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**In this issue:**

- The Value of Customer Service
- Lisa's tips - January's topic - Tips for the New Year
- Recommended Reading

**The Value of Customer Service**

The value of customer service might not be clear until it's necessary - after all, it seems like not a big deal to potentially sacrifice a bit of service in order to gain a good discount. How many of us shop for discounts at the store? Or, in a business setting, how many of us negotiate for discounts even if we think the delivery performance might be slightly unreliable? Probably, most of us - at least at one time or another. However, how often has it turned into the optimal decision? My guess goes back to the saying, "you get what you pay for" (within reason).

I was quite happy to experience the true value of customer service from several respects related to an unfortunate incident that occurred yesterday. While stopping by the store prior to picking up dinner at Mimi's (for my friend Tammi, yes, I wanted to have pumpkin pancakes one more time prior to the end of the seasonal menu since they are fabulous), a woman backed into my car. Unfortunately, I saw her coming and blew my horn, but it didn't help. And, of course, she had a huge truck/ car, and so she not only bumped my bumper but it damaged my hood as well.

After calling the police and finding out that they no longer will come out to non-injury accidents, I found out that I was on my own. So, we exchanged information etc. It all took awhile, as she couldn't find the information in her husband's truck and had to borrow my cell phone to call him. He responded to her description of backing into someone by saying, "that's what side mirrors are for"; thus, she broke down in tears, which didn't help our situation. Thus, it took awhile to complete the process.

Just as we finished the process, I got a phone call. It was Mimi's - they wondered where I was because they didn't want my pancakes to get cold. I told them that someone had backed into my car in a parking lot and so I ended up delayed but was finally on my way. By the time I arrived at Mimi's, they made a completely new set of pancakes so they wouldn't be cold, as they didn't want me to have any more issues after the car incident. How impressive is that customer service!

After arriving home, I called my insurance agent and left a message. I was concerned about the appropriate process to follow to ensure I was covered and didn't want any issues (after all, everyone hears the horror stories of people completely changing the story surrounding the accident while driving away from the scene). With excellent customer service, he called immediately upon arriving at the office this morning. I know my insurance agent somewhat better than most, and he has always been proactive and helpful. I first found him when my mom and I drove to the closest State Farm agent to my apartment when I first moved to California after college, and he was immediately helpful. My memory is vague but I remember I needed information for an MBA class related to insurance, and he was quite helpful in providing whatever I needed. Since it is New Year's Eve, he planned to go home at noon; however, I called him several more times prior to noon (and once after noon) to ask questions related to next steps - each time, he was very helpful. How many agents will pick up a non-essential phone call after closing hours on a holiday in order to help make a client comfortable? Again, that's value!

Next I had to go to a body shop to get a ballpark estimate and find out the process. I went to the same body shop I had used previously (and was approved by my insurance company). The last time I used the body shop, I was so impressed

with their customer service that I actually wasn't upset that I had to bring my car back to readjust the doors - given the annoyance of exchanging and renting cars, that's a big deal. They did not disappoint. The same manager was on duty. He was very helpful and provided information. I told him that I was concerned to get the estimate so that I could evaluate options, and he went out of his way to ensure I was happy. What else can you ask for?

Although I spent a significant amount of time dealing with this problem today that I hadn't planned on, it could have been FAR worse if I hadn't received excellent customer service from three separate service providers. Do you think I'll be a repeat customer? You bet! Would I pay extra money to be guaranteed a quality experience and stress-free service? Absolutely! What are you doing to ensure your customers, clients, etc feel the same way?

## Lisa's Tips: Tips for the New Year

On December 31st, it seems appropriate to think about tips for 2010.... what can you do to ensure a prosperous 2010?

1. Value your relationships: What else could be more important? After all, intangible objects (such as the latest video game or flat screen TV) cannot be there for you. Neither can a company - only people can be.
2. Put together a plan: What better time to put together a plan! Think about what you'd like to accomplish and write it down. Thinking doesn't make anything happen but planning does help ensure success.
3. Communicate your plan: Don't write down your plan and promptly forget about it (or stuff it into your junk drawer). Instead, tell people about it. Share it and ask for feedback. Make it a reality.
4. Take action: DO something soon. Don't wait. Sometimes the way to surpass the competition is to just begin. Why not take a small step forward today?
5. Remember your positive attitude: It is essential to start off the new year by looking at the possibilities - look at the bright side. How can you help others see the positive?
6. Appreciate and thank others: There is no doubt that a simple "thank you" can go a long way. It is absolutely amazing that many times a simple thank you or show of appreciation is overlooked when it takes less than a minute and doesn't have to cost anything. Be the exception and look for opportunities to express appreciation!

## Recommended Reading

["Thrive"](#) by Alan Weiss - an excellent book on why you should throw out a survival mentality and instead focus on thriving. It provides tips and techniques to thrive and lead a fulfilled life.

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