

PERSONNEL CORNER

Is the customer always right?

By VINCE ALFONSO

This question has plagued retailers and service providers since B.C. was a baby. The following story begs the question. Read it, then you decide.

Please write me and let me know your thoughts.

My assistant's frazzled voice burst over my intercom, "Vince, could you come here? I've got a customer who is really upset and I don't know what to do next. I've done everything I know how to do and he's still mad."

If I haven't learned anything else in my 40 years in business, I've learned that when employees ask for help, give it to 'em.

My office at The Rail was in a little red brick building 20 steps from the clubhouse. As I hustled to the counter from my desk, I prayed for wisdom. Something told me I was going to need it.

After consulting with my assistant for a moment, I got the picture. The customer had bolted into the shop, threw money at my assistant and told him to hurry up and sell him an 18-hole greens fee. He said he was going to join the twosome going down No. 1. My assistant politely explained the course was full and he had just sent that twosome off to join the previous twosome, so it wouldn't play so slow for either of them. He further explained he had a spot for him in 16 minutes with a threesome.

The guy would have none of it. He wanted to play and he wanted to play now, not in 16 minutes. He added if he was not allowed to play, instantly, he was going to leave and never come back.

I knew immediately I wasn't going to need just wisdom, but massive quantities of wisdom, to handle this situation. So, I took the gentleman aside so he could tell me his story. It didn't take long to learn this man had no story to tell. He simply leveled the same ultimatum on me that he had leveled on my assistant.

"Either I play now or I will leave and never grace your 1st tee again!!" he shouted.

As I pondered what to say, I remembered how Jesus handled tough situations. Jesus always seemed to answer a question or ultimatum with a question. Therefore, I said, "Sir, should a customer get angry with a salesperson in an appliance store who tells the customer he can't sell him the three-piece worsted wool suit he has just asked to buy?"

He didn't appear too happy as he said, "What the #@?! has that

got to do with my request? I asked to play golf, not buy a three-piece worsted wool suit!"

Obviously, I was going to have to interpret.

"Sir, the point is this: The customer I referred to in my example was trying to buy a product the establishment did not sell. Appli-

ance stores don't sell worsted wool suits. You have asked The Rail to sell you instant golf. We don't sell instant golf. We sell golf tee times for twosomes, threesomes and foursomes. We sell golf for singles by placing them in the next available opening.

"We would have been glad to sell you a spot with a twosome who was going to have to play behind a course full of foursomes. But that was not the case.

We had just helped out that twosome by sending them to join another twosome.

"Sir, I did not have the product you were requesting. It's that simple. Don't be angry with me. If we sold instant golf my assistant would have been glad to sell it to you. By now the threesome my assistant was going to place you with is about to be called to the front counter. Won't you please join them and have some fun? Life's too short

for all this heartache."

The man said, and I quote, "If you don't let me play right now, I am going to get in my car and leave, and never come back."

"Sir," I said, "then I guess you will have to leave and never come back, because we have never and will never sell instant golf."

The man left in a huff.

Moral: The customer is not always right.

Right?



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