misstep in the right direction." » Al Bernstein



Relationship Breakdown

While traveling out of state this week, my wife called one morning to ask, "Do you have any ideas about what would cause a truck to shift into gear but not be able to move?"

Calling on my vast mechanical knowledge, I said, "Uh... it's broken."

When she texted a picture of the tow truck taking my son's truck from our driveway, I began texting him, "Glad I gave you that truck before the big bills started hitting. Whew! Good luck with that!"

(I thought it. I didn't have the heart to send it.)

My wife's next call later that day was to tell me how irate she had become with our regular auto repair shop. Their estimate seemed ridiculously high.

We've had good experiences with that shop before and have brought dozens of jobs to them over the past 10 years. I figured that the guy simply didn't explain himself well.

When I called, I couldn't surmise whether this person (whom I'd never spoken to before) was distracted or simply indifferent.

When I informed him that I'd get back to him soon to tell him which towing company would



Raising the Bar

Over the years, I've preached to more folks than I can remember about the power they have to influence their work environments.

You can show up at work wondering what the mood of your workplace is going to be, or you can decide that you're going to be the driving factor of the mood in that workplace.

Manners and an upbeat demeanor can be just as contagious as bad attitudes. I was reminded of this as I waited for a plane in Minneapolis.

I'm not sure if it is the new norm at some airports, but I was struck by how many usually bustling places were eerily quiet.

I returned my rental car to a garage with no employees present. We're talking zero...a ghost town.

A sign instructed us to leave the keys in the car and proceed to the terminal.

The airline club I planned on doing work in was closed "until further notice."

The restaurant near our gate wasn't serving food that day.

be picking up our truck to bring it elsewhere, he sheepishly said, "Uh... okay."

He then called back 5 minutes later to say they would waive this fee and that fee and reduce the rate on something or other.

In theory, that should have made me happy. In reality, it suggested that this establishment that had earned our trust and business for a decade may no longer deserve either.

A third conversation and a few more price adjustments with a different manager did a better job of getting me comfortable that, on this job anyway, we weren't being taken advantage of.

Our days of not thinking twice about bringing our cars to this establishment, however, are over.

That's unfortunate for us, but bad business for them.

Customers, of course, will always want the best deals they can get. Above all, however, they want to know you are honest and fair with them.

Trust is one of the most valuable assets any person or business can earn.

I'd argue it's more powerful than any form of outside marketing available. It can take months or even years to earn, but a few moments to lose.

Make sure your teams realize that sometimes customers will be happy with what you tell them. Sometimes they won't be.

But when they can trust that you are at least always honest and fair, relationships can remain strong.

John, the bartender, apologized and informed me that their cook didn't show up and they had no backup.

I was struck by his tone and demeanor. He seemed legitimately apologetic.

My response to hearing a restaurant wasn't serving food would normally have been an annoyed one. Instead, I found myself appreciative that this guy was holding up the fort.

He and I ended up in an entertaining conversation about the state of business today.

I've had similar conversations with college professors that were not nearly as informative and entertaining as the one I had with John.

I was reminded that people who work face-to-face with hundreds of folks each day often have a wit and wisdom about them that folks who sit in offices and stare at computer screens each day often lack.

From my table over the next 90 minutes, I likely heard John explain their situation and suggest other food options 50 times.

He was as upbeat and sincere with the 50th customer as he was with me. And I watched folks who would normally be annoyed make the best of things and joke with one another.

I must have heard 10 different people thank John by name when they left for their flights.

That understaffed, customer-disappointing situation could have been a pretty miserable one.

One good-natured and hard-working guy made it a pretty cool one for everyone, including himself.

What environment will you create for customers – and yourself – today?

"The trick is to be grateful when your mood is high and graceful when it is low." » Richard Carlson



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*Dave Martin, author of *The In-Store Advantage*, has become one of the most prolific writers in the banking industry. His keynote presentations, seminars, and podcasts have an authenticity and humor that brings teams of all sizes and seniority levels together.*

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