

“Life Mirrors Training Lessons”

I spent last week training a client to distinguish actions that produce customer dissatisfaction, satisfaction, and delight. A little smack of reality and some poor and great treatment can bring those theoretical comparisons to vivid life.

In the middle of my lecture, my year old laptop (whose brand name we'll call ABC to disguise the guilty) powered down while I was showing some PowerPoint slides. While my brain thought, “Oh #*#”, my gut heaved. The retching stomach memory muscle immediately harkened back to the previous summer when I was in Asia for 7 weeks, jaunting from country to country spreading the “Customer First” word. The journey began in Hong Kong and my then 5-day new laptop screen died and emitted death-throw gasps. What luck, I thought that this should occur in the actual country where my computer was manufactured. But the next moment those hopes were dashed when I heard these phone responses from ABC's local support team:

- “Where's your international laptop passport because without that we can't help you?”. (What's an international laptop passport? I had my receipt and I was registered on line as an owner, but that wasn't good enough for the Hong Kong team.)

- “It's Sunday so you'll have to wait anyway. We only have a skeleton staff on duty to serve people.” (Why do they call it “serve” it they say ‘no’ and hang up on you?)

Ah, well, Penang, Malaysia was the next stop on my itinerary. Surely they could help me there since I had 5 days to have a diagnosis and a fix in place. Struggling through language difficulties I finally tracked down their repair location. The result of this interaction:

- “.....international laptop passport?” (That mysterious thing again that nobody told me about in Toronto.)
- “It's your motherboard but we can't fix it. It's a different part from our Asian-made products.”
- “Maybe our Singapore office can help you. No, we can't tell you where it is located, but I'm sure they have a yellow pages. No, we

can't send them a message about your laptop. Sorry.”

My interim mini-salvation? The 1-gig thumb drive I had my powerpoint slides saved on. The trek to Singapore was less hopeful, and justifiably so. When I finally found the ABC repair location (and no, it wasn't easily found in the yellow pages), I was becoming hypnotized by the mantra of:

- “No, we can't fix it. No, we can't lend you a loaner. No, we can't send it back to North America. No, we can't find about the international laptop passport if you don't have it. No, no, no, no, no.....”
- “The Taiwan office might have been able to help you, but the country is shut down for the next few days because of a typhoon.” (Even Mother Nature was conspiring with Evil Technology!)

A “help call” to my computer guru back in Toronto, Chris Jones, saved my sanity. He said to ship it back (which I did for \$100), and he would run interference with the Mississauga office so that repairs could be made. Four days later, he called me back. The laptop was working but it was in Mississauga. Would the North American ABC people ship it back to me now that I was in Thailand? Their local office response:

- “No...policy says we can only ship it within North America, so we can ship it to your office address in Markham.” (Not very helpful when I'm still 12 time zones away working.)
- “Don't worry about the international laptop passport number; it doesn't mean anything.” (Oh yes it does...why don't you square your story with your colleagues in Asia?)
- “We have three divisions, North America, Asia and Europe, and we operate with different systems. If your computer broke down in Vancouver, we might have been able to fix it.” (I guess it's the fault of my client who sent me to a part of the world where “computer company collaboration” is a foreign phrase.)
- And, ironically, their parting response, “Thanks for calling. Anything else we can help you with?”

The saving grace from this deja-vu from hell: Chris Jones, my computer guy. He gallantly offered to take the shipping hit personally for something that was not his fault (on an assignment that was netting him zero dollars profit before the shipping loss). However, fearing incompetent courier service and language difficulties, I bravely declined his offer. I had also gotten used to traveling unencumbered by the laptop weight. What stayed in my gut and heart was his offer to help me through my problem when nobody else seemed to care.

Fast forward to last week's laptop malfunction. These memories resurfaced when my computer crashed, just a couple of weeks after the one-year warranty expired. (Now the God of Legal was also laughing at me.) Another voice mail cry for help to Jones resulted in continued excellent service. His voice reply to me: “Cheryl, don't worry. I know how important this seminar is and what you went through last year. I will come to your home tonight at 8 pm. I will get it fixed and if I can't, I'll lend you my laptop. We will load it with your program and you'll be in great shape for tomorrow's session. It will be taken care of. I will contact ABC and we will not allow the just-passed expiry date to be an issue. Breathe deeply and relax.”

My classes ask me if I wrote a complaint letter to the ABC Company. I plead guilty to not making a fuss, like the statistical 96% of other unhappy customers who don't bother to complain. Why didn't I? Busy...resigned that it wouldn't make a difference...afraid I'd open myself up to more abuse. As a customer-focus specialist, I should have complained. But as a tired, beaten down customer, I didn't bother. How do I get any satisfaction? By knowing that 1000 seminar participants will never buy an ABC laptop either.

And then there's Jones. While I choose not to reveal the guilty for fear of legal hassles, I'm delighted to promote excellence. His name is Chris Jones, his company is Bricker Consulting, his phone number is (416) 629-8887, and if you hire him, he'll treat you as well as he does me.