

OPINION & EDITORIAL

Editorial

Understanding the woes of customer service

by Cindy Brown
Editor-in-Chief

Every person should work in a customer service-related environment at least once in their life. Why? Well, then they just may appreciate people they encounter at grocery stores, and clothing stores, and any other depot designed to offer some sort of service.

I owe my existence as a virtually debt-free student, at least in part, to my part-time job at a customer service representative at a grocery store in Fredericton. In my position, I hear all kinds of complaints about the service customers receive from such places and I wonder if these complainers have ever been on the giving side of the service industry - working as a cashier, a salesperson, a shelf-stocker, a 'burger flipper'. If they have, they have obviously forgotten what it is like to hold such a job. I hope that UNB students, once they finally have that degree in hand, do not forget about what it was like to work at their part-time jobs.

I started working as a cashier in high school, quit when I came to university, and was then rehired after my first completed year of higher education. My supervisor offered me a position in the cash office (counting money and other office-like things, instead of just working at the checkout) and I accepted, aching to get away from the repetitiveness and sometimes horror of working cash at the checkouts. The downside to my position in the office was the fact that I still had to work cash on occasion, and I had to listen to a lot more complaints from customers.

When working in the retail business, unhappy customers are pretty normal. Things go wrong and people want satisfaction. I know I have been an unhappy customer on more than one occasion, however my experience as a cashier has made me a little more sensitive to how those in the retail business feel. What has caused the customer grief is not always the direct fault of those in the retail business.

However, some customers can be pretty ruthless - calling a cashier *stupid* is certainly not a good way to show one's dissatisfaction with something about which that person has no control over - but it's done. This sort of action will not bring the customer any more satisfaction, it will just let the

cashier know how useless she is. Unhappy customers aren't also raving mad however, a lot are quite reasonable, but you always remember the ones who call you incompetent - again over a policy you have no control over.

Cashiers, at my place of employment, are expected to smile and be happy with each and every customer. So, when a cashier works an eight hour shift, she/he could be saying *hi, how are you* to hundreds of people, one after another. When a cashier neglects this duty, perhaps because she/he has forgotten, or already thought she/he had asked, (and believe me, that happens), customers will complain. The customer wants, and deserves full attention from whomever he/she is dealing with, however, I do not think that many people understand what it is like to work in such a scenario.

I will take the point of view of a cashier as an example, since I am one. The regular day at work consists of working for six hours, repetitively greeting customers, scanning groceries, taking money, thanking the customer. Quite an unchallenging job - I don't think so. Standing on one's feet for six hours straight is no small feat - between knee aches, back aches and headaches, six hours can feel like an eternity. When you are not busy with a customer, you must then try and find something that will keep you busy, or else your supervisor may get on your back.

These people are not making a great deal of money. Often pay rates in part time jobs, (my job as an example), starts out at minimum wage and often, part time jobs only offer between 15-30 hours, if that. It is almost impossible to survive on the income that provides. I know more than one person who has to pick up another job just to survive.

My point is, as you get out into the professional world, and you go buy groceries, remember that the people standing on the other side of the cash are people too. They may not want to work in the position they are in - they may not have an option. However, on the other hand, they may love what they do, just because you had a bad day, or are not happy with a certain policy, doesn't mean you have to take it out on the cashier. Talk to her/him - you may just make their day, or vice-versa. There is nothing better on a bad day/long shift, to have a customer actually care.

Just a thought...

by Joanne Barr
Campus Minister

Anyone who knows me well, knows that I like dogs. I come from a long line of dog lovers. When I was young, we had a dog named Laddie. She lived with us for many years. When I first started work, and was going to live away from home, I went to the SPCA, and adopted a dog. BJ became my constant companion. She was there when I cried, when I laughed, in my pain and in my joy. She was there when I was single, and she was still there

when I got married. I grieved deeply when she died.

Since then, there have been several others. There was Baron, Lady, Honey and Murphy. All have been great companions. And now there is Brandy, who lives with my son.

I came across an article on dog care recently and I decided that perhaps I could volunteer to walk dogs. I visited the SPCA and was welcomed royally by the staff. And I was welcomed as well, by the canines. What can I tell you about these special animals? They are so happy to have visitors. They crave attention and love.

Fines for garbage rummaging not best solution

by Patryk Reid
Managing Editor

The wisdom and vision of Fredericton City Council has been demonstrated once again in its brilliant approach to handling the fragile relationship between city residents and homeless people, where it converges on environmental consciousness.

The assembly of City representatives has announced that a fine ranging from \$50.00 to \$200.00 may be given to anyone found looking through household recycling boxes for refundable containers. The revised by-law was unanimously adopted by Council on Monday, October 22nd, and must only pass a first and second reading at the next council meeting to be put in place.

The decision is based on issues that stem from complaints City officials have received from residents about people going through their garbage at the curb for pick-up, according to the *Daily Gleaner* and local CBC Radio. Council's reasons for passing the by-law consist of not only concerns for the privacy of such home-owners, but also for the fact that the revenue gained from the recyclable is used to facilitate the program.

Fine. Now the other side of the issue.

The individuals one is most likely to find going through someone's garbage or recycling box will mostly be homeless, or extremely poor. And that person's primary motivation for taking the refundable recyclables is the money she can get.

As to the privacy issue, the chance that homeless people are going to peek at any of the paper in a recycling bin are pretty slim. Moreover, if, as Councilor Stephen Kelly is cited as saying in the *Daily Gleaner*, homeowners are increasingly recycling more than just newspapers or single-page bank statements, they ought to know better. Those who are recycling things like multi-page, confidential business reports should do as they would at the office: shred them.

Furthermore, giving even a \$50.00 fine to someone who has no money isn't exactly getting to the root of the problem. These unlucky individuals are going through personal recycling and garbage bins for containers worth no more than five to ten cents. Sometimes they find food that qualifies as edible. THEY ARE DESPERATE. And it's not like they're doing it because they're lazy. Looking through garbage bins and then transporting the returnables you find to a so-called redemption

centre constitutes something rather less than a care-free existence.

But the middle-class mindset fails to see this, and leads many residents to complain about the homeless, and for the city to act on it. It's a view further perpetrated by the media. On October 23rd, both the *Daily Gleaner* and CBC Radio referred to such people as "scavengers". This is a biological term with derogatory metaphorical connotations in the societal context. The use of such terminology in journalism is called editorializing.

Oh, good point, but what about the cost to the program (we have to recycle all of the disposables we use)? The answer lies in this question.

Maybe, instead of worrying about the problem of homelessness, the problem of dealing with residential recyclables, and then the problem of making sure the homeless don't try to take business away from a break-even industry, we could combine all three factors in a positive manner. Would it be so hard for the so-progressive City of Fredericton to enlist the homeless in the collection program? Chances are it would make things a lot easier on them, eliminate the City's need to worry about fining them, take away the problem of having to maintain those fancy, shiny trucks, and maybe encourage the charitable, environmentally conscious people of the city to recycle more.

Perspective on the SU elections

by Clinton Fitzpatrick
Vice President University Affairs

Another election has come and gone and the end result is this...all positions are filled, the Bruns referendum was approved and we are ready to continue dealing with day to day issues.

But before we go any further, let's take a moment and reflect on the results of the election. Sure, all the positions were filled and there were no conflicts that created a stink, but something wasn't right.

If we look at the voter turnout we can see the majority of students did not vote in the by-election. What does this mean? Well, my interpretation is that the students on this campus are going to be represented but the majority don't care who that representative is.

This is a harsh reality but as strong as those words are, there is a great deal of truth associated with them.

Having said all that, it is easy for me to shift the blame to the voters' shoulders but is that the whole truth? No I'm afraid it isn't. It is my job to oversee the elections at UNB, and that means taking responsibility for their results.

So there you have it, I am prepared to take the blame - but it isn't unconditional. I want people to know why this guy gets pissed off when he hears the election wasn't 100% successful.

In high school, I was one of those people who didn't get involved and I was proud to say it. But in the end, I really didn't enjoy the whole experience. When I came to UNB, I started down the same path. Fortunately for

Continued on Page 7

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