



# Dave Mitchell

## the Leadership Difference

### Laugh and Learn

May 2011

## Welcome to the Leadership Difference

### Greetings!

*In this newsletter, Dave shares his thoughts on the current state of customer service in the United States. Dave also shares some of his all time favorite wines.*

## Customer Service or Customersaurus?

Recently, I had a great discussion with some clients regarding the evolution of customer service during my lifetime. So much has changed over the last 50 years related to how business interacts with its customers; some exciting developments, some kind of sad.

Growing up in tiny Greenup, Illinois, I bought my groceries at Hayden's IGA, flowers at D & D Flower Shop, tools at D & M Hardware and banked at the Greenup National Bank. Shull's Plumbing fixed our pipes and I could shop for cars at Bud Mitchell (no relation, dang it) Chevrolet or Hank Carr's Auto Sales. (By the way, it must have been pretty easy to provide career counseling to Hank!). My dad provided the appliances and HVAC needs for the community through Mitchell's Heating and Air Conditioning. Each of these family owned businesses and others provided personal service that went well beyond the conventional service provider/customer relationship. They opened early and stayed late when needed and they knew the names and situation of every single customer they served. These businesses were the backbone that kept the community vital in so many ways.

In the 1960's and 70's, shopping malls became more common and stretched beyond the urban/suburban settings into regional areas. Now, shoppers could exchange personal service for convenience for the first time. Instead of making trips to multiple locations to fulfill their needs, they could accomplish everything in one stop. Sure, the vendor didn't know your name, didn't know your situation, didn't contribute to your own community; but that seemed a small price to pay for the savings in time, gas and (in many cases) a little money. Local merchants were left to provide service or counsel on merchandise purchased elsewhere. The market for the local store began to shrink. This trend was accelerated as shopping malls paved the way for superstores like Walmart, K-Mart and Target with buying power that ensured price points well beyond what could be matched by the family business. Stacked to the ceiling with products and spartanly staffed, these superstores created a "do it yourself" (DIY) approach to customer service.

By the end of the century, the consumer had grown accustomed to nominal customer service. We seldom found assistance while we were shopping nor did we expect it. We even began to do our own checkout at some stores. The DIY mentality grew. Technology replaced the knowledgeable merchant as the source of product information. Soon, the

Internet allowed us to cut out the experience of a store altogether. Now, customer service is being transformed from personalized, human interaction to intuitive computer screens and liberal return policies (albeit requiring us to wait for items to traverse the land via UPS or FedEx). For many items, we don't shop anywhere near where we live. My own children have grown up defining "customer service" as sitting on a telephone or computer chat with a call center in some unknown location of the world while a "tech" troubleshoots their problem. Planned obsolescence has replaced product quality since most people simply replace televisions, computers and the like rather than repair them. I mean, have you talked to a television repairman lately? Hard to find one.

Is the whole notion of customer service becoming extinct? Is it evolving into something new? Someone told me that customer service will make a comeback when people get fed up with the lack of personal attention. To that I say, "Exactly what will people be longing for? There are people in their 30s who have never experienced truly personal customer service."

It will be interesting to see how we define service excellence in another 20 years. I can imagine it now, telling my grandkids during our Thanksgiving Dinner, "Kids, when I was young, we used to go visit a place called a store and talk to a person who helped us with our purchase."

"OMG, grampa, that's just weird!"

***Dave's seminar, Service Excellence: the Heart and Art of Service, focuses on how we can still distinguish our companies by achieving customer satisfaction in an age of declining service standards.***

### Blended Learning

I love to lead educational seminars in classroom settings. Watching the reaction of the crowd, answering questions and witnessing the transfer of learning are hugely satisfying to me. Unfortunately, even the best experience in the classroom can fade if not reinforced. That is why the Leadership Difference provides online course reviews to support the learning objectives of the classroom. Online courses can be customized to meet the specific needs of our clients, can be accessed from any location and are typically no longer than 30 minutes in length. They provide an excellent refresher and can generate metrics for measuring participant understanding.

To learn more about the Leadership Difference's Online Learning Management System, please contact Lisa Jennings([lisa@theleadershipdifference.com](mailto:lisa@theleadershipdifference.com)) or Dave Mitchell ([dave@theleadershipdifference.com](mailto:dave@theleadershipdifference.com)).

### Read Dave's Book



**NOW AVAILABLE!!**

Dave's most popular seminar is now a book!  
Order The Power of Understanding People today!

If you've seen Dave's **Live and Learn or Die Stupid** Keynote and would love to revisit the concepts he presented, this book is perfect for you. Maybe there is someone in your life that could benefit from reading about Dave's unique perspective on how to live a happy life.

### A Few of My Favorite (Wine) Things

My love for wine is very similar to my love of music, so when someone asks me what my favorite wine is I find it very difficult to choose. Like music, wine is very situational. The greatness of a wine has as much to do with the quality of environment within which you drink it as it does the wine itself. Having said that, here are a few of my "desert island" wines that are my favorites year in and year out:

Seghesio Zinfandel  
Sonoma County Sonoma

Orin Swift The Prisoner  
Napa Valley

Domaine Serene Pinot  
Noir Willamette Valley  
Evenstad Reserve Pinot  
Noir

### **On a Personal Note...**

May is a big month for the Mitchells since  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the family celebrate birthdays. Well, more accurately, one Mitchell celebrates while the other two prefer denial. This year is particularly significant; my daughter Brooke will be celebrating her 21<sup>st</sup>. Happy Birthday, Sweetheart!

Merry Edwards Sauvignon  
Blanc Russian River Valley

Argyle Brut Willamette  
Valley (Sparkling Wine)

Just like with music, if you  
ask me this question on  
another day you will likely  
get a different list!