

## FRONT PORCH PERSPECTIVE: Customer Service VII

By Stephen Somerville

Back in March 2012, I again wrote about a subject that had been of increasing concern to me ? the lack of adequate customer service in our society.

That column certainly struck a chord with a number of readers judging by the amount of e-mails and letters that I received. Although it has been over two years since I last wrote about this topic, recent international and local experiences have compelled me to do so again.

Corporate loyalty programs are proudly trumpeted by organizations as a great way to recognize and financially reward long term customers.

You might ask, ?What does this actually have to do with customer service??

I include loyalty programs as part of the entire ?buying experience? which includes how I am treated in the store, what happens when I have a problem with the product or service and what will draw me back to potentially purchase that good or service again. In my view, there are some organizations that, based on the dollar value size of the purchase by customers, should have some type of loyalty program in place.

A good example is Disney.

At certain times of the year they do offer Free Dining Plans for those who come and stay at one of their resorts at either DisneyWorld in Florida or at DisneyLand in California.

However, these programs are offered to any one time purchaser.

Disney also offers a Vacation Club Program that allows people to purchase time that can be used at a number of their resorts.

I am thinking about a program for those people, like my family, who travel to their resorts a few times. Disney should be offering some discount or other incentive based on the number of times and the amount of money that has been spent over the last few years. As they are a very well run and highly profitable company, I am surprised that Disney does not have any such loyalty program. Maybe their research has shown that they do not need it.

I now present two local companies ? one with a façade of a loyalty program and one with a real and straight forward program.

A certain retailer in town of golf equipment has what is known as a ?Leaders Board?. Every time that I purchase something in the store the cashier asks for my phone number to input this information into their system and also asks if I am a member of this club. I faithfully say ?yes? that I am a member of the ?Leaders Board? and provide my phone number.

I don't get any discounts off my purchases but I do receive ? via e-mail ? their flyer showing new sales.

The last couple of times in the store when I have been purchasing something I have asked that cashier to pass on some information to their management.

I tell her that my family and I have purchased a lot in the store over the last couple of years ? clubs and bags for all of us ? and you continually ask us for our phone number but we have not received any discount for being members of this club.

On the opposite side of the coin is Omar's Shoes in the south part of Aurora. We have been purchasing shoes for our son here for years as we really like their selection and their customer service.

Their loyalty program is a simple one. You have a card and every time you buy something they sign it. On your tenth purchase you receive a ?free? pair of shoes. (They take the average price of your previous nine purchases, so you will most likely not get the shoes for free, but the cost will be, in most cases, very minimal.)

Julie and I very much appreciate this program.

What would be even better is if they had this information stored on their system and when we came in for our tenth purchase, they would be the ones to tell us that the shoes were ?free?!

Please remember, a happy customer means a customer that will be coming back.

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