

I WISH
SOMEONE
WOULD HAVE
TOLD ME!

A Trip Along Life's
Highways As Told By
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CHAPTER FOUR

MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE WORKPLACE (HOW DO I KNOW THAT WHAT I DO MATTERS?)

If you want to do more than put in your time, you need to leave the world of work each day feeling a sense of accomplishment, knowing that it was important for you to have been there, and aware that your work has made a difference. Here are some rules from the coach to help you make that happen. My seven areas to think about in your day-to-day work station:

- Customer service
- Develop and refine skills
- Give more
- Be accountable
- Set goals
- Be true to your word
- Have fun!

SERVE THE CUSTOMER

My favorite story about customer service is about a family-owned appliance store in Grand Haven, Michigan. Carol and I, at the time, were at our home in Michigan and our dishwasher died. A crisis. Off to Sears we went. We got a quote for a Whirlpool dishwasher at Sears for \$500.

"When can you deliver it?"

"Three weeks - that's the earliest."

Carol was distraught - three weeks without a dishwasher! We left Sears and headed to Bekins Appliances in Grand Haven. Bekins quoted \$525 for the same dishwasher. Now, if you knew me, you would know that the \$25 price difference is a problem.

"When can you deliver it?"

"Tomorrow."

The man came out the next day with the dishwasher. He took his shoes off at the door, installed the machine and said, "Mrs. Bolger, can you hear how quiet that is? You could hardly hear it, and he smiled and said, "You bought one of the best machines we have. Good job, Mrs. Bolger." He left the house, but about two minutes later, the doorbell rang and he stood on our porch with a rose. "Thank you, Mrs. Bolger for shopping at Bekins. You are one of our valued customers." Mrs. Bolger has a boyfriend. I can see it coming!

So . . . eating dinner a week later, we got a call . . . another boyfriend. This time it is Harvey Bekins, the owner of the store. "Mrs. Bolger?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. Thank you for shopping at Bekins. If you have a problem, you call me. Here's my home phone number. Here's my business phone number. If you have a problem, I will come to fix it myself. I'm the service manager. By the way, we really appreciate your business."

Two years later, we were ready to remodel our Michigan home. We needed a stove, oven, microwave, and refrigerator. You know, Bekins was still \$25 higher in price for each appliance we needed, and knowing how I like to save a dollar, I said to Carol, "Let's go to Sears." I bet you know what her response was! We shopped at Bekins. We paid the \$25 higher per unit price. Why did we go to them? Because we liked the way we were treated there. In the consumer credit business, our product was money. It was the same product offered by banks and credit unions but the cost to the customer for borrowing our money was higher than theirs. But people came to us and came back again and again because of the way they were treated. We treated our cus-

tomers just as Bekins treated us!

There are a lot of platitudes out there about the importance of the customer: "The customer is king" and "The customer is always right" are a couple of them. But, in the daily operation of our businesses today, the customer is sometimes treated like an unwelcomed interruption.

One of the main ways in which this is evident is in the way our phones are answered. *When I first began at Household Finance, we were required to answer the telephone on the first ring. Why? Because there was probably a customer on the other end and whatever we could do for that customer was more important than anything we were working on at our desks. Answering on the first ring communicated to the customers that they were important and that we were eager to respond to their requests, their inquiries, or even their complaints.*

What happens with corporate telephones today? If you call any major national company, you will probably be treated to several minutes of recorded messages instructing you what number to punch next. As a customer, how does that make you feel? If you do not have "inside information" such as a direct line or an extension number to a particular person, you are not important. In fact, it appears that the company would rather you not call at all. Have you ever been frustrated by such a system?

I remember one occasion when I called a national airline for reservations and decided that, while I was waiting, I would watch the hockey game with my speaker phone on just to see how long it would take me to get through to a real human being. The message kept coming back, "We're sorry. You are a valued customer, but we can't come to the phone right now. All of our agents are busy." It was 45 minutes of hearing and re-hearing about what a valued customer I was before I actually was able to talk to a person! Now, this same airline is going to the govern-