

## FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Customer Service ? Round IX

**By Stephen Somerville**

About six months ago, I wrote about the fact that corporate loyalty programs have been proudly trumpeted by organizations as a great way to recognize and financially reward long term customers.

In that column, I presented two local companies ? one with a façade of a loyalty program and the other one with a real and straight forward program.

I also described a local, positive buying experience that made me happy and exceeded my expectations.

The lady behind the counter who served me at the local Mastermind store that day went above and beyond the call of duty.

I took a chance and asked if they had a box to put the presents in. A minute later she came back with an appropriately sized box.

She then put the wrapped presents into the box, put some wrapping paper (that she had turned inside out) around the box to make it look better and then proceeded to encase the box in lots of transparent tape so all that I needed to do now was put an address on the package and pay for postage.

This lady's effort saved me a bunch of time, effort and maybe a couple of dollars.

Let us compare and contrast this with my buying experience last week.

My hockey helmet and full face shield visor are over twenty years old; the rivets on my helmet are starting to come out and there are a lot of scratches on the face shield, so it is time to purchase a new set.

I was seeking a store with a huge selection, and as I had been in a large hockey store at the Vaughan Mills Mall before Christmas and they seemed to fit the bill.

I drove down there.

The store did have an array of helmets; various makes, models and colors.

I tried a couple on. I then searched for a full face shield visor.

There were many half shield visors available but the only full visor was a ?small?.

I asked one of the store employees to help me.

The employee took a quick look in their stock room and said that they did not have any. I asked if he could order me one.

I was dumfounded when he said that they do not take orders and they could not call me when one would arrive at the store. I was even more shocked when I asked for a suggestion of another store. He did not have one.

I then drove up to Upper Canada and entered a sport store within the mall. Same thing.

At least the store clerk who assisted me said that he was sorry that he could not help me, and kindly suggested that I go to National Sports.

Again, the store was out of the full face shield visors that I was seeking, but the clerk checked his computer system and said that a bunch would be coming in shortly. I asked him if they could notify me when one came in and he put my information into the computer.

His colleague ? having heard our conversation and the fact that I have been going across York region in search of a visor, said that he had just purchased the same visor recently at Canadian Tire in Uxbridge, where he lives and he suggested that if I needed the visor right away I go the Canadian Tire in Aurora.

It was a Sunday evening and the Canadian Tire had just closed.

I will head back to the National Sports when my item comes in.

The moral of my story is this: No store will always have 100% of what a potential customer is looking for. However, a customer's happiness and whether he or she is going to come back depends on how you deal with them in these situations.

Having a nice, colorful store chock full of merchandise is absolutely no substitute for training or having a strategy to deal with situations when an item is not available.

Shoppers, like me, have a long memory.

Remember, a happy customer means a customer that will be coming back.

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