

Your Customers Like This



by
Tim Miles

THE WHATS, WHOS,
HOWS & WHYS OF
SHAREWORTHY
CUSTOMER SERVICE

For Bubs and Choo-Choo

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'm wildly and profoundly flawed. You're not reading this book without the help of a whole friggin' boatload of people.

Thanks to everyone who shared their stories - particularly Suzanne, Amy and Jennifer.

Thanks to Francis Pass for inspiring this, thanks to Dee Pontious for making it better and thanks to the Chapmans for making us part of the family...

Thanks to all our other clients for patience, courage and faith.

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Thanks to Scotty for teaching me everything I know ... right?

Thanks to David, Meghan and Will for letting me hog a table in the back to write most of this book in D. Rowe's.

Thanks to my family for allowing me to grow up healthy, happy and curious while surrounded by books and tractors. Special thanks to my two big sisters, Lynn Peisker and Michele Miller, for encouragement and butt-kicking at appropriate levels at appropriate times.

Thanks to my two SJ's - Ryan Patrick - because of whom this book finally got written, and Deidre - for being the perfect partner ... for better or worse, right? :)

And finally, thanks to poophead Trish for making my mom cry at Best Buy. You're the reason I put all this into a book, and even though its helped me with my anger, I'm still putting spiders in your air vents when I find out where you live.

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“Of all the things I’ve done, the most vital is coordinating those who work with me and aiming their efforts at a certain goal.”

— Walt Disney

Not that we can ever fully repay them, but profits from this book go to Touchpoint’s Central Missouri Autism Project for helping our son find his voice and teaching us how to hear it.



THE FIRST LESSON



“Tim, I think Will has autism.”

Six little words. The day everything changed. November 21, 2005. Our son, Will, had just turned 13 months old the day before - when all was right with the world.

Less than 30 days before, I'd quit my job. In just under 18 months, I'd built a million dollar company for someone else, and - with the help of some wizards - wanted to see if I could do the same for my family.

We could have - and maybe should have - punted right there and then. I could have begged for my job back ... or, as some suggested, gone to work at Best Buy.

Instead - we went forward fiercely - lost at first but relentless.

And since then, we've built a company of our own, raised a child with special needs and watched him bloom and also had a daughter who suffers from a terrible affliction known as melodrama.

Above all, we survived. We endured.

According to Autism Speaks, eight out of every ten marriages of parents with an autistic child end in divorce. Oof.

Our faith in God and our faith in each other have grown.

Our business has grown.

Our wealth, health and happiness have all improved - in spite of the fact we've never been busier.

How?

Because of a lesson taught to me by Will's first therapists. It's a lesson you simply must understand before we can continue.

Parts of this book will be uncomfortable. Parts of this book will be hard work. Parts of this book will be relentless.

If you're looking for the magic bullet book, boy, did you pick up the wrong one.

This one's the diet and exercise of work and life and play and hope.

The signs are easy to read. The stories - at least, all but one - are true. The steps to take are simple.

It doesn't mean they're easy.

The first step? The first lesson taught to us by Will's very first therapists - when we were lost and sad and angry and still certainly very much in shock?

You cannot expect others to change their behavior until you're first willing to change your own.

Indirectly, it was Will's first lesson for us. It wouldn't be his last.

Thanks, buddy.

Parts of this book will be uncomfortable. Parts of this book will be hard work. Parts of this book will be relentless.



A SIGN OF THINGS TO COME

Do me favor. Grab a sheet of paper and a pen. I'll wait.

Now - sign your name.

(Turn the page.)

Now. Switch hands and do it again.

I love doing this exercise at the beginning of workshops and the little talks I give from time to time because it's such a clear illustration of the awkward discomfort we're about to experience together.

Change is awkward.

Change doesn't feel right - those bad habits have carved out well-rutted neuro-pathways and have no interest in climbing out of them.

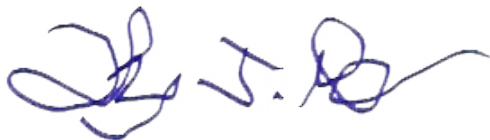
But you must.

If I whacked your dominant hand with a hammer, then duct-taped it behind your back for six weeks, sure, it might smell a little after a while, but what a change would take place to your weaker hand!

We're going to stretch, struggle and reach for something new today.

And tomorrow, it'll feel a little less awkward.

This, today, I pledge to you.



PART I: WHAT

WHAT IS SHARE-
WORTHY SERVICE?

BEST BUY MADE MY MOM CRY

Prior to last week, I've known my mom to cry only three times: at the funeral of each of her parents and on February 13, 2010 – the day she realized she'd been putting up with my dad for 50 years.

I kid!

Seriously, though – mom's not a crier. She's kind, hard-working, helpful, thoughtful, volunteers at a local food pantry, reads books, cooks and gardens. She is not technically savvy. She does not cry.

Last week, Best Buy made my mom cry.

Is it any wonder reports of their slow demise litter the inter webs?

Okay, technically the corporation didn't make my mom cry. Trish did.

Just like Papa John's racial troubles over the weekend, it wasn't the fault of the entire company. In both cases, one rude idiot launched 1000 words (or more in Papa John's case ... 406 in mine).

Trish – in the Geek Squad – at the Champaign, Illinois location. I'm not redacting her last name to be polite. I just don't know it. If I did, I'd include it, along with her home phone, address, social security number, PIN #, blood type and known allergies.

After years of good customer service with Geek Squad – and a very pleasant and apologetic follow-up from someone else after Poopyhead Trish brought my mom to tears – it only took one bad experience for mom to tell me and for me to tell you.

Appropriately, I'm delivering a talk on Tuesday to one of my client's company meetings about what it takes to perform legendary customer service.

Guess what little anecdote I'm starting with to put them in the right frame of mind?

But, what my client may not yet know, is that legendary customer service has a whole lot more to do with the employee than the employer.

As Roy used to say, "A fish stinks from the head down."

So, I'm devoting the next two weeks to customer service.

I'll start by asking you who you think provides exemplary customer service? I asked my friends on Facebook, and I'll share their answers tomorrow.

And I'll finish by saying: Trish? if I find out where you live, I'm putting spiders in your air vents and snakes in your bed.

As Roy used to say, "A fish stinks from the head down."

WHY SHAREWORTHY?

From: Tim Miles <tim@thedailyblur.com>

Subject: Another word for 'legendary' ...

Date: January 15, 2012 10:56:26 AM CST

To: Michele Miller, Lynn Peisker, Ryan Patrick, Scott Cox, Dee Miles, Jane Fraser, Scott Fraser, Sarah Ripley, Craig Arthur, Adam Donmoyer, Jeff Sexton, Rhiannon Trask, Laura Harris, Paul Boomer, Heidi Crouch, Roy H. Williams, Jeffrey Eisenberg, Tom Wanek

Hi there. Sorry to pester you on a Sunday (or Monday in Oz).

I'm finishing up a blog post and new presentation on, essentially, The 10 Commandments of Legendary Customer Service. I'm unveiling the commandments tomorrow, giving examples on Tuesday through Thursday, then sharing a screencast of the beginning of the presentation on Friday. It'll also be an e-book download from the site.

But I want a different word than 'legendary.'

World-class?

Special?

Remarkable?

Gobsmacking? (Would love, I think, to go with a Seussian word that's mine alone but totally works ... much like the 'waka waka' diamond ...)

Bigtastic?

Any thoughts? I'd be grateful. Thanks!

t

And so it began - this idea for a presentation and this book (that was originally going to be about 8000 words). I got some great suggestions from my friends - some so good I won't share them here because they might want to use them.

I wanted something that said - good or bad - "I want to tell others about this experience."

But I wanted something else, too.

I wanted something that said - to a company - "We're all in this together."

I had inadvertently written it in another email when I said:

What would make something shareworthy?

At a lunch two days later, my friend Rhiannon (who I write about later in this book) said, "Here it is. Right here in your email."

Chicks are smarter than guys, yo.

And so, shareworthy customer service was born.

How can your company:

- 1) Develop a plan to implement policies and procedures that arouse such delight in customers that they head to Facebook and twitter and their blogs to brag about you?
- 2) Create a sustainable program that clearly and authentically points everyone - from CEO to part-time employees - toward the same North Star?

That's what we've set out to do. That's what a couple clients have already begun.

That's what we lay out for you here in the next 100 or so pages.

How can you make your customer service shareworthy?

Let's find out together.



SIMPLIFYING SHAREWORTHY SERVICE

The Reverend Harold T. Mooney taught me to love God and golf. He was able to simplify both for me.

When we'd talk about golf at the driving range or in the big emerald yard behind the church, he'd say, "Tim – so many people want to confuse the issue with movements and swing thoughts and where the left wrist should be at impact.

"It gets your brain so full, it's impossible to perform.

"Simplify the game down to what matters," he said. "Two things – study two things, think about two things, practice two things, and you'll learn to master the game.

"Golf," Fr. Mooney said, "comes down to direction and distance. Nothing more or less."

ALS – Lou Gehrig's Disease – took one of my heroes much too quickly, but I remember the lesson, Father.

After researching hundreds of stories, reading a half-dozen books and interviewing a few world-class company leaders, I've realized – as I'm sure you have as well – that recognizing delightful and spectacular customer service isn't really all that hard.

In fact, the same fourteen characteristics that seem to define magnificent and remarkable customer service pop up time and again in story after story.

But so did something else. Another pattern emerged after a couple hundred hours of research these past couple months – something even simpler.

While there are 14 manifestations, 14 defining characteristics, 14 ways to deliver delight, those 14 fall evenly into two halves.

I'll give you the 14 somethings (still looking for a clever word for the presentation/ebook/etc) of customer service this week, plus a lesson in how to implement them, but before we go there, I want to simplify customer service down to what matters.

Study these two things.

Think about these two things.

Practice these two things, and you'll learn to master the game.

After researching hundreds of stories, two common threads tie them all together:

- 1) Professionalism
- 2) Kindness

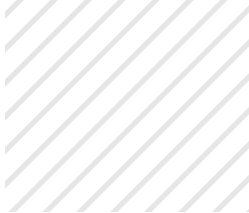
Each has seven links that shoot off to deliver these characteristics to the customer, but if you wish to boil it down to the basic building blocks of all shareworthy customer service stories, it's those two, bub: Professionalism and Kindness.

I told you it was simple. Just like golf, it's simple to read about or watch – the greats make it look so effortless, don't they? The Apples and the Disneys and the Zapposeseses.

Heck, it's even relatively easy to start to play the game yourself, isn't it?

But mastery ... going pro? Well ... it's, frankly, just as simple.

It's just not easy.



THE 14 FACETS OF SHAREWORTHY SERVICE

Over the past couple months, I've spent countless hours researching studies and stories of customer service. I've read the horror stories, and I've heard the stories of spectacular, shareworthy service.

I'm sure you have your own stories in both corners.

As I did my research, patterns emerged.

Think of the foundation of shareworthy service as two big honkin' rocks – each with seven facets.

Every shareworthy story is built from this list. I originally started with 18 facets, but I realized that a few were so closely related that I simplified things.

I'll share stories with you of world-beating customer service and delight. In these, you'll see these 14 facets recur time and again. I'll point them out to you. It's pretty neat, actually – over hundreds of stories, I couldn't find anything that didn't fit the pattern.

Then I'll show you how to leverage these facets into your company's own unique system for defining, measuring and rewarding shareworthy service.

Big Honkin' Rock #1: Professionalism

1. Appearance
2. Attentiveness
3. Consistency
4. Dependability
5. Focus
6. Proactivity
7. Simplification

Big Honkin' Rock #2: Kindness

1. Active Listening
2. Empathy
3. Engagement
4. Memory
5. Manners
6. Playfulness
7. Privilege



There you go. Those are the heavy seven plus seven.

In the next couple of chapters we'll start looking at a few stories. We'll look at the famous and ones you've never heard of unless you live in Sarasota, Columbus or Carbondale.

In the meantime, think of your own stories of shareworthy service – can you think of anything remarkable that wasn't reflected in one of the fourteen facets above?

Let me know!

THE 7 FACETS OF PROFESSIONALISM

Shareworthy Service – either good or bad – has two main components: Professionalism and Kindness. Each component has seven facets. I've yet to find a shared situation being praised or condemned that wasn't among these heavy sevens.

Kindness (or its absence) makes a world of difference, but it's relatively meaningless without first rocking Professionalism. Kindness is the sexy component but these seven facets of professionalism drive the bus.

1) Appearance

Whether it's never seeing trash at Disney or your heating and air conditioning technician slipping floor savers over his shoes, we notice the look, sound and smell of the persons, places and things with which we do business.

Even if the coffee house hipster barista sports her skinny jeans and Residents t-shirt, we still expect a certain degree of cleanliness and order to her rumples. The same holds true for your parking lot, your service vans and your bathroom.

2) Attentiveness

Look me in the eye. Acknowledge you've seen me and are preparing to engage with me. When it's my turn, don't excuse me for the person calling on the phone.

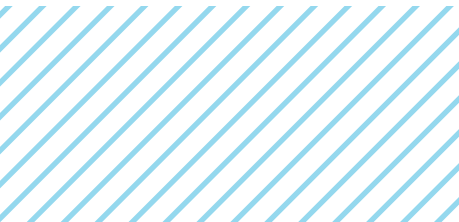
In his latest book, *Entreleadership*, Dave Ramsey tells the story of the pizza delivery driver who watched his tips increase when he began jogging from his car to the door. Make us feel like we matter. It's really not that hard. We have to do business with each other anyway, so the quicker you can help me, the quicker I'll be out of your life.

3) Dependability

Can we count on you to do what you say you're going to do when you say you're going to do it. Typically, an absence of dependability becomes shareworthy.

4) Consistency

Consistency is the dependability of your dependability. You need systems, policies and procedures to deliver dependability, umm, dependably.



Kindness (or its absence) makes a world of difference, but it's relatively meaningless without first rocking Professionalism. Kindness is the sexy component but these seven facets of professionalism drive the bus.

5) Focus

A customer at hand isn't just an important thing – it's the only thing that matters at any given moment. The best servers in restaurants have this down, don't they? She might have 15 tables, but you'd never know it.

Restaurant owner Laura Harbaugh called it “The 3-Second Rule.” I may only be speaking with you for three seconds, but for those three seconds I'm locked in. You are the only thing that matters to me in the world. It's harder than ever amidst the growing distractions. It's also more important than ever.

6) Proactivity

I originally had nine facets of each main component, but I realized a couple were really pretty much the same. I originally had both ‘proactivity’ and ‘authority.’

What I mean is – for example – that any Ritz Carlton employee can comp up to \$100 worth of services to make something right on the spot. The best business owners train their employees, then give them the authority to make decisions the owner will support even when they don't necessarily agree with it.

Read Carl Sewell's *Customers For Life* if you want to learn more about this.

7) Simplification

Technological, ahem, advances have helped companies build walls in the name of ‘customer convenience.’

Please. Did any customer ever ask for an automated phone tree? The layers of complexity in today's work and world increase friction. We're faster, busier, multi-tasking, aggressive, noisy creatures that demand attention NOW.

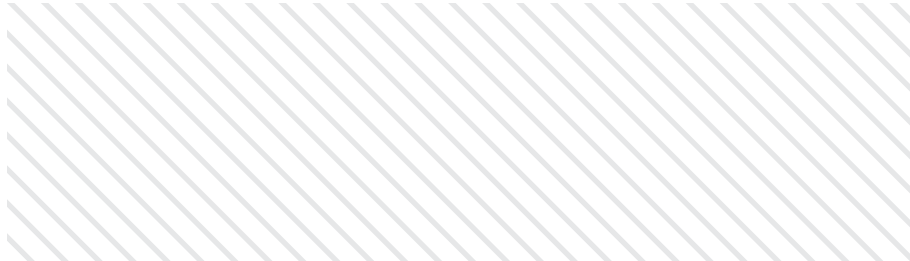
Shareworthy service providers have a gift of being able to evaluate a complex situation and quickly distill it down and remove any tension or friction. You can just feel tense situations deflate at Apple's Genius Bars when a 22-year-old uses common language to describe an otherwise technical problem to a 75-year-old laptop owner.

Watch a great guest services manager in Las Vegas hear a problem, understand a problem and fix a problem quickly and quietly.

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There you go. Those are the first heavy seven.

How does your company rate with each? Do you actually have systems and policies in place to point these facets in your favor, or are y'all just winging it?



THE 7 FACETS OF KINDNESS

Shareworthy Service – either good or bad – has two main components: Professionalism and Kindness. Each component has seven facets.

I've examined the seven facets of Professionalism – the boring bedrocks of any successful company. Now we get to talk about Professionalism's fun baby sister: Kindness.

Kindness gets all the headlines and wins all the awards. Kindness is splashy and silly and three exclamation point all caps FUN!!!

1) Active Listening

You can usually tell when people are dialed in, can't you? Active listening changes your expression. Your head leans forward, and you fidget less – if at all. You're really hearing someone's problem, challenge or situation. It builds confidence in the person telling the story.

You can dazzle them by repeating back the essence of what they said 'just to make sure you have it right.' So many people today don't listen actively. They seem merely waiting for the other person to finish so they can start talking again. Sound familiar? The good news is you can practice your active listening skills.

2) Empathy

I actually don't believe the customer is always right, do you? Sometimes, the customer is uniquely unqualified to assess what's best for them. That said, an expert at empathy understands the delicate bridge connecting what the customer wants and what the customer needs.

Put yourself in the customer's shoes, then use the benefit of your expertise to simply show them what they'd really prefer to do if they had your knowledge and skill set.

3) Engagement

Engaged people give off a contagious energy. Your company's next superstar, in fact, is out there right now willing to dazzle you with his or her eyes and smile and personality. You may just have to pull up to the second window to find her.

Dave Wisniewski taught me this a long time ago: Keep some cards with you. If you get engaging service at a drive-through, for example, hand the engager a card and suggest they come in for an interview for a sales position with your company.

Think about it – if someone can greet you with bright eyes and a smile at the drive through window of Long John Silver's – imagine what she could do making ten times more money without her clothes having to, umm, smell like that every day. You know engaged people when you see them. You know the bright eyes and the locked-in, nothing-else-matters-but-you look.

4) Memory

For reasons passing understanding, I can still remember the birthdays of everyone in my eighth grade class (Steve – Oct. 5).

The good news is that this carried over into adulthood. I make a point – an effort – to

remember the names of people's children and what they've been working on lately. I remember a person's favorite drink or what kind of foods they don't like.

If you struggle with these things, why not use something like Evernote or some other syncable application to make notes of them. That's how your stylist does it, you know.

5) Manners

My father, a Marine, and my mother, raised in a family surrounded by schoolteachers, taught us 'yes, sir' and 'yes ma'am' values at a very early age. I would rather you tell me my children are polite and respectful than that they're smart or talented or good looking. There's simply no substitute for respect.

6) Playfulness

Lord, give us both the ability to take things seriously and the ability to be silly and fun. And please, Lord, give us the wisdom to know when each is appropriate. I ask you, though, wouldn't it be far more remarkable for a place to loosen up and have a little fun more often?

Wouldn't most interactions with most businesses be improved with a little fun? Like when I got that colonoscopy a couple months ago. I tell ya, the doctor had me in stitches. He said the funniest thing as he was getting ready to ... wait, maybe this is a story better saved for another day.

I actually don't believe the customer is always right, do you? Sometimes, the customer is uniquely unqualified to assess what's best for them. That said, an expert at empathy understands the delicate bridge connecting what the customer wants and what the customer needs.

7) Privilege

I wrote about privilege last week. We like to be made to feel special. We like perks and treats and the perception that we're getting some degree of preferential treatment – even if it's policy. For example, we stayed at the Vdara hotel in Vegas when I spoke at a company's annual meeting a few months back. I'd call down, and the guy would say:

“Hello, Mr. Miles. This is Stephen. How can I help you this evening?”

Look, I know my name pops up on a screen. I don't care. I feel like Elvis or Prince or somebody. I know the next guy who calls – his name is popping up on the same screen. I don't care. I fall for it every time. It's the little things.

Vegas is a fine hub for shareworthy service. So are many resorts in the Caribbean. I think we'd all do well to do some research in one or both of those places, don't you?



PART II: WHY?

WHY DELIVER
SHAREWORTHY
SERVICE?

the love of a lifetime customer

Read a simple-but-startling angle this morning on customer value.

Have you calculated what a customer's worth over the course of her lifetime?

What if – just one time – you calculated your marketing budget off that amount?

In *Embracing Lifetime Value*, Seth Godin suggests this simple challenge:

So, a chiropractor might see a new patient being worth \$2,500, easily. And yet... how much is she spending on courting, catering to and seducing that new customer? My guess is that \$50 feels like a lot to the doc. Instead of comparing what you invest to the benefit you receive from the first bill, the first visit, the first transaction, it's important to not only recognize but embrace the true lifetime value of one more customer.

Write it down. Post it on the wall. What would happen if you spent 100% of that amount on each of your next ten new customers? That's more money than you have to spend right now, I know that, but what would happen? Imagine how fast you would grow, how quickly the word would spread.

Do this as an exercise.

What if you spent just as he suggested? You've suddenly got an influx of cash to invest in tickling the delighted fancy of customer after customer. What might you do? What might you do differently than you're planning to do?

In brainstorming and strategic planning, we often use the "what if money were no object" parameter to loosen mental impediments and objections. Here, it's the same thing, but we're putting faces to that parameter – beautiful, evangelical faces. What would you do?

Because from these ideas, you might pare some small derivative that would never otherwise have come to you. You might find five. Heck, you might realize ten brand new unique-to-you ideas for some serious fancy-tickling just because you stopped to think differently about the value of your customers.

So, this morning, answer me these questions three, 'ere the other side you'll see:

- 1) Do you really understand how much a customer is worth over her lifetime?
- 2) Why is #1 important?
- 3) When are you scheduling your planning session to do something differently next year as a result of #1 and #2?

Do it this week, please.

Or don't.

Do you really understand how much a customer is worth over her lifetime?

a local business wake-up call

Do you like the idea of supporting local businesses?

Is that like asking a politician if he's for more jobs and against crime?

But ... and it's an awfully big but ... your locally-owned business has got to meet me MORE than halfway. Sorry if that seems unfair. Heck, it is unfair.

Get over it.

One local restaurant urges folks to get on board to help them beat the chains. "Chains are bad. We are good." That sorta thing.

To wit:

Twice before the holidays, I called for delivery and was greeted with 'hello?'

Both times, it sounded kind of like I was bothering them by trying to offer them money.

I asked if I was, indeed, calling the restaurant. Both times, I was greeted with a self-righteous, "yeah."

The second time, I was abruptly cut off twice when asking simple questions.

Neither time did the phone person say 'thank you' or 'good bye.' Each time, they simply hung up.

Help you beat the chains? Help yourself.

<insert Superfriends transition sounder>

Meanwhile ...

One of those nasty chains – Target – answered the phone over the holidays at not one, but two different stores in two different towns by nicely saying,

“Hello, this is Target. What can I help you find today?”

That’s right. A real, live, human being person answered. No automated phone tree. Also no hangups or entitled, snippy, self-righteousness.

Target obviously had a system in place. How exactly was that evil? That’s like calling kittens evil.

Your locally-owned business has got to meet me more than halfway.

Or you’ll lose.

It’s not a temporary inconvenience. It’s the new reality of your business, and you best embrace it and – more importantly – develop chain-like, repeatable systems to do it better.

Remember, in this age and day, whether you deliver an exceptionally good or bad experience, social media will only accelerate the inevitable.

I want to celebrate our independents. I really do. I’m sure you feel the same way to one degree or another. Help me, please.

‘Thank you.’



consistency & dependability

“I’m a liar.”

One of my clients said this to me a few weeks ago. It lit this shareworthy service fire (Best Buy making my mom cry just poured kerosene on it).

He voices his own ads on the radio. He frequently talks about what customers can expect when they do business with us. He’d received a couple less-than-stellar reviews of his service team.

“If I’m there on the radio saying one thing ... and we’re doing another ... well, I’m a liar.”

What a moment. What a frightening, enlightening step-on-a-rake moment of clarity.

As consumers, we’ve grown so accustomed to being underwhelmed and mistrustful of advertising that we’re not even surprised anymore – in fact, we assume it’s the norm – when a company’s long on talk and short on action.

Not my client. We’ve launched a program to measure and reward improvement in our service.

It’s sad that consistency and dependability are facets of shareworthy service, but they most certainly are.

The best way to generate shareworthy service?

Disappoint a customer.

You have to raise the bar with systems, policies and procedures that spell out each interaction with a customer. Your team has to know what is expected of them – every time.

A Big Mac should taste the same whether you eat it in your hometown or Walton-on-Thames. Why? Because we sleep better at night knowing that, whether we even like them or not, certain things are always consistent.

Can you say the same about your company?

Are you saying one thing with your advertising and delivering another?

All the time?

It's okay if you can't. It's an opportunity.

Dependability – Can we count on your company to deliver what you say you will when you say you will?

Consistency – Every time? Consistency is the dependability of your dependability.

And sure, we all make mistakes. My rock-solid dependable email marketing company had a server failure yesterday morning and my email didn't go out at 5:00 CST like always.

They apologized. They fixed the problem quickly.

They followed up with me to let me know it had been fixed.

And then followed up again to say they forwarded my thank you note around the office and it made everyone's day.

An old friend once said, “Tim – eventually, everybody’s going to stub their toe. It’s how you fix it that matters.”

My email marketing company fixed it. My client is fixing what needs fixed.

How about you?

(It’s about this time in Hazzard County that I should mention the only dangerous thing for you at this point is if you don’t know ... then you best get to findin’ out, bub.)

the pit of mediocrity

I gave the customer service talk to a client's company today. Between you and me, I killed. I wasn't sure whether to open with Robert Frost or Swayze's bar speech from Roadhouse. After seeking the counsel of my elders and wisers, I went with a mashup of both. It was stirring.

Anyway, I had this idea and a concept emerge today while giving the talk. Stay with me for a couple hundred words.

We've covered the bad. We've covered the exceptional.

That's the thing about extremes: for better and worse, they get covered. And even when a company stinks up the place, they usually get at least one chance to make good – and that chance, if taken advantage of, tends to get as much coverage as the offense. We do love our redemptions, don't we?

But what about the rest?

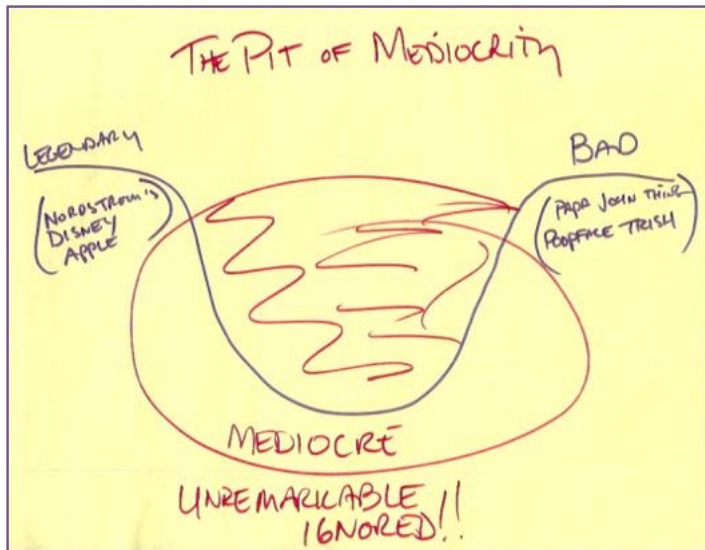
Ugh.

Imagine an inverted bell curve.

At both extremes, you get discussed.

Everyone else – wallowing in the pit of average – gets ignored.

Wait ... here ... I'll draw it on a legal pad for you.



Breathtaking, I admit.

There – in the saggy, soggy bottom sits a black hole suck from which it's hard to escape. I mean, why would you try to escape when you don't think there's a problem?

“Our service is fine.”

“We do a pretty good job.”

“Hey, we’re good. When we make a mistake, we always try to fix it.”

Fish don’t know they’re in water.

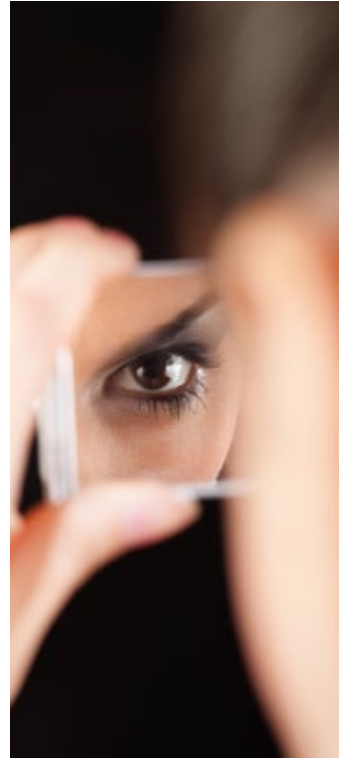
It’s a dangerous wasteland, my friends. It’s a narcotic malaise that deadens souls of employees, companies and customers.

And it’s true for most of the companies with whom we do business.

Isn’t it?

(Wait ... aren’t you an ad writer?? Yes. I’ll tell you what all this has to do with all that in the next chapter.)

There – in the saggy, soggy bottom sits a black hole suck from which it’s hard to escape. I mean, why would you try to escape when you don’t think there’s a problem?



advertising & the pit

Advertising only accelerates the inevitable.

Good advertising will make a good business more successful more quickly and more efficiently.

Good advertising will make a bad business go out of business faster.

If you're in between – languishing in the Pit of Mediocrity – you'll try advertising and it won't work very well (if at all, depending on a few factors) – at least, not nearly as well as it could.

There's a billboard for a convenience store I see every time I go to St. Louis that drives me bugnuts crazy:

It's meant to look like either a twitter or Facebook status update. It reads:

Fastlane: For Fuel, Food & Fun!!

Why does it bother me so much?

Because it's false advertising.

I've been a couple times to investigate.

It's not fun.

I mean, at all. I know that may come as a shock.

It's got gas and beer and Funyuns and Combos and all that.

Just no fun.

But I'm not arguing they should change the billboard to match the experience.

Imagine if they changed the experience to match the billboard.

Have you ever ... ever ... walked out of a convenience store thinking, "Oh man, that was awesome!"

I see an opportunity. How about you?

What if this convenience store spend six months visiting amusement parks, carnivals, Vegas, Branson and a few other places that sell fun for a living? What if they took notes and figured out ways to provide a head-shakingly fun experience at a convenience store?

Free whoopee cushion with every full tank of ... wait for it ... GAS?

Spin the wheel of canned cheese?

A dunk tank filled with Red Bull?

Who can make these things happen?

Suddenly, you've got a c-store everyone's telling their friends about. Suddenly, you've got people lining up to not only fill up their tank but come inside for your high margin snacks and joy buzzers and stuff.

Suddenly my kids are begging to stop at FastLane in Warrenton on the way to Grandmom and Granddad's house. And my wife is telling her mom friends. And some goober's on the web blogging about their relentless capacity for fun.

Oh, people will come, Ray. People will most definitely come.

Because you're a convenience store.

And our experience at convenience stores across America* is drowning in mediocrity.

Advertising messages fail for two reasons:

#1 - Companies don't speak to consumers about things consumers care about in a language consumers understand.

#2 - Companies don't live up to the promises they make in their advertising.

FastLane passes number one with flying colors. We all need fuel, food and fun.

They fail miserably at number two.

The easy road is to change the ad.

The company on the road less traveled changes the company.

And that will make all the difference.

Suddenly my kids are begging to stop at FastLane in Warrenton on the way to Grandmom and Granddad's house. And my wife is telling her mom friends. And some goober's on the web blogging about their relentless capacity for fun.

my company's dirty little secret

Yesterday, I said our company's dirty little secret had everything to do with how smart you were.

You see, we don't solicit business.

We only work with people who contact us, then we have to be very selective in the vetting process. We're paid on growth, so we only make more money if our partnership works.

So, our dirty little secret? It's two-fold:

You have to be very good at what you do.

You have to like talking about what you do.

The first is substantially more important than the second, but that doesn't mean the second isn't important.

Advertising will only accelerate the inevitable.

Our company can help a good business get to where they're headed faster and more efficiently (meaning less effort and money) than you would without our help.

I see media reps who tell business owners all the time that ‘they can for sure help them’ when what the media rep should be doing – if she really wanted to help – would be advising the restaurant to clean up its restrooms, telling the jewelry store to invest in sales training.

If you’re an HVAC company whose guys show up late for service calls with dirty pants smelling a little bit like weed, one of our advertising campaigns will only put you out of business faster.

Which, when I think about it, may be the kindest thing I could do for that HVAC company.

We simply have to be as good at what we do as our extremely talented roster of small business clients.

A couple years ago, my partners came up with a list of the defining characteristics of our most successful clients.

- Do you share the characteristics of our most successful clients?
- You are a business owner who has absolute authority to say “YES.”
- You are looking for a long-term growth solution ... not a band-aid approach or a quick fix.
- You are open to innovation.
- You consider yourself the most ethical company in your category in your market.
- You have a long time horizon.
- You are willing to invest resources into the growth of your business.
- You are passionate about your business, its goals, products, and history.
- You are committed to your business goal.
- You accept responsibility for your successes and failures.

And finally, our most successful clients know that, just as getting fit involves commitment and pain before you start enjoying the benefits, so does good marketing. Only with marketing, the pain barrier is not physical, it is financial.

Many business owners hearing the words “financial pain and commitment” would run in the other direction. These are the business owners who are easy prey for the quick fix, no pain, advertising cocaine sales people. They’ll spend the rest of their business lives experimenting, testing the waters, and looking for the next ‘sure’ thing.

Sad, but true. But don’t tell anyone.

Let’s keep it our dirty little secret.

**You have to be very good at what you do.
You have to like talking about what you do.**

smoking kills curb appeal

I had just finished meeting with a client in Illinois when I headed to one of my favorite spots for lunch.

It has everything:

Great ambience? CHECK.

Great food? CHECK.

Planter by the front door filled with cigarette butts, empty packs and trash? CHECK.

It's a shame ... because all the great advertising in the world won't overcome me sharing that photo on facebook.

My friend Darren replied, "If their planter looks like this, it's a good indication of what their kitchen looks like!"

Eww.

My business partner Mike Dandridge – an expert on how businesses improve customer experiences – taught me the term for this:

Micro-Associations

Consumers connect dots – even when no natural line exists. We invent them. Mike shared this quote from Donald Burr, former CEO of People Express Airlines:

“In the airline industry, if passengers see coffee stains on the food tray, they assume the engine maintenance isn’t done right.” – May 5, 2002

It’s true. Darren knew it. You know it. I know it.

But the good news is: It’s so easy and inexpensive to fix. Just make sure you add it to the server or busser’s list of side work.

Just please make sure he or she washes his hands before returning to work, okay?



beth's best customers

I am sitting behind Levi in a crowded room at 7:15 AM on a Tuesday. In front of him is his company's annual business plan. Levi's one of about 30 employees at the first of two annual meetings held by Chapman Heating & Air Conditioning every January.

At a lavishly catered breakfast (meeting #1), his bosses share the company goals, the company financials and the department budgets and targets with every employee. They show everyone how they arrived at budget goals, and they answer every question. It's truly a family business.

They wouldn't have it any other way. How can the company get where they want to go unless everyone's pointed in the same direction? Yet, I'm shocked by how few organizations do it.

The last few years, I've spoken at this annual meeting. This year I talked about this crazy idea of starting to spend part of our marketing budget on them.

You see, I've had a lot of success helping service companies: Roofing, Water Treatment, Glass, Insurance, Heating & Air Conditioning.

No, it's not terribly exciting, on the surface, at least.

A long time ago, my first HVAC client said in our first meeting: "Air conditioning isn't sexy."

Nope, so how did I learn to help these companies grow – some by double-digit percentages, some by multiples?

It was easy, actually, I was dumb, so I listened. A lot.

And that first home services company – Chapman Heating & Air Conditioning – gave me a very important lesson about how to run a business in that same meeting.

Beth Chapman, sweet and brilliant, told me about – as the owner – her most important customers.

“My most important customers are our employees. If they’re not happy, if they’re not given everything they need to succeed, then how can we expect them to treat our paying customers well?”

“For our customers to win, our employees have to win first.”

She really saw it that simply, and it was clear it wasn’t just lip service around they shop. The Chapman family made it their numbers one, two and three priorities to make sure their customers – the Chapman employees – were delighted.

Another friend, Matt, who’s CFO at The River – a fiercely independent Contemporary Christian radio station in Columbus, OH, put it another way:

“The leaders’ role is simply to create an environment where her or his employees can do their best work, evaluate that work and reward the results of that work.”

That’s it. Don’t complicate it.

Do you view your company that way?

You can simplify it still if you’re a larger organization: As a C-level executive, can you regard your ONLY customers as your managers and department heads? That’s it. If you focused on no one else for a week, what might happen?

If you built systems, policies, procedures and methods for measuring and rewarding those processes, what might happen to your organization?

Would it give you more time? Would it give you more focus? What's the worst thing that would happen if you gave all your energy and passion to a small number of your best customers and empowered and rewarded them for doing the same.

Then why won't you give it a try? I don't mean form a committee. I mean: Do. It. What's the first step to trying it?

Okay. There. You're out of reasons not to do it.

Thanks, Beth.

Oh, I forgot: the second January company meeting? That's the profit sharing meeting.

"My most important customers are our employees. If they're not happy, if they're not given everything they need to succeed, then how can we expect them to treat our paying customers well?"



PART III: WHO?

WHO DELIVERS
SHAREWORTHY
SERVICE?

my friends like these

There's never been a better – or more profitable – time to excel at delighting customers.

The thing is – it's pretty darned easy for every one of us to come up with – like I did yesterday – a story about horrendous customer service.

What about good ones? Inspiring ones?

Who are the companies that deliver?

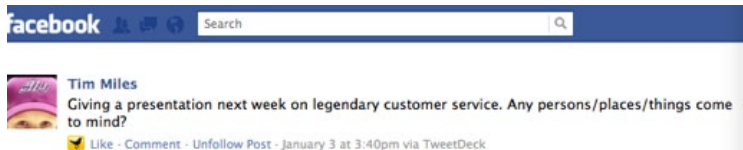
Let's take a look at the defining characteristics of legendary customer service and why it's never been more important (or more profitable) to deliver it.

In case you hadn't noticed, the Internet changed some stuff.

Now, in addition to being able to watch clips from Battle of the Network Stars, you can also spread the word about anything to dozens, hundreds, even thousands of friends (and they to theirs) with a few taps, points and clicks.

That's great news if you're extraordinary. That's really awful news if you're a boogerface.

To start my research into legendary customer service, I did what all astute professional scholars do: I went to Facebook.



###

Suzanne – Studied it for a summer while interning at Disney World. Dump your ice cream cone on accident on Main Street? Tell them, you’ll get a new one. Offering to take a picture of your family so you can be in it – they do it all the time. Nordstrom is the other one. Never a hassle on a return.

Amy S. – Gates Barbecue. “Himayihepyou?” Always with a smile.

Amy M. – Apple handed me a new iPad when I went in with my cracked screen. I had no insurance on it. I also appreciate never waiting in line at Target stores.

Melissa – Zappos. I know it’s cliché, but it’s true.

Joey – Here’s a few that come to mind: Zappos.com — Unhurried knowledgeable phone suggestions. Surprised to discover free upgrade to next day delivery when the shoes arrived. Southwest Airlines — I showed up a day early for a flight. No hassle. They fixed it, no charge. My local pharmacy (Logan Professional) anticipated my benefits year and ordered refills for me a few days early so the deductible wouldn’t kick in. Ritz Carlton Battery Park NYC — usually out of my price range but I got a deal. Employees know your name by the second time they see you. Concierge went way beyond expectations.

Mike – Southwest Airlines for sure! Their customer service makes them the only ones I want to fly

Renee – Amex. Had my card # stolen a month ago. No hassles, sure, but they handle everything so quickly. Love them! xoxo [At this point, I got all excited because I thought it was an unrequited love fulfilled 25 years later (Facebook is particularly useful for this), but then I realized she was xoxo-ing Amex ... and not me, and then every ounce of Cusackian social awkwardness returned. I'm going to stop talking now.]

Kristi – HyVee has a “no point” policy that their clerks are supposed to follow. They are to walk you to the thing you're looking for instead of just saying or “pointing” to the general direction where the product is located. In my experience, my HyVee has followed this policy every time.

Kristi, Part Deux – When it comes to a phone or internet order, the company Plow and Hearth provides hands-on experience for all of their operators with the products they sell. When I called to ask questions about some curtains I wanted, the operator went on and on about the curtains because they were new to the catalog and they had had a training session the week before on all the aspects of the new curtain. I was awed b/c I was dealing with someone who knew the product and wasn't just reading info off a screen! When I asked if that was common, she said all the operators were required to have had some kind of hands on experience with all the products—wow!

Kyle – If you want to go with a local company/business, I'm really happy with Landmark Bank. They have always been super helpful to me when I have questions about my money.

Megan – Ditto on Zappos. And locally, Lone Star is actually pretty amazing. I think it's important to remember the small things – they always ask me to cut into my steak to make sure it's cooked right so they can immediately take it back if it's not. This doesn't happen at other places and it drives me bonkers because I always have to send it back!

Lori – St. Louis Bread Company. They gave my friend the wrong order in drive thru. She got home called them...they brought the correct order to her house and gave her free dessert and bread!

Nanci – The Learning and Performance Support (LAPS) Team at MU's College of Ed ROCK! They keep all stakeholders in the College of Ed working and up to date on leveraging technology... I couldn't do what I do without them...and I not only say thank you in person I write letters with specific actions they take to support my work and sent to the DEAN....

Bret – Chick-fil-a is one of the best. Go to any store and say “thank you” and they will never say “you're welcome”... they will always say “My pleasure”. Best fast food service ever.

Bethany – Kohl's has an excellent return policy. No questions asked. For someone who often misplaces receipts, I appreciate that. Plus, they have a Kohl's Care Team that volunteers in the community.

Jess – One of my dear friends was diagnosed with breast cancer so she and her fiancée moved up their wedding by 9 months and we all pitched in to plan their wedding in 2 weeks time. When the shop where her dress was ordered told her that her dress was in Springfield, she told them her story and the store manager drove in her car 3.5 hours each way to get it to her.

Kelly – Have you seen the info about Pike Place Fish Market in Seattle? They have a strong work ethic when it comes to customer service. I saw a video a few years ago that they put out about how they improved customer service. Hope this helps :)

###

How you about? Who do you think is bragworthy?

There's never been a better – or more profitable – time to excel at delighting customers.

Oddly enough, it's also never been simpler.

The question on my mind is this, though – just because it's simple ... is it easy?

interning at disney — 20 years later

“Dump your ice cream cone on accident on Main Street? Tell them. You’ll get a new one. Offering to take a picture of your family so you can be in it? They do it all the time.”

My friend, fellow pinball fanatic and former biology lab partner Suzanne interned at Disney a ... umm ... uhh ... a while ago. :)

It’s still with her. I can’t tell it any better than this:

“Yes, years after interning there, I am still brainwashed.

“I still point with two fingers or the whole hand.

“I still offer to take pictures of families I see out and about (which drives my husband NUTS!), but it was so part of the culture there.

“I think that’s the difference. Customer service has to be part of the culture.

“We were told over and over again that we were the face of Disney and it didn’t matter if that guest (yes GUEST, not customer – a tidbit that Target adopted after sending their management folks through Disney training) was in our parks for the tenth time or first time, our job was to make it feel like their first time and make it wonderful.

“Nine great things could have happened to them on their trip, but guests (customers) don’t talk about that.

“They talk about the ONE BAD thing that happened. It was drilled into us to NOT be the one bad thing.

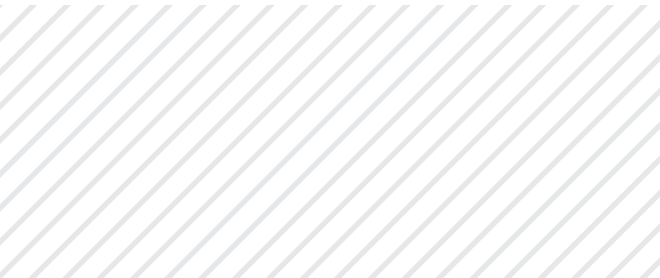
“That said, I interned there when I was twenty. Those principals have stuck with me throughout my career, even though it’s been in high tech – not tourism.”

Thanks, Suz.

In 250 words ... Suzanne covers 12 of the 14 facets of shareworthy service.

Disney, dude.

All these years later, Mouse can still bring it.



francis, jake & carrabbas

Francis Pass is my client and my friend. He is also on the Mt. Rushmore of storytellers. We got to talking about shareworthy service the other day, and I was able to record – and have transcribed – his story of a recent legendarily magnificently delightful dinner he shared with his wife, Patricia, and a young man named Jake. Take it away, Francis:

Patricia and I were in Sarasota, Florida. We saw the sign for Carrabba's. We had been seeing the advertisements on national TV and never been to a Carrabba's.

So we went to Carrabba's and we got this young man named Jake.

Right off the bat the hostess seats you and then Jake comes over and he introduced himself as all waiters say: "I'm Jake and I'm going to be taking care of you." Jake went above and beyond that.

He extended his hand out to me and said, "And you are?" And I said I was Francis.

"And this is your lovely date?" And so Patricia then extended her hand because he knew the proper etiquette – only shake a ladies hand when she extends it. So she shook his hand.

"And your last name?" Pass, I said.

"Francis and Patricia Pass," he said. "Well, I'm Jake. I'm going to be taking care of you this evening. Have you ever been here with us before?"

No, as a matter of fact, Jake, this is our first time ever to go to a Carrabba's. "Wow. Okay," he

said. "I want this to be a fantastic event for you, and I'm going to make sure that you have a wonderful experience. I'll do everything I can to do that for you. Would you like something from the bar?" Patricia and I said we wanted wine.

Jake said, "Do you know what you might like?"

And I said to Jake, "I haven't even looked at your wine list." Jake said, "I'm going to go get your water, and I'll be back out."

So when he came back I showed him what I thought. He said it was an excellent choice. He disappears and he brings back this beautiful, blonde-headed girl. And he brings her over to our table, literally, and says "Francis, Patricia, this is Sheila. She's an outstanding wine glass server. She's brought your glasses for this evening and then she'll be bringing back the wine, and I just wanted you to meet this young lady."

Then he turned to her and says "Sheila, this is Francis and Patricia Pass and this is their first time here, but it's also their first time ever at a Carrabba's. We want to make this a special event for them."

Of course she was grinning from ear to ear. Well, she gives us our glasses then the wine comes and they're gently poured. They start off with Patricia first and then pour mine.

Then, during the course there's this young lady going around to all the tables with this little roller vacuum. Jake gets her by the arm and brings her over and says "Lisa, I'd like to introduce you to Francis and Patricia Pass. Lisa is our most fantastic floor cleaner." Then he made absolutely certain that she was aware this was a first-time event.

This was when I began to kind of look at the people around us. The table to the left, table to the right, and every time Jake would show up they'd now stop what they were doing and they'd look and they'd listen. He's not taking care of their tables, okay? And I could tell by expressions, they were like 'what the heck's going on? Who are these people?' You know what I mean?

The whole evening went that way, and when he brought my meal out, he brought out this other little bowl. I had not ordered soup because I had the salad. Jake says “you know, Francis, the dish that you ordered is made with a champagne cream sauce. It’s excellent, but it is more on the bland side,” and he said “I can tell from the wine you ordered, and the salad you had that it might be just a little too bland, so I brought this sauce so that, if it’s too bland, spoon a little on it.” He says “Patricia, you might like this also because it’s more like your sauce. But if you want more...”

And I did want more! It was a great recommendation. The whole event was just – it was the best legendary restaurant service we’ve ever received anywhere.

After dinner I asked Jake if he had ever considered a position in sales? And he said “you know, I’ve been told that before.”

I gave him my business card, and I told him if he ever made it to Illinois to come see me, and I will create a position for him – period!

And then I told Jake I wanted to recommend him to our franchise – One Hour Heating & Air Conditioning – right there in Sarasota.

And Jake said, “That’d be fantastic. I’m 28 years old, and I need to get a real job.”

It was the most unbelievable service I’ve ever had in my life. I think our bill was \$87. I gave him a \$35 tip.

Multiply that times ten tables a night, five nights a week. Heck, ole’ Jake might be taking a pay cut going to work for One Hour. :))

And to think – Jake wasn’t there one minute longer than any other server working that night. He didn’t have any special tools that any other server couldn’t have used as well. He just chose to have more fun and be more interested in and interesting to his tables. And he made 40% while others, no doubt, whined and complained and wondered why Jake was so lucky getting all the good tippers while they got their measly 10-20%.

How about you? Do you remember your last legendary customer service experience?

I gave him my business card, and I told him if he ever made it to Illinois to come see me, and I will create a position for him – period!

privilege at cap city fine diner

I'm in Columbus, Ohio, where I'm in the middle of eating the best fried chicken dinner of my life.

I'm a guest of a delightful Christian radio station – 104.9 The River. My hosts have quickly become friends.

I passed on the meatloaf my three dinner companions at the Cap City Fine Diner all ordered. They assure me it's the signature dish.

Three bites into my chicken, I assure them they're wrong.

The general manager comes up to our table to introduce himself to our table. Always a nice touch, right, but not all that uncommon?

He asks of our meals. I tell him his fried chicken dinner is stupid.

I mean it's good. I'm hip that way. At least my son thinks so. Still.

I tell him I'm from out-of-town and my three friends said we absolutely had to visit this place while I was there. He thanked them and wondered if we were going to try the signature dessert: The Cup of Chocolate?

“It's a large mug,” he said, “filled with warm, gooey chocolate lava cake, topped with vanilla

bean ice cream and hot fudge.”

“Mbmbm phgmm,” I replied, on bite 17 of my fried chicken dinner.

“But,” he continued, “and we don’t put this on the menu, but our regulars order it with warm peanut butter between the lava cake and the ice cream.”

“Now you’re just showing off,” I said (borrowing one of my favorite phrases from my friend, Scotty).

He smiled, clearly proud of his place and his food, and wished us an enjoyable rest of our dinner and thanked us for coming.

“They do that a lot here,” Bill said at our table, “I know there are several things you can order off the menu.”

“Like at In and Out burger,” said Craig.

“Yep. Same thing,” I said, and as I was about to continue to talk about what a delight it can be to be in the know and rewarded and made to feel special by knowing things ‘outsiders’ don’t, our waiter arrived at our table.

“A gift,” he said, “from us. You could have gone to a lot of places during your short time here.”

A giant, steaming Cup O’ Chocolate. Four spoons.

And peanut butter, of course.

I was a regular now, after all.

“A gift,” he said, “from us. You could have gone to a lot of places during your short time here.”

smile! you just opened a small business.

Years ago, a good friend and client at the time – a dentist – explained to me why so many ‘technicians’ struggle when they hang a professional shingle.

In dental school, students studied amalgams and x-rays and maybe even how to use that cool little suction thingie.

So, a technician graduates well-schooled in the arts of her science – whether that science is dentistry, medicine, photography or whatever.

But my friend said to me, “That same person doesn’t have any real understanding of how to run a business.”

I bring this up today for two reasons:

- 1) Dilbert creator Scott Adams wrote a fantastic essay for *The Wall Street Journal* about education and entrepreneurship – what he thinks should be taught vs. what is actually taught viewed through the lens of his actual college experience. Read it. I’d love to hear what you think.
- 2) Our friend Rhiannon.

Rhiannon recently left behind an impressive professional résumé as VP of Marketing for a regional bank to pursue her dream of being a professional photographer.

She's a tremendous photographer. But, really, isn't that the easy part?

Not for you or me, I mean, but for anyone who would even remotely consider accepting money to take pictures.

You know what I mean ... that's kinda the basic prerequisite for this sorta thing, right?

What impressed us – or, more correctly, my wife – after we used her for a recent family photo session was her firm grasp on the fact that she “just opened a small business.”

Rhiannon, and her company Lollipop Photography:

Sent a thoroughly detailed email to mama (who booked the appointment) a couple days before the shoot outlining exactly what we could expect.

Knew who was boss from the moment we arrived: Mama. If she could keep Mama happy, she knew everyone would be happy.

Understood that to keep Mama happy, she had to be totally flexible with the whims and fancies of two young children – one of whom has special needs. In other words, every time Will started making silly faces or Sarah started running to another tree, Rhiannon acted as though that was EXACTLY what she had in mind for the next shot. She was brilliantly flexible but always prepared to shoot.

Delivered a longer, better experience than promised.

Transferred delight and confidence throughout the shoot ... which continually kept Mama at ease – this, in spite of the fact, that we were at times ready to place our daughter on eBay.

Conveyed clear expectations of when we could expect to see photos – which is really what matters more than anything. How quickly can you have those shots online so Mama can see them and share them with her friends.

Not just beat ... but reeeeeeally beat that expectation by more than 48 hours. The last time we used a portrait photography studio, they were great photographers who worked well with our son. They were kind, patient and fun. Then it was our turn to be patient as it took more than three weeks to get those photos up and online. Mama was displeased. Do not displease Mama.

We get the digital files on CD. Why? Because it's 2011, that's why, and that's the way more and more families want to receive their pictures. So many photographers still think it's 1973, and force us to buy expensive printed portraits. No thank you. There's a great Pensacola photographer I know who does the same thing.

That evening, as we were checking out our photos through the wonderful AppleTV, two of Dee's mama mafia – Heidi and Heather – came over and ooooh'd and aaaaah'd.

Money's worth. She could have charged twice the price, but in fact, as our friends swore they'd use Rhiannon next time, she – in fact – tripled her money's worth, and possibly more – as those pictures spread like mama-fueled wildfire through social media.

Rhiannon's starting off successfully not because she's a great photographer, though she is.

But because Rhiannon understands what too few do — that she just opened a small business — and it's why I think she's the best Columbia photographer working today.

Disclosure: Lollipop Photography is not a client, but her former employer was at one time. We paid full price for our photo session just like everyone else, and my wife had never met her before we arrived for this session. Rhiannon doesn't know I'm writing this.



shakespeare's secret ingredient

“It’s the pizza, stupid ... and maybe the beer.”

So begins the mission statement for one of Columbia, Missouri’s cultural icons: a self-proclaimed pizza dive known as Shakespeare’s Pizza.

People come from wide and far and close and narrow to line up to eat their pizza. No pasta. No burgers. No fried ravioli or stuff. Just pizza and a few salads and both Coke AND Pepsi.

What’s their secret? It probably won’t come as any surprise they have several ... many of which have absolutely nothing to do with pizza.

Last night, they provided pizza for another client’s (Socket: a different cool company with a different cool story for a different cool day. Cool?) neighborhood party. Socket set up shop at a local park with games and music and a bounce house and other means of assorted funnery.

Two of Shakes Secrets: Socket advertised that pizza would be served from six to eight. Shakes started serving about fifteen minutes early and had the 200 pizzas ordered delivered in three flights rather than all at once.

That way, the pizza was always hot. If you were hungry ahead of the expected time (5:45), you got a piping hot slice, but if you showed up at 7:30, you didn’t get a lukewarm, chewy, 90-minute old slice. Yours was just was piping, bub.

Sure, it takes a little extra effort. Build a little extra effort into the price. That piping hot pizza's marketing, friends. It's a language that communicates to guests that Shakes rocks, and it communicates that Socket rocks, too.

Shakespeare's helped improve Socket's event and continued to reinforce the positive image of the business.

My partner, Roy H. Williams, recently told me that "advertising is a tax you pay for being unremarkable."

Often, the cheapest form of marketing is a delivering a remarkable product or experience.

Why not look through your systems, policies and procedures and see where you can ratchet up the awesome.

"It's raising the anticipated price, stupid ... and maybe the beer."

My partner, Roy H. Williams, recently told me that "advertising is a tax you pay for being unremarkable."

Often, the cheapest form of marketing is a delivering a remarkable product or experience.

the business of bbq

One BBQ restaurant in my town caters for \$7.50 a plate.

That includes 2 meats, three sides, and a bill.

You don't get plates or napkins or serving spoons.

Oh, and you're serving 3000, or you're a regular customer and ask for a discount?

Sure thing. For you, it's only \$7.50 a plate.

Another BBQ restaurant in my town caters for \$8.95 a plate.

That includes 2 meats, three sides, utensils, napkins, plates, serving spoons and most towelettes.

It also gives the business owner flexibility and headroom (or margin) to make anyone he so chooses feel like they're getting a deal.

Whether it's a large order or a regular customer, business two builds in flexibility to ensure he can play favorites and utilize the shareworthy facet of privilege.

I'm not saying one strategy's better than the other. But one's probably a lot more fun.

(Okay, I *was* actually saying one strategy is better than the other.)

just one quick apple story - twice

When I was doing my scholarly Facebook research on shareworthy service stories, my old friend Amy shared a juicy Apple story. It's ... just ... so ... cool.

Yes, I am an unapologetic Apple fanboy. But there are reasons I'm an unapologetic fanboy. This is one of them. Take it away, Amy:

This is from Ray's blog at his job at Target, but sums up the story. Not really much to it, they were just awesome. It was the Apple Store in Minnetonka, MN. Take care!!

Last December I purchased an iPad at my local Target--at first it was 'off limits' to my 2 kids (Pete is 6 and Tessa is 3)--but over time my wife and I have relaxed that stance and both kids play with it--sometimes with less than ideal supervision. That was the case on Monday morning--Pete likes to get a few sessions of Angry Birds in on his way to school. On Monday, he walked out the door with the iPad in one hand and his backpack in the other. While fortunately he's more coordinated than his father, he wasn't able to successfully get both the iPad and the backpack to the car on this morning--coming back into the house with a concerned look on his face. The iPad had hit the driveway and apparently landed right on the glass screen, creating a large spider-web break. Bummer!! (Although truthfully I'm not sure that was the word I used).

I knew there were a number of places that specialized in iPad/iPhone repairs—but had concerns about potentially voiding my warranty by using someone other than Apple. I am typically cheap..... but wanted to make the best decision.... o my wife scheduled an appointment with a technician at the local Apple retail store.

This was the first time I had been in an Apple store—the place was packed, but an employee approached me immediately and asked how she could help me—I mentioned that my wife had made an appointment—I was a few minutes early, so she asked that I make myself comfortable (there were lots of cool toys there to play with!) and a technician would approach me shortly. Right on time—my technician (Sam) found me and asked how he could help.

I showed him the damaged iPad—he then referenced my home address and e-mail and noted that I had never made a purchase directly from Apple. The next thing he said was: “How would you feel if Apple picked up the tab tonight and I sent you home with a brand new one?”

Just like that—I was walking out of there with a brand new iPad—remarkable when you consider the damage was clearly my fault and not warranted—and he knew that I was not a frequent shopper—I had never even made a purchase from an Apple retailer—EVER!

Clearly a ‘moment of truth’ for Apple—and they aced the exam.

The funny thing is. The exact same thing happened to me. Well, I tried to catapult ours off the top of our minivan (where I’d accidentally left it while buckling in the 2-year-old), but I went into the Apple Store in West County in St. Louis, and told them it was completely my fault. My guy said, “Well, we appreciate you telling the truth, so I tell you what - we’re going to replace it for free today.”



first, do no harm

I was surprised to see an email come to both Dee and me. Another old friend, Jennifer, shared a story with us that she's allowing us to share.

When I see your posts about service, etc., I always want to comment about a shining star of service, technology, and media, Cleveland Clinic - <http://my.clevelandclinic.org>

I had some major health issues in 2008 and early 2009 and had the opportunity to visit their main Cleveland campus, and remain in contact with them since.

Service:

When you initially phone them, they ask, "Would you like to come in tomorrow?" [I almost passed out, I was armed with my list of contacts, referral source, and list of validations for my visit].

I went there for one appointment with one doctor / department. He said, "I have some colleagues I'd like to have weigh in on this." And asked "How long can you stay in the area?". When I responded; "We are currently booked in for 4 days, but are flexible." They made every effort to get my in front of all 4 departments that they really thought I needed to see. You might be thinking that I sat around in waiting rooms all day in the hospital. Nope. They simply asked me to stay within 45 minutes of the campus. We went to the Rock 'N Roll Hall of Fame, dinners out, shopping, etc. My cell would buzz. Next appointment: Bldg X, Room Y - 4:00.

The campus is amazing - clean, beautiful, lots of art & fountains...and they have great susbi in one of their "store fronts" (no food court).

They have "Red Coats" - a small army of volunteers and paid employees all easily identified by their red jackets. They stand at all major hallway intersections and are happy to help you from point a to b, recommend an area restaurant, or anything else you need. Loved those folks!!!

The doctors see you on time & the doctors are amazingly approachable and take time to make sure you thoroughly understand the situation. [It's like they seem to actually understand that you might be slightly whacked out at the situation and overwhelmed by the medical-eye].

You never see a "patient." No beds or wheel chairs with hospital gown clad people being wheeled from there to there. If the patient is able to walk from exam area to exam area, they get re-dressed and do so. If they have to be transported they are taken through back halls rather than being paraded through common areas or waiting rooms. No clutching the gown shut in back - yikes!

They have an indoor/outdoor rooftop quiet area which is amazing.

Media:

Great website - correction, AMAZING website which a plethora of info

Strong social media & interesting Facebook posts They create many videos for You Tube, their own site, etc.

Technology:

They have this great system called "My Chart", which allows the patient to manage health information and update their chart with new information, prescriptions, etc.

The fact that I could "enjoy" my time visiting a hospital during a very difficult situation sticks with me still today. I hope some of this is of value to you in your work.

Take care, Jennifer

You take care, Jen. It was great to know you were in amazing hands.

the urinal gnat

A friend came to me yesterday to express her frustrations.

Work had her down, done, and all out.

We broke down and isolated her great, all-consuming irritants and found them, really, to be nothing more than urinal gnats.

Guys know. Guys who either used to live in less-than-HGTV-worthy homes when they were younger or who frequented less-than-fancy bars when they were there yesterday know.

The urinal gnats hover in the john around said receptacles. They never land. They never bite you and leave red, stinging welts in your nether-regions that make you want to cry.

They won't give you the Asian flu, rickets, or ADHD.

Even a urinal gnat with the most cranky disposition on its worst day does nothing more than float there giving you something to look at while you keep your eyes front, thank you.

But, in your mind, you can allow urinal gnats to grow to prodigious horse-flies that buzz like chain-saws – disrupting your disruption with their menacing tendency to land and grab hold of something.

Same is true of my friend.

Her problems were no more than a small series of inconveniences in an otherwise pretty good job. Most everyone loves and respects her. She's good at what she does.

It happens to all of us.

But if you don't communicate ... if you let the pool of problems fester in the heat and humidity of your workplace ... they can buzz over the sacred dividing line and creep into my – your co-worker's – urinal.

Or, worse, a customer's.

Your customer doesn't really care all that much if you're having a bad day. They don't care if you've answered their question 273 times already today. They've come to you wanting to buy from you, and there will either be a connect or disconnect between you and them that happens almost imperceptibly in the first three seconds of your time together.

So, if you have real problems, fix them away from the other patrons, please.

If you have a few small inconveniences, though, just don't forget to flush and wash your hands of them before returning to work.

Don't make mountains out of molehills.

Don't make horseflies out of urinal gnats.

And, please, tip your bartenders and waitresses ... provided they've washed their hands.

Your customer doesn't really care all that much if you're having a bad day.

PART IV: HOW?

HOW DO YOU
DELIVER SHARE-
WORTHY SERVICE?

implementing shareworthy service

I have been actively working on a theory for a couple months now, but I've been thinking about it for yeeeeeears. Two clients are beginning to test it. A couple more may follow.

As always, we will continue to increase our marketing budget as a percentage of sales, but we will be lowering our advertising budget.

Huh?

For years, owner-operated companies spent bazillions on things like the yellow pages - pouring buckets of cash into the last refuge for people who have no preference. Now, many of those same companies are using some of that money to buy bags of magic beans from social media experts.

Don't get me wrong. I think social media's a fantastic tool for listening and deepening a relationship and doing research and addressing customer concerns and sharing videos of singing dogs and stuff. It's just not a broadcast or direct response medium. It's terrible - for most owner operated companies - at direct response.

So my clients are participating in a grand and frightening experiment. We're going to begin taking part of our ad budget and putting it back into our company's best customers: our employees.

My partner Roy has said a million times: You cannot improve what you do not measure and reward.

Most managers love the measure part, but they turn the other way and whistle when you remind them about reward.

To implement this program, we started by asking these best customers - our employees - a series of questions about their ideal rewards - large and small. To get them to buy into this new way of thinking - that each employee is part of the marketing department - we have to start by painting a picture of what's in it for them. Each of them has a different carrot at the end of the stick. If I'm right - if we do our job correctly - we'll be able to reward them mightily.

How about you? Do you know what your team - your best customers - want, need and desire? I don't mean "more money." I mean specifics. Each one.

Does it bother you that you don't know?

Then, we have to ask them more questions - you have to ask them questions about what would cause a customer to *want* to share an experience with your company.

You have to ask them about professionalism and kindness - what the defining characteristics of each one looks and feels like to your customers. You have to ask them for specifics.

You have to pull out worksheets with the 14 Facets of Shareworthy Service and ask these most important customers of yours how each one could be dialed up with your company's customers. Ask for specifics. Ask each employee. First, ask them not to share answers so you can see individual results. Then do it again and collaborate on answers.

You need to ask your employees what YOU can do to deliver shareworthy service to them - after all, they are your best customers.

How about you? Do you know what your team - your best customers - want, need and desire? I don't mean "more money." I mean specifics. Each one.

What do they need from you - what resources can you provide them - to help them help your customers?

You're going to have to ask them.

Wait - isn't this an awful lot of work?

Absolutely.

Then, how can you measure and reward these tactics. If you have a shareworthy service contest, what are the ground rules?

You know who needs to set them? Your best customers - your employees - they need to OWN IT. They are uniquely qualified to be specific about definitions, systems of measurement, rewards big and small, and implementation.

A funny thing's going to happen - I think - on the way to this new world. You're all going to have a heck of a lot of fun along the way. You're really, really going to enjoy coming to work every day and sharing stories of your own.

We're going to continue advertising, don't get me wrong. We're just going to focus on media that allow us to harness the powers of emotion and story. And those stories aren't going to be about margin-killing. Groupon? Eat it, Groupon.

Customer service is the new accelerant. Most companies say they need a Facebook page. Why? I'm pretty sure they'd be better off focusing on delivering service worth sharing.

You want more likes?

Great. Give people something to actually, you know, like.

Of course ... I could be wrong. About all of it. Are you ready to jump out on the skinny end of the branch and try it with us? I'll give you the plan next week if you'll help out some people who helped our family.

a listening exercise

The most common sales rep frustrations I hear from clients and all small business owners across North America:

Sales reps don't listen. Sometimes they act like they listen, but I'm pretty sure they're just nodding and waiting for me to finish so they can start talking again.

Want to learn to actively listen?

It requires practice. In your next sales training:

Pair up into two-somes.

Pick a conversational topic. It can be as simple as 'tell me about your day yesterday,' but it should be something that requires a bit of storytelling.

Sit in chairs facing one another. Person A will tell their story to person B.

They must maintain eye contact and person B cannot interrupt. Understand that: Person B may not say anything. Person B's only job at this point is to listen.

Then, switch roles. Person A listens. Person B tells.

Once finished, go around the room with each Person B telling Person A's story and vice versa.

It's more fun if you have a colorful, emotional topic such as, "Tell me about your favorite family vacation," or "Tell me about your most embarrassing moment."

Do this once a week for the next twelve weeks. I defy you to not see dramatic improvements in connecting with not only clients and prospects, but also with friends and family, too.



dee p. names the lobsters

Ever hear of naming the lobsters?

You go to a seafood restaurant with one of those big lobster tanks by the front door. Your kid starts naming them, and suddenly you can't eat one.

They have names. They're suddenly more than a market price dinner. They're cute little Disney creatures with names and families and hijinks and adventures.

Your kid just kept you from eating that lobster because your kid made it a little more real.

Dee Pontious at Jansen's Heating & Air taught me how to name the lobsters for companies.

I first saw the poster middle of last year. It was 24" x 36" brightly colored poster board covered with rifles and the lights of Vegas and boats and grills. They were surrounding a big number.

"What's that?" I asked Dee.

"Well, I wanted everyone on the team to realize we all won if we hit our company goal this year, so I had everybody go through and cut out their dream toy if we got our profit sharing bonus."

“I had them think about, imagine, then make the effort to cut out what they wanted.”

“We all had to paste them on this poster here, and then I put it up by the back door so it was the first thing everyone saw when they arrived in the morning and the last thing they saw before they went home at night.”

It's not the first contest Dee's done brilliantly. It seems every time I go there to visit, she's got them all involved in some new scavenger hunt or bingo or team competition.

Dee Pontious is a genius. She's not the only one there at the shop.

Coincidentally, Jansen's Heating & Air was named contractor of the year by their trade association last year.

“Well, I wanted everyone on the team to realize we all won if we hit our company goal this year, so I had everybody go through and cut out their dream toy if we got our profit sharing bonus.”

How to implement a shareworthy customer service program: part 1

“ **ON THURSDAY, JANUARY, 19th**, I delivered the Shareworthy Customer Service talk for the second time. I had delivered it a few days earlier for Francis Pass’ company. I was at the annual breakfast meeting for Chapman Heating & Air Conditioning, with whom I’ve worked for seven years.

Here’s what I had to say:

TIM: You’re getting pieces of paper passed around.

We’re not going to share answers with each other; in fact, I’m not going to ask you to write down answers, but I want you to write down questions.

Throughout the next 25 minutes or so I’m going to give you a list of questions.

I want you to write them down. By Tuesday, I want you to have thought about them and answered them and put them on Heidi’s desk by Tuesday morning, before you go out on calls, or if you work in the office or do sales calls by 8:30 AM on Tuesday morning put your name on these.

You’re going to write some questions down. I want you to have them answered by Tuesday morning.”

Take the questions home, talk about them with your spouse or your significant other.

“**Number one, what’s your dream vacation?** You don’t have to write the answer right now, just write down the question. Think about it. By Tuesday, Heidi wants the answers back. What’s your dream vacation?”

Number two, if you had an extra week off from work, if you had an extra week’s vacation, what would you do on that week off?

Number three, what big boy toy would you like the most right now? What absolutely selfish purchase would you like to make for yourself right now? And again, you’re just writing down the questions.

Number four, if you could sort of turn the mirror around and help somebody else, what is your dream service project? Write that down. And what I mean by that is, is there something at your church? Some charity that you support? If the whole company got behind it, what would it be? So what’s your dream service project is a short way to write that.

TATE: *What would be my dream service project if the whole company got behind it?*

TIM: Yeah. Yes, total pet project. We’re giving you a day of our time.

Number five, what’s your dream meal? If we were going to take you out to dinner, what’s your dream meal?

The last question for now is **number six: If you were going to get a gift for your spouse or your significant other, what would that gift be?**

My son, at seafood restaurants, named the lobsters so I can’t order lobster because they’re real all of a sudden.

They have faces. I never understood why restaurants put faces on food in their advertising. Why would you do that? Why make it more real? So the more specific you can make it, the more real it becomes.”

“As we continue to grow the company, the marketing budget will continue to increase. The marketing budget will continue to increase as a percentage of sales. It's just a number we use, kind of as a baseline, to figure out how much we're going to spend on marketing. But there's a different between marketing and advertising.

Marketing continues to work as well as it ever has. The internet's tends to make good marketing work more quickly.

Advertising, throwing stuff onto a T.V. or a radio, putting stuff in mailboxes, is working less and less well by the second.

Mass media advertising still works, but it's working less well than it used to.

Marketing is every touchpoint we have with a customer and no one touches them directly more than the people in this room.

No one, and the internet's changed everything.

If you think of customer service at this inverted bell curve here, ask anybody. They can pretty quickly tell you a terrible customer service story somewhere where the service just sucked, it was bad, it was a nightmare. I mean people get animated, passionate about that stuff. Just go on Facebook any given day and you'll see somebody who was ticked off about something. Advertising will put that business out of business faster. Advertising only accelerates what's going to happen anyway. A great advertising campaign that draws more people to a bad business just spreads the word faster that this business stinks.

On the other end of the inverted curve? Legendary, spectacular customer service, we don't have as many of those stories. There are the usual companies, the Apple Computer, the Zappos. Nordstrom is another one. ”

Marketing is every touchpoint we have with a customer and no one touches them directly more than the people in this room.

“ The companies that make people, you know, stuff you want to talk about, shareworthy.

People get on Facebook and actually say great things. Those companies, advertising accelerates their growth logarithmically.

Boom - takes off because you're making more people aware, and reminding people who've done business with the company, how awesome it was.

Breathtaking customer service, Disney - have you ever been to Disney? They literally wrote the book - a binder. You can't buy it. It's all about systems, policies and procedures on how to be awesome. How to make everyone feel like it's the best experience they ever had. Here's what's funny: everybody who works at Disney works 8 hours just like you and me, 10, you know what I'm saying?

It requires no extra effort, or time, or money to be awesome than it does to be crappy, and it's an awful lot more fun to be that way.

But here's what's changing. Here's what the internet has changed:

Very few companies and experiences are actually just that crappy.

Very few are actually really legendary. Where advertising used to work, where mass media "sprayin' and prayin'" used to work, was for the great unwashed pit of mediocrity there in the middle.

Everybody who was just kind of okay, who wasn't noteworthy or remarkable in any way, shape or form, they just went about their job. They thought they did okay. They went home, lather, rinse, repeat like a wall of zombies for the rest of their lives. Pit of mediocrity right here. This is becoming less and less effective by the second. It's getting ignored. Yankelovich & Sons, a marketing research firm, last year found that the average person in a major city hears a certain number of messages every day, whether it's an ad or something you see on Facebook or some idiot in a blazer yammering at you in the front of the room when you just want to leave. ”

“ How many messages do you think that is, each of us hears every day, approximately?

SOMEONE: 150?

TIM: 5,000!

That's your number guys. Five-thousand messages yammering on and on in the middle that nobody remembers.

The advertising budget will go down. If we do this right, the marketing budget will continue to go up. Advertising down, marketing up.

Where are we going to spend that money?

So why is bad customer service so dangerous? Let me read you something that my partner, Roy Williams, wrote about such a thing in his *Wall Street Journal* Business Book of the Year, *Secret Formulas of The Wizard of Ads*:

An in-depth study conducted by Technical Assistance Research Programs, T.A.R.P., of Washington D.C., uncovered some things I think you should know.

Number 1: On average, 26 unhappy customers won't complain, for every one that will.

Number 2: Yet each of these unhappy 27 customers will tell an average of 16 other people about his or her bad experience with your firm.

Number 3: This means every complaint you hear represents 432 negative impressions. How many people should have to complain before you take action to permanently remedy your problem? By the time you hear a particular complaint three times, the problem has been mentioned to an average of 1296 people.

Number 4: It costs 5 times as much to attract a new customer as it costs to keep an old one.”

Number 5: 91% of your unbappy customers will never buy from you again.

And Number Six: But if you make a focused effort to remedy your customer's complaints, 82% of them will stay with you."

“**TIM:** Steve Tuschmidt, the owner of Mid-America Harley Davidson said something that has stuck with me since I heard him say it, “Eventually everybody is going to stub their toe. It's how you fix it that matters.” And that's really true.

So I'm not asking for the impossible, I'm not challenging you to do the impossible today, which is to always be perfect.

But make a conscious effort to figure out what you can do to make things right if something does go badly.

Advertising, we spend a lot of money on advertising every year.

It's a shame, because often it gets wasted. Not in our case, but in some cases.

Sorry. There's this billboard that drives me bug-nuts crazy, on I-70 going to St. Louis, for Fast Lane.

It's over on the left hand side right before Warrenton, where Warrenton oil, who owns the FastLane companies and loves billboards, is.

Um, but it looks like a Facebook status update. Y'all know what I'm talking about? It's like “FastLane, for fuel,” this is the update they left, “food and fun.” exclamation, three exclamation marks. “For fuel, food and fun!!!”

That drives me nuts, and I'll tell you why. Have you ever walked into a FastLane or any other convenience store and thought, and walked out and go, “Man that was fun! That was cool. Man, Disney's got nothing on FastLane.”? ””

“ So I walked into the place, and you know, it was moderately clean, no one greeted me, no one said hello, there were no clown noses or whoopee cushions anywhere. There wasn't anything fun about the place.

And people just chalk it up and say “Oh well, that's advertising. You know they just say whatever they're gonna say.” You might think that I'm arguing that they should just take this word out. No. Wouldn't do them a lick of good.

If they actually sat around, if they took their management staff to Disney World and to Great Wolf Lodge and to all of these places that sell fun and figured out a way to make the world's most fun convenience store chain, they would be zillionaires, billionaires, gazillionaires, because they changed the experience. They moved from in here somewhere, to here. And every time we went down that dadgum highway, my children would yell at me to stop at this place, and yours would do the same. And my wife would tell her mom friends about it on Facebook and they would spread it and be advocates for us.

All because they changed their systems, their policies and procedures to measure and reward legendary customer service and fun. That's what I want to talk about today.

More questions, please write them down.

Next question; *Have you ever had legendary customer service?* Tell the story.

Next question: *What would you have to do to deliver shareworthy customer service?* What would you have to do to cause someone to get onto Facebook, to pick up the phone, to send an email to Chapman's and say “Holy crap, that was amazing.”? What would you have to do? What could you do that someone would share?

Next question: *If we had a contest to reward legendary customer service*, how would we measure it? Because if we do have this contest, y'all have to be the ones to decide the rules, and how it works.

You know it's funny, you might say, well, we just go there, they don't want us there, that want us in and out as quick as possible. ”

“ Let me read a story. Hey, is anyone familiar with a Dave Ramsey in here?

I'm a big fan of Dave Ramsey. I actually had a client say that I was like the Dave Ramsey of marketing which is a big compliment to me. He said I was the least full of crap guy he'd ever heard talk about advertising.

Ramsey wrote this in his new book *EntreLeadership* on small business:

I'm known for telling people to deliver pizzas or throw papers for some quick extra money. I had an energetic and analytical young man working for our team during the day, but he wanted some more money so he decided to deliver pizzas.

Anyone can just walk up to the door and hand someone a pizza. But John was not content with doing just the basic process, because his best money came from the tips.

TIM: Was he doing it because it made him feel good? No, he was doing it to make extra money. If he gave better service, he made more money; there was a direct correlation.

He took the exact same amount of effort. He probably was happier and enjoyed it more, and went home happier at the end of the night. But he wasn't doing it for that he was doing it for money.

He built a spreadsheet so he could graph the results of each of his ideas. First he found that given the territory of his pizza shop he left with no more than three deliveries in his car at a time. By the time he got to the fourth one, he was running late to the customers mind, and the proof was, that often the pizza was cold.

Two deliveries was inefficient, and four was too many. He discovered that after ringing the doorbell he needed to take at least three steps back so the person answering the door was not intimidated by his height and presence.” ”

“TIM: Can they do that? It never occurred to me that, if you're tall, and ring the doorbell, and take three steps back, so the persons not intimidated by your height.

He also found that when he should park his car in sight of the room, where the TV likely was, so someone would see him arrive and announce throughout the house, 'Pizza's here!'

After parking where people could see him in advance, he found he should slightly jog as he went to the door, because it showed he cared.

He tried whistling while he ran, while he waited for the door to be opened. He even tracked whether one tune he whistled was better than another.

He became very intentional about smiling and reminding them that the pizza was piping hot and delicious.

Other than calculating the proper number of deliveries to take at one time, thus making sure he delivered hot pizza, what he did to increase his tips the most was genius.

John noticed that a large percentage of the time, a dog greeted him with the family member ready to pay.

Being a dog-lover himself he realized how it helped his tips if he would pet the family dog and make conversation about the dog.

That's when he had his breakthrough.

He went to a building supply store and bought a nail apron that tied around the front with two pockets in it, he then put dog biscuits in the nail apron so he could give Fido a treat right in front of Fido's master.

TIM: Brilliant. ”

“Wanna hear something really stupid? John quit delivering pizzas for that company because the store manager, a real boss, became jealous of his tip income and demanded he start carrying more pizzas per run, thus messing up the whole formula.

Leadership is required to win in business.

Next and last question.

What do you need from the Chapman family? What do you need from management and ownership, what resources do you need from them, to provide this legendary customer service.

How can they help you?

Another way to say that is, what legendary service do you demand from the owners of this company?

What do you insist upon? How can we put Ron, Beth, Phil, Nathan, Heidi, how can we put them over here, for you?

Advertising is not the future of the growth of the company.

Not advertising, not raw advertising.

Systems, policies and procedures, the things that are shareworthy, are what's going to continue to grow this company, and it's in your hands.

You are part of the marketing department. We are all part of the marketing department.

If we had a contest to reward measure legendary customer service, what would we do?

That's what I would like to hear from you when you answer those questions by Tuesday morning.

Thanks for your time. ”

Systems, policies and procedures, the things that are shareworthy, are what's going to continue to grow this company, and it's in your hands.

How to implement a shareworthy customer service program: part 2

A WEEK AFTER I SPOKE at their annual breakfast meeting, we got back together. Our winter promotion wasn't working very well, and we decided to plow straight into the share-worthy customer service program. With their permission, I'm including this transcript of our conversation on the next steps to implement this grand adventure.

“**TIM:** All right, yeah, we're officially on the record. We got back the employee questions and answers. Now, you have to follow up. You have to ask them about what they wrote - their dreams and ideal vacations and big boy toys. Okay, you wrote down a rifle? Tell me about it.

Just so they know that you've heard them. Just so they understand that, okay, this wasn't something that we just had you fill out, rah-rah, let's go back to doing the same things we've always done.

Ask them if they have any thoughts already written down about what we can do to improve - or how we already provide - legendary customer service.

Basically, you're just going to go over their form with them, shouldn't take more than ten minutes per employee. It's really important to do.

And then you're gonna tell them, okay, over the next week all I want you to do is be mindful through the course of your day, of your week, and your interactions with customers. ”

“Thinking in broad strokes first, you know, the big picture ... with kindness and professionalism, what could you do differently? What could you do better?”

What did you do awesomely that made you think “Hey, we could make this into a policy or a procedure.”

That’s what you’re leading toward; systems, policies, and procedures. Things that are measurable, things that are duplicable, things that are spreadsheet-worthy.

Spreadsheet-worthy service. Doesn’t have the same ring to it.

Then the next week you’re going to have another 20 minute meeting with them, and maybe this will be a group meeting, and you hand out sheets of, “Okay, here are these 14 facets.”

That, I believe - again I’ve looked at hundreds of stories - all 14 that I wrote down, that all of you have seen, are in there.

Okay, what would privilege look like? Privilege is making someone feel special. “Hey we don’t tell everybody this, but we’ll let you in behind the ropes.” How could we do privilege in our business, in our company? How could we utilize memory in our company?

They may not have the answers but maybe they do. I would first ask them to do it individually and that’s a sheer answer cause you never know where the circles might overlap or, and then do it together as a group. ”

**What did you do awesomely that made you think
“Hey, we could make this into a policy or a procedure.”**

“ This is all in a period of about two weeks. This all happens. It costs them nothing except a little bit of time in their mornings.

But you start with talking a little bit with them about their rewards so they're reminded that this is a means to an end.

You're not gonna buy every one of them an RV or a camper, but you're listening.

And so you sit down with them and go over the worksheet with the 14 facets. Then starting April 1st, starting second quarter we're going to have a contest.

But *they* have to define the rules of the contest. You have a final say but no one is more qualified to determine what the contest should be and how it should be measured than those guys.

And then the contest, and this is so crucial, has to have a big carrot at the end of the stick, but it also has to have little baby carrots along the way.

And again it's measurable. It's not measurable tomorrow but my gosh it could be sustainable. It could be something that 3 years from now it's like we never even realized. And then think about it, it makes an awful lot of sense.

I'm not saying that it's right, but I am saying that it's logical. That this practice of empowering your employees to be your marketing department to make them realize and be rewarded for being in your marketing department? ”

Systems, policies and procedures. But those are going to come from the guys. Or from you. Or from Heidi at the front desk. Those are going to come from people who are paying attention, who are mindful.



“ Heck, what could it hurt, we know Direct Mail’s not working.

And it’s not working anywhere. It’s not working in California, it’s not working in Tennessee, and I think that you focus your marketing budget on things where we can tell stories.

Systems, policies and procedures. But those are going to come from the guys. Or from you. Or from Heidi at the front desk. Those are going to come from people who are paying attention, who are mindful.

It starts with mindfulness.

And again, even if it doesn’t show an increase in our top line in the first quarter, everybody is working together toward a common goal.

And that common goal is to make customers freakin’ dazzled by us. I would wait to start a big referral program until October.

That’s really it. Thank you.

It’s not complicated.

There are two ways you could kind of fall off the balance beam. On one side, you go all woo-woo, happy, no measurement, let’s just feel good. Then the feel good will start to fade. Then it’s done and you go back to doing what you always did. Or, falling off the other side, it’s so top-down that they don’t feel like they have any control or input in it.

Then they’re just following orders and they actually resent it. And it will blow up in your face. It has got to be grassroots. It has got to be bottom up. They have to feel like they are being listened to, and they have to feel like they are a part of it. And they constantly have to be reminded that there’s carrots at the end of the stick. ”

“You guys were perfect for this. Disney said, “Out of all the things I’ve said, the most vital is coordinating those who work with me and aiming their efforts at a certain goal.” Walt Disney, one of the most powerful men in the world at his time, didn’t say “work for me” he said “work with me.” He didn’t care about credit. He didn’t care about taking all the credit.

That’s why I think this could work. You guys have always been like this. From the first day I sat down with you, it wasn’t just lip service.

You actually believe this stuff.

Now it’s a matter of systemizing it. It only works — the success or failure of this program hinges on an ability to measure and reward it, not to just make everybody feel good.

It will fail, it will fail quickly, and then we’ve just wasted time. And I don’t want that to happen.

This is a pilot program. Well, no, and you’re my proving ground and I’m yours. I mean we’re both kind of in this together.

Okay. One last thing. You guys had talked about wanting to go visit a heating and air conditioning company. I have a different idea that I want to run by you... I want us to go to Disney...”



THAT'S IT.

What are you prepared to do?

Are you ready to pull the trigger and do something?

It's going to be uncomfortable at first.

You may not see results right away.

Your colleagues may call you crazy.

Congratulations.

You've just begun the same way every great success story has before you.

If developing and implementing a shareworthy customer service program was easy, everyone would be doing it.

What are you prepared to do?

Call us if you have questions. Maybe we can help.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

To quote David Freeman, Tim took everything that made him weird as a kid and got people to pay him money for it as an adult.

Part Dave Barry, part Dave Ramsey, part that Dave guy from the movie, umm, Dave, Tim Miles has used common sense, kindness and an unquenchable curiosity as tools to help a few hundred businesses – at least those willing to meet force with force and do the work – to be more successful more quickly. He runs an odd little communications company that helps owner-operated companies do more with less.

Tim started creating advertising campaigns in 1995. In the ten years that followed, he won more than 80 awards for his ideas and execution of those ideas. Then, on 11/20/05, he decided entering awards shows was kind of a silly way to measure success.

When their son was diagnosed with autism in November of 2005, Tim learned pretty much everything he thought he knew was wrong, and he's made it his mission since to teach people to look at the world a little differently and separate the merely urgent from the truly important.

Tim's paying clients help to subsidize his volunteer and fundraising efforts with more than a dozen small not-for-profit organizations. In the last five years, he's been fortunate to speak to more than 1000 not-for-profit organizations about how there's never been a better time to do what it is they do, but there's never been a more important time to be good at what it is they do.

As founder and President of The Imagination Advisory Group, Tim's consulted businesses in four countries and regularly speaks to companies, conferences and colleges about how to

communicate more powerfully, how to escape the pit of mediocrity and how best to let the world see you as you really are... not as you think you should be.

He married Deidre – who's much smarter and infinitely better looking than he deserves. This is not hyperbole. Ask anyone who knows them both. They have two children, Will and Sarah, and live out in the country on a couple acres in the middle of the middle west with Kitty and Fish44.

Tim chronicles mistakes made, lessons learned, and the sordid misadventures of clients, friends, and family here at The Daily Blur.

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**Tim writes a daily serving
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