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By Steve Burns, Capital News contributor

Have you ever had such poor customer service that you just couldn't believe it?

Have you ever wondered how a company stays in business treating customers like they just treated you?



Such a poor customer service experience leaves customers telling, on average, at least 10 people.

I wanted to relay a story of contrasts in customer service that affected me recently.

It really made me think about how that a missed opportunity to one company was an opportunity capitalized upon by the other.

I also noticed that the company that delivered awesome service to me raised the bar for every other customer service experience that I will have.

The context is that I recently decided to take up the game of golf.

For years I have avoided the game completely as I really did think that it was rather boring. I love action sports such as basketball, football and hockey.

Maybe it was the caddying that I did for my uncle when I was 16 that created the boring images.

My uncle was entered in a golf tournament and I think that I spent more time in the forest looking for balls than I did on the fairways.

This year I played for the first time in the CA/Lawyer tournament and really enjoyed it.

I was picked to be part of the horse race at the end where four teams play off against each other.

I missed the putt to place our team in the finals but I was close.

Close is never good enough in golf so I decided to attempt to learn this game.

About a month ago a friend of mine said that he would take me to the driving range and teach me how to hit the ball.

We practised for about two hours and he then gently suggested that I take some lessons, which I thought would be a great idea.

He said that he would introduce me to the head pro at his golf club.

He suggested that I take lessons from him as he had worked with him before and, as a result, had made significant improvements to his game.

We had breakfast together and then he introduced me to the head pro and mentioned that I would like to take some lessons from him.

At that point I had become a very vulnerable consumer that was ready to do anything my instructor said—purchase 800 lessons, buy golf clubs, consider a membership, etc. What I heard next was shocking.

“I would really like to help, Steve, but I am focused on administration these days. I have not given lessons for a while so I suggest that you take lessons from one of our other staff members.”

I just couldn't believe what I was hearing.

Did he not see how ready I was to get going? Did he not realize that I would have paid anything to get started now?

I responded, “As my friend speaks so highly of you, I would really like to take lessons from you. When would it be possible to fit me in your busy schedule?”

He said, “Well it will take a couple of weeks before this could happen. Why don't you call me in a couple of weeks and give me about four or five days to organize something for you.”

I said that I would give it some thought.

After he left the table we discussed what just happened. My friend was embarrassed to say the least and I was still in shock.

Does this club not care about customers? Do they realize what they are missing out on by having their head pro focused on administration?

These are opportunities lost forever, which simply cannot be replaced. I have written the club about the incident but I have received no response.

Perhaps they just don't care about my opinion.

After I left the club I was wondering what I would do now. Who would I take lessons from?

Then I remembered that my neighbour, Gilles Dufort, is the general manager and executive professional of the Harvest Golf Club (www.harvestgolf.com), so I thought I would go and talk to him about taking lessons from him.

Well I simply can't say enough about how different my experience was at the Harvest. When I arrived at the parking lot I was greeted by a staff member wanting to drive me to the clubhouse.

They noticed that I didn't have golf clubs so they asked me if I was coming for lunch and if there was any way that they might be able to help me.

I said that I wanted to talk with Gilles so they found him and connected us together.

Gilles welcomed me to the club and I told him that I wanted to take lessons from him.

We went to his private office, where we talked about my needs and what I wanted to accomplish in taking up the game of golf.

He asked me when I would like to get started and within a few minutes I had my first lesson booked for early the next morning.

After my first lesson he loaned me a set of golf clubs to use until I was able to purchase my own.

I have been spoiled since the moment that I visited Gilles at the Harvest.

What a contrast to the customer service experience that I had elsewhere.

It is no surprise that I am a loyal customer of the Harvest Golf Club. Angela and I enjoyed our 19th year anniversary dinner at the Harvest, Angela is now taking lessons to "beat her husband at golf."

I have taken clients golfing, played the course a number of times, practiced a couple of times a week and enjoyed breakfast and lunch.

I really appreciate their efforts in making learning this complicated game fun and enjoyable.

In describing my attitude towards the Harvest, I need to go much further than describe myself as a loyal customer.

In fact, I would say that I am a raving fan. I tell everyone I know about my very positive experience at the Harvest and the contrast with the other club.

In summary, I think that Gilles Dufort and the staff at the Harvest Golf Club have raised the bar for customer service for every business in the Okanagan. Not a wonder that the club was rated number four in Canada by Score Magazine for Quality Service.

Also remember that a poor customer service experience may be an opportunity lost forever to create a raving fan. How would your business' customer service compare to the Harvest?

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