

## Little Stuff Means Big Differences

Three cheers to the person who invented the sensor that allows a girl to sneak a cup from the coffee pot during the brew cycle: someone knew it would be a great feature for us A-types. Same kudos for the brainchildren of Spell Check, automatic car windows and the words “thank you.” Yep, these are little things, but they make wonderful differences—so much so, that consumers base their buying decisions on benefits like these. So why not take a page from the book of successful manufacturers and marketers by making the Little Stuff be a Big Priority at the office?

### Five Important Questions

What annoys your customers? What would make your clients’ lives easier when they are using what you’ve sold to them? Are you a customer of your own company? If not, why not? Wouldn’t it be interesting to know why your own colleagues prefer the products or services of a competitor instead of your own organization?

### Five Important Answers

You should want to know the impediments to using what you peddle. Is it price? Convenience? Ease of operability? Service? The “Hassle Factor”? (The Hassle Factor is what we use to label a reason that steers a person to buy from a competitor—the return policy at Costco is a great example: it is so much easier to return something there than Target, Best Buy, etc.) Another example of the Hassle Factor is technical support. We, for instance, will not buy hardware, software or telephony from companies that have hard-to-find answers on their websites or that have ridiculously long wait times in their support centers. And while we appreciate the fact we don’t have to pay the long distance charges to talk to someone in India (they are often more polite, as a rule, than stateside service reps), it

sometimes takes so much time that we darn near could have made the trip.

We encourage the practice of calling your own stores, branches, plants, call centers, et al, and posing as a person who would rightfully be in need of whatever they provide. There is a lot to be learned here!

But there are other effective ways to hear the voices of your clients before they become so frustrated that they send complaint letters:

1. **Exit Polls.** These can be small post-visit question cards or 2-minute “debriefs” that can be done by any employee. If the experience occurred online or by phone, it can be a part of the shopping/checkout process. The “How are We Doing” brochures and half sheets that litter desks and windows of service people are a little too company-oriented, we think, than customer-driven. How about asking clients if they use a competitor and if so, what they like about their experience there? We have other suggestions for this as well, but you’ll have to call us. Not recommended: a survey that asks about your experience that restricts what you can say. We recently received an online survey from the hotel in which we held our May Leadership conference—not ONE question addressed what *we* would have liked to express!
2. **Focus groups.** These are highly insightful if well organized and run by a skilled and impartial third party. It is important not to *lead* the group but to *facilitate*. Avoid asking questions in a way that makes the participants feel as if there is only one “right” answer. Too, simple observation can reveal telling answers. In his book *Rules for Revolutionaries*, author and business guru Guy Kawasaki cites a powerful example which he entitles *Don’t Ask, Just Watch*: “When Philips Consumer Electronics was developing a portable radio-cassette player for teenagers, called MovingSound, the company conducted focus groups with potential young customers. The players were designed in bright yellow and classic black. During the focus groups, the overwhelming majority said they would prefer the yellow color. After-



ward, Philips thanked the participants by giving them a free MovingSound player. A pile of yellow players and a pile of black players were placed outside the room. Most of the teenagers chose a black player.”

3. **Employee Feedback.** No, not a survey that asks how staff feels about the company, but a new kind of quality assessment—informal but well-planned gatherings wherein small groups are asked to use whatever it is you produce or sell. Nothing beats hands-on experience. You may also want to consider asking employees to observe customer behaviors when using your products or services to report back what seems to be troublesome and what works well.

It *is* the little stuff that makes big differences in a customer’s experience. Look for it and learn from it—and make adjustments. Then watch your clients become goodwill ambassadors of your company. Is this a great way to advertise or what?

### In This Issue...

#### Page Two

- *Blind Interviews*
- *BIG DESK, Little Cube - Contractors and Vendors*

#### Page Three

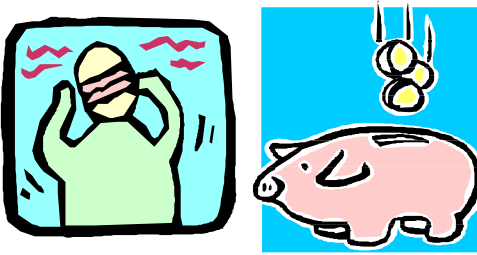
- *Light Touches—Internal Service*
- *pArticle Piques—Bad Ads*
- *Warm Tips—It Starts in the Mirror*

#### Page Four

- *Insider Insights—Leadership Conference Results; Plagiarism*
- *Beacon Bits*
- *Last Laughs— Sign Language*

Written by Leslie Charlesworth  
Edited by Denise Dollard





## Save Your Company's Bacon with a Blind Interview

We got to talking the other day about a common condition in large companies: bad hires made of good intentions. Here's what happens: the interviewer is often so reliant upon his or her visual impressions of a person's qualifications that they fail to really hear what is being said, or to pay attention to that little instinct that is signaling something amiss. C'mon, admit it: The snappy dresser with the smooth lines and ready smile is just what is needed for the company image. The pedigree is there, and s/he seems to have the basic skills for the job. What's not to like? Well, you'll soon find out.

We are not asserting that attractive or polished people are not good hires. Nor do we suggest snatching up the first vagabond you

happen across. Rather, we think that a little credence needs to be given to another sense: hearing.

Imagine how objective your hiring decisions would be if initial interviews were conducted blindly? No, not with a scarf over your eyes, but in a way that forces one's focus on the quality of the answers given and questions posed by the applicant.

Our theory is that better and more objective decisions can be made if you have to rely more on what you hear than what you see. Here's a test: for your next job opening, do phone interviews with your candidate pool. Let someone else do the face-to-face interviews. Each of you ask the same questions, and then compare notes. We are willing to bet that the feelings that are telegraphed from listening to

responses via phone will be more revealing because there was no visual stimuli to divert your attention. The "hearing" interviewer will have developed stronger impressions about communication style, preferences, customer orientation, etc. This is especially important if your candidate will have responsibilities that involve interaction with staff and customers by phone.

Optimally, although conceptually a bit radical, voice synthesized blind interviews could be interesting. How much fairer could a selection process be? It boils down to the words used by the prospective employee and nothing else. An alternative that we think may be more palatable (we have suggested this in the past), is to ask applicants to submit, in writing and in real time, answers to several provocative questions. This too, will tell you the thought processes of your applicant without distracting you with the fluff.

\* \* \* \* \*

## BIG DESK / LITTLE CUBE:

*(a look at the varied perspectives of managers and employees)*

### Contractors: Lower than a Cockroach?

Okay, darn it, we have to go on record here with an appeal to everyone's sense of honor and respect. It is not easy being a non-employee, but NOT because we have a rapid learning curve and don't immediately know who and where the resources are. No, it's just a few people inside that make it difficult.

The truth is that outside people are brought in for one of only two reasons: there aren't any people available to do what is needed and/or there isn't anyone with the skills to do it. So why is it okay to ignore a phone message or email from an outside party? Is it because they have no recourse?

We are not griping here out of any sense of

personal affront—we are used to the different level of regard we are accorded—it's a way of life. But it does cost our clients more money, and does adversely affect the reputations of insiders when vendors are treated as less important than employees.

When contractors have to make repeated requests for information or assistance, they are wasting time for which clients pay. When an individual chooses to ignore a vendor's issue, the vendor has two choices: let the deadline slide or try another avenue. Appeals for help to other parties invariably reveal the fact that the first source dropped the ball.

#### BIG DESK PEOPLE

Chances are that you made the decision to bring in outside help. This being the case, don't you think a word or two of introduction and explanation would go a long way toward generating cooperation and collegiality?

We agree that once you have decided to hire the vendor that you don't have to manage him or her—s/he should be self sufficient. However, there are times when your input is needed for a decision or strategy.

#### Little Cube Inhabitants

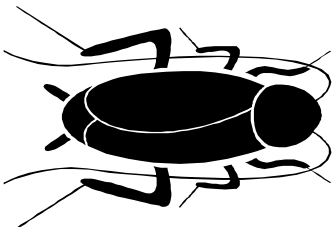
We certainly know that you have enough to do without having to stop everything to spend time on a task that a vendor needs. The truth of the matter is this: your boss, boss's boss or someone with a big title decided that the vendor's presence is important.

Here's another way to look at it: vendors are your friends. They have contacts, techniques and resources outside of your world and can give you information you might find very valuable. They commend greatness that they see and tell bosses who goes out of his or her way to help. Vendors are VERY cautious about offering criticism, but freely supply praise when it is earned. So if they're not saying anything about you, it *could* be a bad thing.

Our policy is to treat all people as equal people. This includes gardeners, waitresses, guards, and mucky mucks. We don't *have* to be like this, but it sure is a lot nicer and more fun.

We have been extremely fortunate to work with people who actually treat us like we are part of the company for the time we are in it—seldom are we ignored or disrespected. But there are occasional blips in the norm, and then we fall into the "Lower than a Cockroach" category: you see, cockroaches always get immediate attention—even if it is someone running behind them with a can of Raid.

\* \* \* \* \*



# Light Touches

Service Extras That Linger Long After the Experience

In a different perspective of service, we would like to recognize employees who do great things within firms for which we have worked. You've all heard about internal service or the "internal client" - someone inside the company who relies on another employee's work/assistance to get the job done. The following people are greatly diverse in talent, industry and personality, but all share one wonderful quality: they hold themselves to high standards and are responsive to client needs, whether or not the client is a co-worker, customer or a vendor. These individuals went above and beyond their normal workload to help not just us, but others within the organization. They are consistent in this, and while perhaps groaning inwardly, ALWAYS deliver promptly and willingly. We salute these extraordinary performers who recognize the importance of service to all people and return all calls:

#### AMGEN:

Lory Munoz  
Kathy Palmer

#### City National Bank:

John Robinson  
Joe Flueckiger  
Brad Richardson  
Sue Guzetta  
Emily Wunderlich

#### Nestle USA

Cynthia Nelson  
Marsha Gonzalez  
Lee Turner  
Martha Wiedermann  
Valentina Mirzakhanyan

Thank you for your outstanding service and support—you deliver greatness!

\* \* \* \* \*

## pArticle Piques

Irrksome iotas of service that cost : **Bad Ads**

To our way of thinking, annoying television commercials are a reason to steer clear of the company that pummels you with them. For one reason, we don't want them to think we are stupid. To buy from a company that either insults our intelligence or that believes that wearing us down with frequently-aired jingles and tag lines that irritate would be succumbing to the visual and audio torture they dole out. It just might encourage them to spawn even more drivel and insults. Yet it must be an effective practice, because they continue unabated. The squeaky wheel syndrome? Does patronage occur because people believe that these companies are successful and have the money to litter the airways with ridiculous assertions and antics?

Thank goodness for DVRs (digital video recorders, like TiVo®) that have fast forward buttons. Even if you don't have one of these marvels of viewing efficiency, you do have a remote and can change the channel when the offending commercial airs, if you are of the same mindset as us.

Here in Southern California, there are some particularly aggravating ads that get our danders up. One is by a mattress seller who promises that if another competitor's price for the same thing is less, he'll give it to you FREEEEEEEEEEEE! What is not revealed is that this place doesn't carry the same model numbers as competitors, so they price themselves higher while promising they are the best deal in town.

Then there's the retailer of used and reconditioned electronics that screams in a heavily accented voice and throws TVs from rooftops. He brags about being crazy (no doubt there) and touts bargain prices—yet never mentions that his wares are second-hand.

And what was the thinking behind the has-been, sleaze ball actor who targets down-on-their-luck people for an uncollateralized loan between \$2600 and \$10,000 dollars? Well, check out the interest rates—loan sharks are cheaper.

Don't fall prey to ads because they promise something. They may be hiding something.

\* \* \* \* \*



## Warm Tips

*Reheating some old principles to succeed in new times*

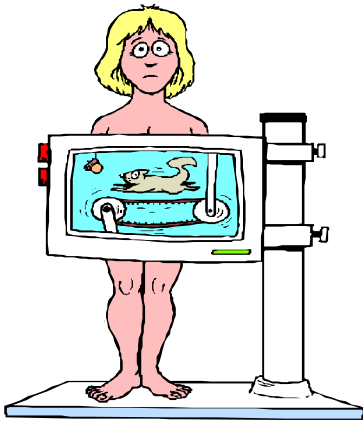
### It Starts in the Mirror

Desperation is surely a lonely and fearful place. It is with heavy hearts that we bore witness to the horrible fate that has befallen the Gulf Coast of our great nation. We are fortunate that we were viewers and not victims of Hurricane Katrina. But that does not let us off the hook: being lucky does not mean being complacent.

The people of The South were initially bereft of more than food and shelter—they were isolated from communication. And in one sense, that might have been a blessing: they were not a party to media coverage that focused largely on the destruction and the politics.

While there is much rightful ado about who didn't act quickly or appropriately enough, we wonder why people were sitting around waiting for someone else to give the order to do something that was blaringly obvious. Is our nation so reluctant with initiative and so fearful of the repercussion of making a decision that inertia is the preferred action? We agree that when something is wrong, the guy at the top should shoulder the ultimate responsibility (as Denise likes to say, "Fish stinks from the head"). But does that really excuse everyone else from doing something? If a leader fails, or is slow to act, is it ONLY the leader's fault? We sure hope not, or every single company, group, party, family, etc. is headed for disaster. When people's lives and livelihoods are at stake, we should give our instincts free rein and **get moving**. There will ALWAYS be time later to point fingers, but those same hands are needed to reach out and help others first. Let us all learn a lesson from Katrina—look in the mirror and see what the person therein can do before waiting for someone else to give direction.

\* \* \* \* \*



**The May Leadership Conference**

We know you've been on the edges of your seats wondering how it all went: it was a smashing success, discounting the horrendous string of problems generously provided by the hotel, which inspired a novella of complaint written by yours truly.

People from all over the US came to hear Jack Zenger and Joe Folkman talk about the Extraordinary Leader Program, and were treated to a high-energy, informative and personalized process that allows people to walk with a formula for leadership greatness. (They were also treated to what we now refer to as "Sahara Chicken" - a bath towel right out of the dryer has more moisture.)

We were very proud to host the session, which was attended by 50 principals of companies such as Honda, Sony, Occidental Oil, Reebok, General Mills, Boeing, SAIF,

**Insider Insights**  
*Thoughts and News Items We Felt Like Sharing*

etc. On a scale of 1-5, participants scored the conference as a 4.17! *Very cool.*

**PLAGIARISM!**

On the one hand, it is flattering to see your writing in print—especially if it is a publication you don't write yourself, and that has a sizeable distribution list. On the other hand, it is infuriating to see your article reproduced with nary a word of acknowledgement as to the original author/contributor. We were neither consulted nor recognized when our 4th Quarter 2004 article entitled, "PowerPoint (and other) Presentations—Feedback from the Audience" appeared, verbatim, in a newsletter published by another organization earlier this year.

We love the fact that people photocopy our articles and inserts and distribute them within their companies—that's why we plaster our logo all over everything we send. Besides the fact we just like sending a quarterly newsletter, we do it for business purposes—it keeps our name and abilities in the minds of clients and potential clients. But *lifting* our ideas and words is not acceptable (or legal) without due credit.

To quote a former co-worker, Chuck West, it was like "seeing your mother-in-law drive over a cliff in your brand new Cadillac: mixed feelings". The good news—people liked our stuff; the bad news—nobody knows we wrote it.

\* \* \* \* \*



**Beacon Bits**

Quotations to cast rays of humanity across everyday business life

*Think big thoughts but relish small treasures.*

- H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

*Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them to become what they are capable of being.*

- John Wolfgang van Goethe

*A company is known by the people it keeps.*

- Anonymous

*A day's impact is better than a month of dead pull.*

- Oliver Wendell Holmes

**Last Laughs:**  
**Sign Language**

Contributed by Jeff Claspell:



**DOING A GOOD JOB HERE**

*Is Like Wetting Your Pants  
In A Dark Suit*

**YOU GET A WARM FEELING  
BUT NO ONE ELSE NOTICES**

**Are you lonely ???**

Don't like working on your own ?  
Hate making decisions ?

**Then call a MEETING !!**

You can ....  
SEE people  
DRAW flowcharts  
FEEL important  
FORM subcommittees  
IMPRESS your colleagues  
MAKE meaningless recommendations  
ALL on COMPANY TIME !!!!



**MEETINGS .....**

THE PRACTICAL ALTERNATIVE TO WORK.