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**"It's curious that we spend more time congratulating people who have succeeded than encouraging people who haven't yet."**

» Neil deGrasse Tyson



## Moments That Matter

My wife recently received a confirmation email of a large order made and picked up curbside at a mega-retailer.

It's so convenient that we can shop entirely online if we choose, have store employees pick up the goods, and then deliver them to a waiting car in the parking lot.

It's even better when the person ordering on your account, charging your credit card, and picking up curbside is actually you.

Someone in a suburb 3+ hours from us stocked up on groceries and toiletries via my wife's account and picked them up curbside.

I half-joked that I hoped the criminals at least tipped the person who brought the fraudulently purchased items to their car.

A minor panic sets in when you suspect that someone has hacked your account and may have your passwords, credit card number(s), etc.

My wife immediately called the retailer's help line and began navigating phone menus primarily designed to keep you away from reaching a human.

After going through that maze, she was finally able to get a live person on the phone.

This is the point in the saga in which the human on the other end of the line is supposed to express empathy, give information, offer advice and/or support, etc.

The absence of any of those things was striking.



## The Writing on the Wall

One of the items on my office wall is something that might cause a visitor to raise an eyebrow. It's a large dry-erase calendar.

Wall calendars are not that odd, although you see fewer and fewer of them as our phones have become most folks' calendars.

I may be old-school, but I've always liked being able to look up at the wall and get an instant view of what's coming up.

Different people visualize things different ways. That's always worked for me.

The oddest thing about that calendar is I've left 2020's schedule on it.

And as we approach the turning of yet another year, I'm leaving it up there again. (Yes, I do have a current calendar, as well.)

But this one is a sort of a screenshot of a moment in time.

It still has the live events I spoke at in the first quarter of 2020 listed on it, as well as the short New Orleans trip we were on with family when the world began shutting down.

There are a dozen or so events on it that were canceled, including the big family vacation my wife had spent the better part of a year planning.

A friend joked that I'm a glutton for punishment to keep a visible reminder of such a frustrating year.

As my wife asked very basic questions (often rewording and asking them again) to find out how to secure her account and ensure there weren't other fraudulent activities, the "customer support" person seemed strikingly apathetic.

To make things more frustrating, this person seemed in a hurry to end the call. Her first, "Is there anything else I can help you with?" statement came early and without having helped my wife with anything.

My wife laughed and said, "Anything else? You haven't helped me with anything yet!"

After the call, my wife set out to close an account she used regularly. We hadn't blamed the retailer for the fraud.

Criminals are clever and relentless.

But the lack of empathy and assistance when an issue arose rebranded them in our eyes.

As basic transactions move online, the percentage of personal interactions with customers that are centered on complex questions and problem resolution increases greatly.

Our empathy and assistance in these critical moments of truth define us.

How are you defining yourself in those moments?

I understand. Many folks prefer to forget 2020, and, well...much of 2021 altogether.

The reason I keep that memento on the wall is that it serves as a constant reminder to never take things for granted.

Business can be booked. Contracts can be signed. All parties can be enthusiastic. Reservations and plans can be locked down.

And...poof. Things can change in an instant.

Beyond that, one of the things I reflect on often are the clients/events that we were able to keep, reschedule, figure out a different format, etc.

And then there are relationships that faded.

A person in denial would simply assume that some customers were going to stray. The world suddenly changed. Stuff happens.

That's possible. It's also possible, however, that certain relationships faded from a lack of attention and follow-up.

Like many, I likely assumed that the world had hit the pause button, and we'd resume where we left off before long.

In some cases, we did. In others, we didn't.

But the handful of cases that I have questions about remind me that loose ends may come unraveled.

What loose ends can you tie down this week?

**"The sooner you step away from your comfort zone the sooner you realize that it wasn't really all that comfortable."**

» **Eddie Harris**

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**Financial Supermarkets, Inc. • [fsi@supermarketbank.com](mailto:fsi@supermarketbank.com)**

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

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