



Editors Corner

**Clichés
Sometimes
hit their
mark!**

"Do as I say, not as I do."
"You reap what you sow."
"Promises made are promises kept."
"A man is only as good as his word." and on and on

Whether it be in our personal lives or our Chamber lives (is there a difference?) I am seeing more and more instances of reluctance to adhere to the basics of the "golden rule", especially when it applies to good customer service. As the voice and the face of the business community, Chambers above all, should set good examples.

Sometimes we get so concerned (a.k.a. panicked) while reviewing our membership numbers and the monthly financials, that falling into the "do anything to get these figures up" syndrome prevails. The "next year high drop out" problem is ignored in lieu of the "quick fix".

Businesses should not join their local Chamber of Commerce...they should buy into it...invest in themselves and in their community. The return on their investment is the Chamber delivering both tangible benefits (networking, advertising, referrals, seminars etc.) and intangible benefits (advocacy, economic development, quality of life etc.). No matter how large the staff is, it is impossible for *them* to fully meet the needs of all of its members. However, when current members "sponsor" new members and take them under their wing - it's a win win situation - if they do it.

A highly motivated, charged volunteer enthralled by the costumes, challenges, dares and other fun aspects of a high motivation telemarketing membership event can do wonders for your numbers and your budget. However, will those members renew? Do they know what they bought and how to use it? Even if they do, is it practical to think that the volunteer who sold multitudes of new members will nurture them? Or will be up to the *staff alone* to meet all their needs (a.k.a., provide the level of customer service necessary so they renew next year)?

My philosophy on retention is pretty basic: sell them right to begin with, have a current member sponsor and mentor them, and maintain or enhance the programs so the Chamber product remains of high value.

So back to the clichés....

If we as Chambers are to be of most value, we must consistently provide value to an educated consumer. That's alot harder than once a year adding a couple of hundred new members to fix the problems left when the hundreds brought in last year, don't renew. Isn't there a point of no return in the playing out of this scenario? And what happened to good customer service?

Air Travel Warning

Do you know many people who fly around as much as I do? Well, even old dogs can learn new tricks...when forced to! And I pass it on to you as a warning so others don't fall into the same trap and also as an example of sticking to the letter of the law may be allowed, but it sure illustrates bad customer service (result: short term increase in revenue = long term loss of much more!)

Everyone knows airline tickets are a fraction of the cost if you stay over a Saturday night. In an effort to save Goodlettsville, TN a chunk of money (remember, my middle name is Cheap) I combined the trip I was making to conduct the workshop "Growing Your Business Through Chamber Membership" on January 14 with the air tickets for their Community Awareness Week of January 27-31. The largest airline in the world, you know, the one based at Dallas Ft. Worth airport whose name starts the alphabet, flew me in on the morning of January 14, refused me passage on the return that afternoon and confiscated my tickets for 1/27-1/31. So, I was forced to buy a horribly expensive one way back to Dallas ticket and a new round trip for the upcoming week.

Were they right? By the letter of the law, yes. There is a very long document they publish "Conditions of Carriage" that if you look real hard and have plenty of time, you will find a statement stating that they prohibit "Back to Back Ticketing". (If you buy tickets on the Internet, as I did, there is no way to know there is anything wrong.) So they kept both of my \$257 tickets. I purchased new tickets, but NOT on them.

So here's the lessons learned:

Just because you buy something in good faith, it may not be what it appears to be

Short-term gain may very well lead to long-term loss (kind of like the article above mentions). Not only did they lose me (and everyone I know) as a customer, but also won't you think twice from now on when you purchase tickets?

Quotes of the Month

"Work is a slice of your life - it's not the whole pizza."

"Just when I was getting used to yesterday, along came today."

"Sometimes I think I understand everything, then I regain consciousness"

Retention: "Member Contact Program"

I have been told about several Chambers that have instituted an excellent plan that has provided multi-positive results: increased retention, membership survey completion, and a lot of "bonding" (between member, board member, and staff president). We all know how hard it is to get volunteers, especially board members, to give of their time, but at the next board meeting when they are in an uproar about retention, suggest this program. The two-faceted program involves:

- Each Board member selects 6-10 members to mentor (hand deliver directories, call to invite to Chamber events, etc.).
- Board members identify a morning or an afternoon that they can set aside to visit those on their list, with the Chamber staff president. (All visits are done in a two month time frame with one third of total membership visited).
- During the maximum 25 minute visit, the Board member and president discuss survey questions listed on a small 3" x 5" card and the president leaves the room prior to the last question. This allows the member to express opinions they might feel uncomfortable discussing in front of a Chamber employee.
- Upon visit completion, Board members add any additional information or insight and send the survey cards to the Chamber office for compilation and summary. The results are then reviewed at the annual board goal setting.

Short Survey Questions:

Why are you a member...most important benefits of being a member?

Is the Chamber meeting your expectations?

What are the two most important things the Chamber provides or does?

Rate your level of involvement in Chamber activities/programs.

If there were one concern you could bring to the Chamber Board's attention, what would it be?



I want to thank you, Lord, for being close to me so far this day. With your help, I haven't been impatient, lost my temper, grumpy, judgmental, or envious of anyone. But, I will be getting out of bed in a minute, and I think I'll really need your help then.

Amen

Unique Event & Membership Benefit

Betsy Sherman-Saunders, Greater Fulton, NY Chamber (population 12,000 on the outskirts of metropolitan Syracuse with 450 members and 3 staff) created a very successful event: Media & Promotion Auction. It allowed members to discover new ways to advertise and promote their business while building relationships within their county as well as with the "big city" media in the nearby city. Over \$12,000 in services, donated to the Chamber, were up for bid (radio/television/outdoor/newspaper/internet advertising, printing/web design, public relations/marketing, etc.) with packages ranging in values of \$50 to \$500. Held as a fun evening of entertainment, & food it provided a great service to members and was a successful fund raiser for the Chamber.

Check out our website: www.chamberdevelopment.com