

BUSINESS DILEMMA EDITION *Editor's Note: This is the first in a series of monthly editions of "Monday Manna" that will focus on common business dilemmas and ethical issues we confront in the workplace. After a brief summary of the problem, we provide questions for personal consideration or group discussion. We then offer comments on the situation and also consider biblical principles that might apply.*

THE FRUSTRATED CUSTOMER

By John D. Beckett

It had been one of those long, aggravating days – the kind in which the nerves of everyone in the company remained constantly on edge. "At least this day is almost over," thought Carlos, the customer service representative for Ace Windows and Doors. Just as he was reaching for his coat to leave for the day, his phone rang.

"I have tried for half an hour, and I cannot get your Model SD 92 storm door to lock properly!" said the frustrated customer.

Carlos was familiar with this complaint since he had dealt with it many times in the past. So he knew with nearly 100 percent certainty that the caller had not bothered to open the owner's manual for the new door and read the instructions. If he had, the solution would have been immediately apparent.

"Listen," said Carlos, annoyed by having a difficult day unnecessarily extended. "I will just bet anything you have not read the instructions that came with the door. If you had, you could have avoided this call. We make quality products and we stand by them, but give us a break. I will tell you how to lock the door – but next time, please read the manual!"

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

- How well did Carlos represent his company? What do you think was the likely effect of Carlos' response on the frustrated customer? How would you have felt if you had been the customer?
- What measured, gracious response could Carlos have given that would have fit the circumstances in a more appropriate manner?
- If a more customer-oriented response had been offered, how might the customer have reacted – immediately, and in the future -- as a potential repeat customer?

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BEST PRACTICES

Customer complaints can be viewed as either aggravations or opportunities. A challenge for senior business leaders is to build and sustain a culture rooted in passionate service to others, especially customers. In fact, top companies regularly survey clients to identify areas in which they are doing well, as well as to determine how they can improve.

Successful business leaders are very proactive in understanding and solving complaints, viewing them as opportunities to learn, make adjustments and win friends, some of whom will become their most loyal and enthusiastic clients and ambassadors.

FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

- What we say, and how we say it, can have great and often permanent impact on those to whom we are speaking. Carelessly spoken words cannot be retrieved, and have a lasting effect. *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger”* (Proverbs 15:1).
- Before responding to others out of impulse or emotion, it would be wise to pause and ask ourselves, “If I were that person, how would I like to be treated and spoken to?” *“Do to others as you would have them do to you”* (Luke 6:31).
- In a similar way, we need to keep in mind if the situation were reversed, how would we want to be considered? Would we feel valued and appreciated, or as an inconvenience or an imposition? *“Love your neighbor as yourself”* (Mark 12:31)
- Under stress, time constraints or other demands, it is normal to think first of our own desires. However, if we wish to effectively serve our customers and clients, and enjoy their repeat business, their needs should be given equal importance. *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others”* (Philippians 2:3-4).