

Berd Cage for October 13, 2009

Do Your Employees Value Customers?

As we approach Christmas shopping time once again, I was feeling compelled to write my blurb about shopping locally to keep our community economy going. That was until I started hearing and reading all kinds of complaints about the local business's lack of service.

I shop locally as much as possible, especially when it comes to bigger ticket items that may require servicing and warranty work down the road. I made the mistake of buying a VCR from a big-box store in Red Deer nineteen years ago and had to return it five times in the first year. By the fifth trip back to that store, I was finally able to convince their repair person that this particular VCR was a dud and could I use the "satisfaction guaranteed" card and exchange it. I was told that since that VCR was almost a year old, they would allow me the price of depreciation only towards a new unit. It was a pretty useless warranty. I will never buy another thing from that store, no matter how inexpensive it may be.

I have never received verbal abuse at a local store, but I have been ignored. There are businesses in this town where you can stand at their counter for more than three minutes before you receive a simple acknowledgement. All I require is a simple nod or wave to let me know that you have seen me waiting and you will be able to assist me momentarily. If I'm not worth an acknowledgement, I'm surely not worth your valuable time.

When I looked up "customer service" on the internet, I read on one site that 82% of people who take their business elsewhere do so because of customer service issues. A US News and World Report study found that 68% of customers who stop buying from one business and go to another do so because of poor or indifferent service. 14% leave because of an unsatisfactorily resolved dispute or complaint. Only 9% go elsewhere because of price, so we had better make sure our employees are providing excellent customer service all the time.

Employers need to pay attention as to whether their employees are people-loving employees. It costs you, the employer, four to five times more to obtain a new customer than it does to retain an existing customer.

The local Chamber of Commerce addressed the issue of customer service at their monthly luncheon meeting last week and you will find more written about their discussions elsewhere in this edition.

One thing we as consumers should be doing is letting employers know when we have been treated badly by one of their employees or when we have received exemplary service from their employee. Any business owner concerned about the bottom line is sure to be interested in knowing which employees are worth keeping.

Bernadine Visotto is a Mountaineer columnist who is loyal to businesses that provide good customer service.