

RANDOM

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COMMUNICATIONS WITH A PURPOSE

THOUGHTS

A tale of schlimmbes and highly trained dogs

Three times I've been in the same room with "Albert Einstein". You know, of course, that Einstein died in 1955, but you may not know that I was 8 years old that year. Maybe it wasn't the real Einstein who was in the room, but he had some excellent ideas for solving problems. It occurs to me that all organizations have problems. It's the solutions that set the winners apart.

Somebody smarter than me probably said that, but it seemed original, so I'm going to claim it as my own until somebody can prove I'm a plagiarist. And that thought led me to recall the three times I've been in the same room with "Einstein" (actually Dr. Arden Bercovitz speaking as Einstein). Bercovitz has studied Einstein, who considered himself to be not very bright, but extremely curious. Most people today think of Einstein as a genius and forget about the curiosity.

One of the Einstein quotations Bercovitz uses in his talks is "Problems cannot be solved at the same level of consciousness that created them." It's another way of reminding us to "think outside the box."

He also calls on us to avoid Schlimmbes, his abbreviation for the German word schlimmbesserung, which means "any improvement that makes things worse." As an example, he suggests the foam disposable drinking cup. "They were initially innovative and inexpensive, and turned out to be virtually indestructible. Like gum stuck to the bottom of our shoes, their lifetime environmental impact far outlives their utility."

Bercovitz as Einstein: Establish a "No Schlimmbe" policy across your entire company. Include a specific alert system and a zero-Schlimmbe tolerance. Your objective is simply to cultivate a group consciousness that roots out anything that even hints of a Schlimmbe. A No Schlimmbe focus also helps keep attention on specific results rather than on personal attacks.

Highly trained dogs

Companies that employ trained dogs do not please their customers. Here's an account that I found on a website that illustrates the problem:

"When I moved, I mailed address change notices and about two weeks later, I couldn't log on to my Internet account. I called the ISP and they said, 'You ordered the account shut down.' How could anyone read an address-change letter and interpret it as a request to cancel the account?"

"People couldn't, of course. People may answer the phone at the ISP, but much of the work is apparently done by highly trained dogs. The dogs may not be able to handle something out of the ordinary, but the company saves a lot of money. Dogs depend on their sense of smell and the odor of an address change is very similar to that of a cancellation notice.

"The ISP isn't alone in using highly trained dogs. My bank took two years to change my address and made the change

"I have no particular talent, just inquisitiveness."

– Albert Einstein

only when I wrote to one of the VPs downtown to explain that I was concerned that the bank was having such trouble with basic record keeping. I never heard back, but the address was fixed.

"A friend called customer service at her bank to protest a \$35 credit card late fee. Claiming that the fee was excessive and punitive, she said that it couldn't possibly cost the bank \$35 when her check is a day late. 'Yes it does,' said the person at the bank, 'because of all these people who call protesting the charges – and we have to deal with them.'

"When you encounter trained dogs in positions where people should be working, I recommend that you say 'Woof! Woof!' They won't know what you mean, of course. But you will."

I can vouch for the use of trained dogs

Last year I bought a hard drive from a company in Illinois for my art school student to transport files home from the Columbus College of Art and Design. The drive failed after a few months. When I opened the case, I discovered that the Hitachi drive that should have been inside was made by a far less competent manufacturer. After several complaints to the company that sold the drive, I wrote to the Illinois attorney general, who apparently has trained dogs on the payroll.

Instead of writing to the company that sold the drive, the AG's trained dogs wrote to American Express.

In a follow-up letter to the Illinois AG's trained dogs, I pointed out that the problem I had was not with American Express, but with a company in Chicago. Follow-up responses from the Illinois AG's trained dogs confirmed that dogs were

on the job. But this needlessly disparages dogs, Dogs would probably do a better job. I may have been dealing with idiots.

Whether you're a government bureaucrat or an employee of a company (large or small), it's important to remember that *you* are the organization to your clients. Everyone is in marketing. Everyone is in sales. Everyone is in the public relations department. Everyone. Every time you touch a client, you're representing all of your organization.

What customers expect

Author Ray Jutkins earned enough in Los Angeles to move to Roll, Arizona, 30 miles east of Yuma, at the end of a long dirt road. He ran a consulting business that took him to every continent but Antarctica.

This is an edited version of a longer piece he wrote for marketers. To save your time, I've removed the sections that pertain exclusively to marketers. Ray began by quoting an ad he'd noticed:

.....
Are you waiting for someone to lead and inspire you, for the boss to recognize you, for clients to thank you, for coworkers to help you, for the world to hail you? Well here's a news flash: They are all just sitting there, too, waiting for you. (Minolta advertisement)

Running fast to stay where you are.

Business is moving fast! A short while ago I was in the market for a new laptop. My computer guru had a 30-day-old machine and I wanted one just like his. Too late. Already that model was not available.

Today business runs 24/7. This is strange if you remember the decades of the '60s and '70s when we believed that technology was going to give us more leisure time, not less. The work week would drop to 32 hours, maybe 24. Everyone would have 3-day weekends, if not 4.

Before clocks, we regulated time by the sun and stars. There was a rhythm to life, built around the seasons. Now there is no season. Everything runs together. Time controls us. Cell phones have taken over our lives. Not long ago, we could walk away from the office – turn out the lights, go home, and forget about work. No longer. If home isn't the office, it's probably a second place where you work.

Why? Because your clients expect you to be available no matter where you are, or why.

Commitment is in.

The basic principle of business is that everyone has to become committed and involved – from entry-level in the basement to the oval office on the top floor. It may not be a 2-way street, but customers expect you to be committed to standards, to performance, to service, to quality. In return you may get nothing.

When you give 110%, you will not always get 110% back.

Loyalty is tough to build and tougher to keep. Frequency is easy to promote, yet retention is not necessarily the result. Still, the customer wants you to make a commitment. What should you do? Make the commitment! You have no choice: Do it the way the customer wants and the customer might stick around. Fail to do it the way the customer wants and the customer will go away. This has nothing to do with right or wrong; it has everything to do with dialogue.

Extreme is expected

Customers expect maximum performance, extreme service, and uncommon value. When you add value over and above their expectations, you win. Put the customer first and you are much more likely to stay first yourself. You can't just "get by" any more.

Price is not a value. Surveys routinely show that price is not an issue when extreme value is offered.

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Convenience stores charge high prices, offer mediocre service, and have limited selections. They succeed because they offer the value of convenience. To get ahead, you must provide extreme value.

The customer expects zero defects

Most people would consider 99.9% accuracy to be excellent, and that certainly seems reasonable, but consider an electric utility that provided power 99.9% of the time. Such a utility would leave you without power for 1 minute and 26 second every single day. Would you consider that excellent? Would you consider it to be acceptable?

At a 99.9% level of accuracy ...

- 300 words in an unabridged dictionary would be spelled wrong.
- Publishers would put the wrong dust jacket on 2,240,000 hardcover books every year.
- Every hour, the US Postal Service would incorrectly sort 18,640 pieces of mail.
- At Chicago's O'Hare Airport, two airplanes would crash every day – 730 per year. At just one airport! You don't believe it? O'Hare averages about 80 take-offs and landings every hour. That's about 2000 operations per day and 0.1% of 2000 is 2.

Do it right the first time, every time

Customers expect 100% accuracy. They expect airline pilots to get landings right the first time. They expect surgeons to perform the operation right the first time. They expect payroll to get their check right the first time, and every time.

And they expect each and every one of us to do the job we're being paid to do accurately and on time.

Is this asking too much? I think not. **B**

on the market by A.J. Stinnett

CORNER

"Defining the problem (or issue) is the critical step in making effective decisions."