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"Down in their hearts wise people know this truth: the only way to help yourself is to help others."

» **Elbert Hubbard**



Replaying the Hits

Something that has always interested me about the Christmas season is the fact that so many of us end up happily humming or singing along to songs you'd figure we'd be tired of by now.

It's not that some aren't great songs. It's just that...well...after hearing anything hundreds or more times, we'd normally have had enough of it.

On a recent drive, I realized I was happily belting out "A Holly Jolly Christmas" along with Burl Ives.

That song was released in 1964. I've easily heard it 1,000+ times in my life. Yet, after a 10-month break from it each year, it still elicits a sing-along.

The same phenomenon is true for certain old movies and TV shows. They were (and are) good for a reason.

Something about them moves you or scares you or makes you laugh. If you watched them every few days, you'd quickly tire of them.

But...put them on every now and then, and they pull you in.



Value an Honest Mentor

I've recently been reflecting on the impact one of my banking mentors had on my career.

Sadly, he recently passed away, and I found myself wondering if he knew how appreciated his tutelage had been to me through the years.

I hope he did. We spoke often in later years, and I believe I was able to convey my gratitude.

If we're lucky, there will be individuals throughout our lives and careers who take enough interest in our success to be not just supportive, but honest with us.

I've worked for folks who were competent managers, but not mentors. Their interest in you is solely tied to the job you are currently in and how it immediately impacts them.

Mentors tend to see a larger picture and help people develop careers.

There are times when folks simply need to be encouraged. We primarily need to hear from someone we respect that we're on the right track.

And then there are other times in which the best mentoring we can receive is simple honesty.

It may be a bit of a stretch, but I've long thought that most businesses could benefit from revisiting some of their greatest marketing and sales hits through the years.

Twenty years or so ago, I began asking branch managers to tell me about the most successful promotion or campaign, or even marketing display, they had ever implemented.

You often saw a smile come over someone's face when they told you about their favorite and/or most successful effort. I then always asked them if they ever recreated that promotion or campaign again.

It is shocking how many have thought for a moment and said, "Uh...no, not really."

I often heard something like, "You know, I hadn't thought about that promotion in years."

I was always a fan of folks who kept pretty detailed records of the various bank-wide campaigns or even single-branch promotions they've run over time.

I've seen branch scrapbooks of promotions and even decorations that brought smiles to my face.

It sounds like a quaint idea. But it has real business value.

It's one thing to go back and see what the business results were for any given period.

Far fewer can accurately analyze what promotional and marketing efforts were being made during their most successful periods.

And while not every successful promotion or campaign is an "evergreen", you may be surprised at how many can be.

What are some of your own greatest hits?

A few may sound great to customers (new and old) again.

If your effort is poor, they tell you. If your focus is lacking, they call you on it.

If you're whining too much, they let you know it.

I've told the story often of the time this mentor's assistant called me after overhearing a painfully honest "coaching" session.

She said, "Dave, he's only that hard on the people he likes, and he thinks can eventually run this place."

I remember half-joking, "Well, it would be nice if he didn't like me so much some days." As she laughed, I realized the call wasn't an accident.

For all I know, he may have asked her to call me after that meeting to make sure I wasn't demoralized.

I also realized there wasn't a single thing he told me in that meeting that wasn't true.

Over the years, I've had peers from those days laugh and wonder if it's even possible today to be as honest with folks as this person was with us.

We all have funny stories about honest "discussions" that didn't feel funny in the moment.

Yet, to a person, we credit him for making us more competent and successful at our jobs.

In the end, few things are more memorable or can be more impactful in our careers than a caring, honest mentor.

If you have (or had) one, be sure to thank them while you can.

And when you're in the position to do so, pay them back by mentoring others.

"He who gives when he is asked has waited too long."

» **Lucius Annaeus Seneca**



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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.

For more info about having Dave or an FSI Consultant speak to your group, email Tina Coleman, tcoleman@SupermarketBank.com or call 800-992-4978.

Financial Supermarkets, Inc. • fsi@supermarketbank.com

383 Clarkesville Street • PO Box 1450 • Cornelia, GA 30531 • (800) 992-4978

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