



Give Customers the Competence they Expect

ONE OF THE FASTEST WAYS TO DRIVE CUSTOMERS AWAY IS TO TREAT THEM WITH INCOMPETENCE. FEW THINGS WORK FASTER TO TURN A CLIENT INTO A FORMER CLIENT, YET IT HAPPENS ALL THE TIME. YOUR CLIENTS WANT EVERYTHING, THEY WANT IT NOW, AND THEY WANT TO HAVE IT DELIVERED.

Years ago, poor service could be forgiven. Or, if not forgiven, at least the customer had little recourse. I remember a man who lived in my hometown and drove a car that had severe collision damage. He had attached a sign to the top of the car complaining about the poor service he had received from his insurance company. At most, a few hundred people might see that sign every week.

Today, he could go online and let tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands know about his problem in just a few seconds.

Extreme is Expected!

TWENTY YEARS AGO, MARKETING GURU RAY JUTKINS OFTEN SAID "EXTREME IS EXPECTED!" BY THIS, HE MEANT THAT CLIENTS EXPECT MAXIMUM PERFORMANCE, OUTSTANDING SERVICE, AND UNCOMMON VALUE.

When you add value, over and above their expectations, you win. "Put the client first and you are much more likely to stay first yourself," Ray said. "You can't just 'get by' any more."

What do we expect? Zero defects, period. Most of us would consider 99.9% to be excellent, but an electric utility that provided power 99.9% of the time would leave you without power for 1 minute and 26 seconds every single day. Would you consider that excellent? Most people wouldn't. We probably wouldn't even consider it to be acceptable!



Ray had done some calculations. At a 99.9% level of accuracy, 300 words in an unabridged dictionary would be spelled wrong; publishers would put the wrong dust jackets on 2,240,000 hardcover books every year; every hour, the US Postal Service would incorrectly deliver 18,640 pieces of mail; and two airplanes would crash every day just at Chicago's O'Hare Airport.

Some of those figures are a bit out of date, but the point is valid: 99.9% isn't really as good as it might seem to be.

The simple solution is to do it right the first time. Every time.

Clients expect 100% accuracy in their orders. They expect airline pilots to get landings right the first time. They expect surgeons to perform

operations right the first time. They expect payroll to get their checks right every time.

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

Bad Response

"BUT WHAT DO MANY COMPANIES RESPOND WITH?" RAY ASKED. "LOWER PRICES. PRICE IS NOT A VALUE."

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

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 need to provide extreme value and this is accomplished by creating useful products or services that people will be willing to buy.

Apple has been remarkably successful with this strategy. The company creates a product that solves a problem few people even knew they had. Apple's products are far more expensive than competing products, but this works for Apple.

The alternative is to create *schlimmbes*. Explaining *schlimmbes* requires some background information about Albert Einstein.

Three times I've been in the same room with "Albert Einstein". The name is in quotation marks because the real Einstein died in 1955, when I was just 8 years old. So it wasn't the real Einstein, but he had some thoughts about solving problems.

“Einstein” is actually Dr. Arden Bercovitz, who speaks in character as Albert Einstein, sharing insights, inspiration, and innovative ways of thinking.

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 a good way of reminding us to be open to new ideas—to *think outside the box*.

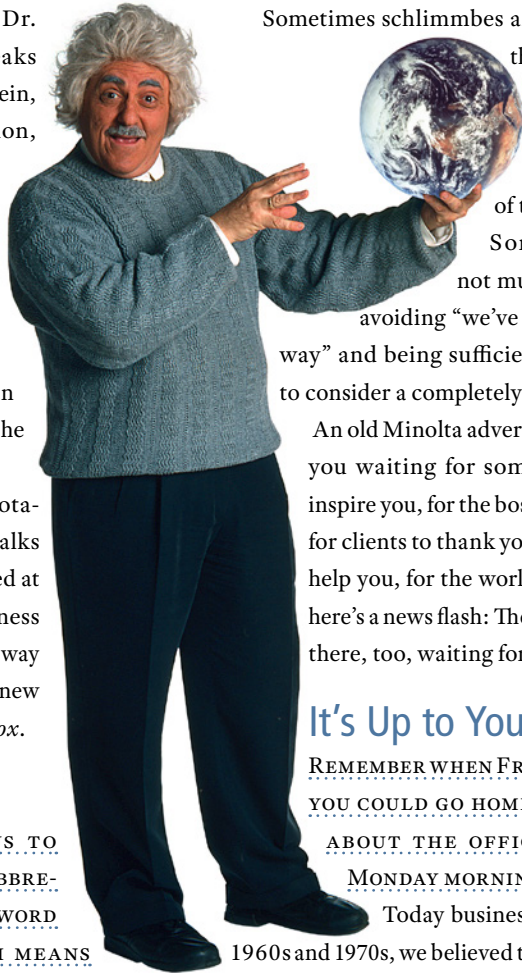
No Schlimmbes

BERCOVITZ CALLS ON US TO AVOID SCHLIMMBES, HIS ABBREVIATION FOR THE GERMAN WORD SCHLIMMBESSERUNG, WHICH MEANS “ANY IMPROVEMENT THAT MAKES THINGS WORSE.”

A suburb near where I live is about to install a roundabout in an intersection that has no business with a roundabout. It’s a high-traffic intersection with minimal available space to expand, so a roundabout is likely to make traffic even worse than it is today. They’re building a pricey schlimmbes.

An example Bercovitz uses to describe a schlimmbes is the foam disposable drinking cup. “They were initially innovative and inexpensive,” he says, but they “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 tells us to establish a *no schlimmbes* policy across our entire organization. Include a specific alert system and a zero-schlimmbes tolerance, he says. The objective is simply to cultivate a group consciousness that roots out anything that even hints of a schlimmbes. A *no schlimmbes* focus also helps keep attention on specific results rather than on personal attacks.



Sometimes schlimmbes are created because those in charge don’t have sufficient time to consider all of the ramifications of their decisions.

Sometimes there’s not much space between avoiding “we’ve always done it this way” and being sufficiently open minded to consider a completely different solution.

An old Minolta advertisement said, “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.”

It’s Up to You

REMEMBER WHEN FRIDAY MEANT THAT YOU COULD GO HOME AND NOT THINK ABOUT THE OFFICE AGAIN UNTIL MONDAY MORNING?

Today business runs 24/7. In the 1960s and 1970s, 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.

Now we’re connected to the office all the time, day or night, weekday or weekend. Holidays and vacation days, too.

The ancients (and those who lived well into the mid 1800s) regulated time by the sun and stars. A rhythm of life was built around the seasons. Now there are no seasons. Everything runs together. Christmas sales begin in October, if not September. Back-to-school clothing ads appear a week or two after school is dismissed for the year.

Time and cell phones have taken over our lives. There’s no chance today of turning out the lights, walking away from the office, going home, and forgetting about work. You may work at home. If not, home is probably also a second location where you work.

And that brings us back to customer expectations. Remember those?

We are so connected because our clients expect us to be available no matter where we are, no matter the time. *Commitment is in.*

Being Committed

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 clients expect us to be committed to standards, to performance, to service, and to quality. In return you may get nothing. But, Ray Jutkins pointed out, if you give less, you certainly will receive nothing in return.

When you give 110%, you will not always get 110% back. Loyalty is tough to build and tougher to keep. Frequency bonuses and loyalty programs are easy for businesses to promote, yet retention is not necessarily the result.

The client wants us to make a *commitment*.

What should we do? Ray was clear on this: “Make the commitment!” There really isn’t a choice. “Do it the way the client wants and the client might stick around. Fail to do it the way the client wants and the client will go away.” This has nothing to do with right or wrong; it has everything to do with dialogue. Ω

Fraud in Your Mailbox?

Recently I received what looked like a check for \$69,750. I shredded it and threw it away. A bit of research let me to an article in Inc magazine.

It’s called a *merchant cash advance* or *credit and receivables financing*, essentially the business equivalent of a payday loan. According to the article, merchants pay at least 25% of the total amount advanced, sometimes much more.

Writers Elizabeth S. Bennett and Nitasha Tiku concluded that this can’t be considered fraud, but quoted researcher Paul Martaus of Martaus & Associates: “The word *unscrupulous* comes up a lot in the business.” Martaus says that some providers advance as much money as possible, regardless of their customers’ capacity for debt.

If you need money desperately, you might get a better deal from the mob. Ω



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