

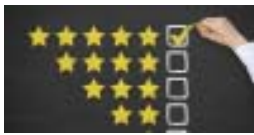
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**"Before you react, think. Before you spend, earn. Before you criticize, wait. Before you quit, try." » Ernest Hemingway**

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## Hit Me with Your Worst Shot

I recently had the opportunity of teaching two large classes at a graduate school of banking. (Scary, I know.)

A few weeks later, instructors were provided with the assessments that bankers were asked to complete.

Along with a few simple numerical ratings, they were asked two questions: 1) What was the best aspect about the class? And 2) What was the worst aspect about the class?

To be honest, I doubt any instructor likes students being prodded to list a "worst" aspect of their class.

Sure, I suppose that technically something must be "worst."

But it sounds, uh...harsh.

I opened the email attachment with the reviews and scrolled straight to the "worst aspect" columns to see what horrors I would find.

I suppose I'm a "Give me the bad news first," kind of guy.

I blew right past the numerical rankings and a long list of very nice comments on the left side of the page. My priority was to see what the "haters" said.

The fact that most put N/A or "nothing" in the worst category was comforting.



## The Weakest Link

A recent attempt to purchase a refrigerator from a locally owned business reinforced how a company's sales and customer service efforts are usually only as strong as their weakest link.

I was in the market for a refrigerator for an outside storage area at my mother's home in Louisiana.

While I've always tried to support small businesses, the past two years have made that desire stronger than ever.

I learned of a locally owned company that sold "scratched and dented" and refurbished appliances.

Since this was going into a storage shed, that seemed like an acceptable option.

I called to ask a few questions and a young lady working in the showroom answered.

She was well-informed and very helpful, even sending me pictures of the units she was telling me about.

Although a used unit with no warranty was only 20% cheaper than a new unit from a national chain,

I was ready to support the "little guy."

Then, I had to interact with the office manager.

It also got me really wondering who the folks were going out of their way to be critical. I mean, why couldn't they just leave that part blank or put N/A like other anonymous people did...and were now my favorite people ever?

I found myself smiling as I realized I was displaying the behavior that I've spoken to managers about for years.

We humans tend to give negative comments far more weight than positive ones, regardless of their actual significance.

If ten people compliment your appearance today, but someone during the day asks, "Are you putting on weight?", that one comment stays with you far longer than the nice things said to you.

I then remembered sage advice I read long ago. Ask yourself if the criticism you receive has any truth to it. If it doesn't, ignore it.

But if there is some truth to it, be more interested in improving that thing than annoyed that someone pointed it out to you.

In this case, one of the funnier and telling items was that there were a couple of aspects of the classes cited as "worst" by two participants that were listed as "best" by others. And I suppose they were both right.

There's something to learn from each.

Personal growth is aided by honest, objective feedback.

Whether you are giving (or receiving) it this week, be principally interested in communicating (and receiving) it with a positive mindset.

The great employee on the floor didn't have the authority to complete the sale to me online, nor could I complete it myself. Okay, no worries.

The office manager chose to communicate via text messages. Interesting, but okay.

She then seemed bothered that I had a shipping question. It seemed a simple, logical question to me, but alright.

With credit card in hand, I had one more question about the estimated age of the item.

She responded that I was welcome to visit the showroom.

I told her that I was a 6-hour drive away but would buy it sight unseen. I'd simply like an estimate of the age.

She restated that I was welcome to visit their showroom any time. Then, she stopped responding.

I sighed, clicked over to a national chain's website and placed an order within 15 minutes for a slightly more expensive (but new) model.

I never spoke to a soul. It was delivered a few days later.

Now, maybe business is so strong these days that this small company won't miss that sale.

The new customer relationship they missed, however, may be more costly over time.

It wasn't lost because of inferior technology, price, or inefficient processes.

Heck, I truly enjoyed speaking to the one great employee in the process.

Their weak link was a disengaged person, not a system or process.

How strong are the links in your chain today?

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**"People are developed the same way gold is mined. When gold is mined, several tons of dirt must be moved to get an ounce of gold; but one doesn't go into the mine looking for dirt - one goes in looking for gold."**

**» Andrew Carnegie**

*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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