

From: Tom Wagner <twagner@wagnercg.com>
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To: Tom Wagner
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Focus

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Take "No" Out of the Equation

On October 18 I was treated to a wonderful example of a leader who would not take no for an answer. Moreover, this leader set a powerful example for her followers.

In this particular case, the leader, Mittie, would not take no from a customer, me. That is, she would not accept less than total customer satisfaction. More on that later. But refusal to accept "no" can be applied to other situations.

In the largest sense, refusal to accept "no" means, "Despite everything, we will succeed in our mission." This leadership approach produces a creative and passionate work atmosphere. After all, if a "no excuses" standard exists, people will naturally think creatively and work collaboratively when obstacles appear.

Imagine a challenge or "ropes" course. In this classic team building exercise, teams accomplish the unthinkable, like scaling high walls (especially getting the really big guy over that wall). At the conclusion of the course, the team has more cohesion and respect for each other *and* a newfound belief in what they can accomplish as a team.

It's the outcomes, however, that really define a no excuses culture. No excuses teams gain a reputation for reliability and quality; they become known as the go-to group/company/firm. People who don't belong leave during the creation of this type of

team, but once this shake-out is done employee turnover is lower than normal. Job satisfaction is higher. A stranger can see this when interacting with a no-excuses team. Even reserved employees have a certain look – dare I say sparkle? – in their eyes.

The payoff is better customer satisfaction, whether for internal customers or for external customers. Great customer service is so rare these days that it can make a big difference in customer/client retention.

Now I will return to my Wow! customer service experience at the hands of store manager Mittie at the Madison (Miss.) Home Depot.

I had returned two floodlights that weren't quite the right size and the store was still out of the ones I wanted. Mittie approached me and asked if I needed help. We walked to the empty shelf slot, and she asked associate Kelli to scan the bar code to check the store inventory. None. I thanked and began to leave, but no! Right there in the aisle Kelli located bulbs in the Brandon store and Mittie took my phone number, assuring me the bulbs would be delivered to my home or office *at no charge*. When I questioned this, Mittie said since I had to come back twice I shouldn't have to pay because they were out of stock. This also took one of my "no" objections out of the equation. By the end of this brief process I had demurred three times, but the woman just wouldn't take a polite "no" for an answer!

Later that afternoon, Kelli showed up at my door with two floodlights. We spoke briefly, and what I heard reinforced the very positive suppositions I had about Mittie and her team.

Think about the lessons Mittie is sending as a leader. It's not just talk, it is action. Can you imagine what Kelli had to say to her co-workers about leaving the store to make a light bulb delivery? Also, it's Mittie's motto I used for this article's title. Said she, "I tell my people I want to take 'no' out of the equation."

We've all heard the saying that 50% of your advertising spend is wasted, but you just don't know which half. Surely, delivering knock-their-socks-off service is better than any advertising.

Mittie is now "my" Home Depot manager. She knows how to build customer relationships.

Tom Wagner

President, Wagner Consulting Group, Inc.



A company is not just a business, but a philosophy,
a set of values, a series of traditions and customs.
It is these deeply held beliefs that guide a company in meeting its objectives.
~ David Packard

601 853-0076

www.wagnercg.com

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