



Jewish Herald-Voice

The Texas Gulf Coast's Jewish Newspaper Since 1908

May 8, 2014 - 8 IYAR 5774

Volume CVII - Number 5

Houston, Texas

jhonline.com

\$2 Per Copy

RED & BLACK ... And Customer Service?

Red: Why does everything have to be such a struggle? I don't know whether it's because I'm tired or just getting older, but I just don't have the time or the patience, for this.

Me, neither.

Black: You don't even know what I'm talking about ... how can you agree? Or are you saying you don't have time for me?

You are talking about how things that should be simple become a production. The fact that I do not know the specifics of what you want to vent about does not change the concept.

Red: How did you know what I was even talking about? I didn't say much.

But, I listened to what you did say ... everything being a struggle. I figured you must be talking about easy things becoming complicated. I would hope you were not complaining about complicated things being complicated.

Black: Well, at least you were listening. Which is part of the problem.

OK, now you have lost me.

Red: I don't think people listen anymore.

At the risk of agreeing again without knowing specifically what you are talking about, could you explain?

Black: Since we've been traveling so much, I needed to catch up on some personal things. But what should have been a quick phone call to make a simple hotel reservation ended up becoming involved and stressful. And that's just one example.

Where are you going? Somewhere fun?

Red: I doubt you'd consider Sugar Land Town Square fun. But, for me, it's a convenient escape. Anyway, I was trying to use a coupon good for a complimentary night's stay. I read it carefully, and it specifically states that I must book through the front desk or the coupon is void.

Seems straight forward enough.

Black: I thought so. Until I ended up talking to three people, each time having to start from the beginning, since none of them would stop and actually listen. Instead, each one just transferred me to another person. I ended up wasting over half an hour and ultimately got nowhere. It was infuriating.

DISCLAIMER: We are real people. We are not claiming to be experts in any given field, but rather are becoming experts of our own lives.

Maybe you gave them too much information. I am beginning to think that people are training to becoming "Twits."

Excuse me?

We live in a world where people communicate via Twitter, which limits you to 140 characters. And, text messages. Website homepages entice us with photos and one-line summarizations. So much of the media focuses on sound bites. The bottom line is that people's attention spans are getting shorter and shorter.

Well, that would explain much of the problem with customer service these days. No one takes the time to focus on the customer. Or, to take responsibility. Everyone's just so quick to pass the buck.

It is easier - and quicker - to make it someone else's problem than it is to handle it.

No kidding! Which takes me to what happened with my lawn mower, that came back from being repaired in worse condition than it had started, including being absolutely filthy and covered with grass clippings. It is less than a year old so still under warranty, but when I started to complain they made some excuse about being a franchise.

Let me guess. They told you that you had to deal with the corporate office. Which, in reality, would probably like to know how you were being treated by the franchise that carries their name.

I don't want a business lesson in franchises, I want to get back to my story. I ended up talking to the store manager, the whole time making him realize that I wasn't going to just give in, and insisting that they take some responsibility. We got there in the end, but it took a while and I really had to stand my ground.

So, your story has a happy ending. Not to mention, a few years ago you probably would have gotten upset but just accepted the situation rather than create conflict.

All I know is that the whole time I was thinking that I don't want to deal with "corporate." I want to deal with people. The way it used to be. When people owned stores. Not corporations.

Technically, people own the franchise - not the corporation, but I understand your point. You want businesses that

understand the importance of customer service. And, you want employees that understand that, too. But, I bet you also want them knowledgeable about the products and services they sell.

Yes! Since that's also part of customer service. Or, at least, if you don't know something, be honest and admit you don't have the answer ... and then actually help you find the answer. For example, Home Depot. They tend to hire people who are fairly knowledgeable about the products in the store, but more important to me - they're always happy to help. In fact, they've often walked me clear across the store to help me find something. This may sound crazy, but it's as if they take pride helping the customer.

That started at the top. It was how the company was built. Unlike other big-box businesses that just offer lower prices, they made sure to offer the know-how of the small hardware store. Funny thing is that when the chain first started, they stacked empty boxes on the high shelves to give the illusion of being bigger than they really were, but provided product training for their employees to make sure they were truly knowledgeable. Selective illusions.

Impressive, but it must be expensive to train everyone.

And, that is one of the reasons for the lack of customer service today. Few people are willing to pay for it. When you want the cheapest price, you are most likely going to end up in stores that are not going to invest money training their sales staff. Plus, it is probably safe to say that for most of their sales staff it is just a job, not a career path. All of which, unfortunately, affects their attitude.

Which would explain why many people don't seem to take pride in what they do. They see their job as just a job. Nothing more. I'm not sure anything will change that.

It is all about mindsets and perspectives. They may be just one person, yet they have the power to make the customer's experience a good or a bad one.

Not to mention when there's a problem, they have the power to make it better or make it worse.

It goes back to what we discussed with the seniors at KIPP Houston High School - taking pride in how you



Tina "Red" Pennington and Mandy "Black" Williams are sisters and co-authors of "What I Learned About Life When My Husband Got Fired!" The informative, entertaining book discusses values, priorities, relationships, financial literacy and much more.

UPCOMING APPEARANCES

May 28 & 29 - Florida Prosperity Partnership (Orlando)

For an up-to-date listing of all upcoming public appearances, please go to "Future Appearances" at www.redandblackbooks.com.

do your job, regardless of what it is, does not "cost" anything and does not require special training. Plus, it can be a great way to stand out in today's workforce.

True, but I found it most amusing when you decided to interrupt the manager's meeting at the table next to ours at Pappadeaux the other night, to basically say the same thing. I bet that was the last thing they expected to hear from a customer.

I could not help myself. Although it had been years - no, make that decades - since I worked at the Strawberry Patch, one the of the Pappas' first restaurants, I still remember the manager, Steve Sims, explaining that the hostess is the first employee the customer will meet and that they set the tone for either a great start or a bad experience. Each person, no matter what their job, is an important member of the team. It has stuck with me all these years.

What a powerful, but simple, lesson. Although I have a hard time picturing you working in a restaurant.

You would have a tougher time if you saw the uniform I had to wear. Now, that is something I would like to forget.

Well, it's something I'd like to see.