

**DECEMBER 2001:
JUST TELL SOMEONE
YOU'LL HELP**



MONTHLY FEATURE COLUMN: JUST TELL SOMEONE YOU'LL HELP
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It's difficult to complain—about anything—when one considers what so many people are currently experiencing. Families and friends are in agony from the events of September 11. Afghani children—many of them no more guilty of anything except living in that drought-stricken country—are starving. The women of Afghanistan, above all, have an incredible amount to complain about.

Under these circumstances, it's easy to see complaints as shallow and unnecessary, and just unpleasant whining.

But if we look at complaints as one of the strongest contributors to quality, then it is always appropriate to indicate where and how things can be improved.

Different responses to complaints (quality suggestions!) can make people feel as if they are part of making things better, or can make them feel as if they are nasty little whiners.

This past week at my health club's swimming pool, I was once again beset with water that was uncomfortably warm to swim in. To be exact, the pool was at 85 degrees Fahrenheit, and 78 to 80 is where it should be. Those 5 degrees make the difference between taking a pleasant, brisk swim that leaves one feeling invigorated, or taking a swim in something resembling pea soup!

I believe in "gift-giving," so I mentioned the high temperature to the elderly man who was late arriving to his lifeguard position (and about which I said nothing) and asked if he could do anything. First he told me, "I don't know anything about that." I told him the club's policy of keeping the pool closer to 80 degrees—as I have told him on several occasions in the past. I asked him if he could turn the thermostat down.

"Oh, I couldn't do that," he responded.

Could he check with maintenance, I inquired.

"Oh, I don't think they are there yet."

Could he check with anyone, I persisted.

Finally, in disgust, he returned to the club house to tell someone about my request. I

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hate to think what went on in that conversation: "There's that lady out there who has nothing better to do with her time but complain. She should experience something real to complain about!"

Later while in the dressing room, I made a suggestion to one of the attendants to provide a stand for the magnifying mirrors that are available. I am tall and the short mirrors require me to stoop way down to see into them. "Why, yes, of course," she responded. "This isn't good. I'll tell my supervisor about it."

What a difference!

As I left the health club after these two very dissimilar encounters, I considered the disparity between their two approaches. I asked myself, "Can you teach someone to respond like the young woman if their natural inclination is to be like the elderly man?"

I believe you can, but then you have to be willing to tell someone that is the behavior you want.

Too many organizations want helpful staff, people who are willing to cooperate with customers rather than disappoint them.

But these same organizations assume that helpful behavior will be forthcoming automatically. Clearly, it isn't. All of us know this from our own experience of interacting with service providers. If this is the case, supervisors and managers need to be explicit about the exact behaviors we want in place.

Don't assume your staff will naturally offer to help. They won't.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN DOING: WE ARE SHIVERING IN PARADISE!

We are learning about winter in Las Vegas. Since there is virtually no cloud cover at any time, this high desert locale cools off in the evening. It definitely can get cold in the evenings. The temperature variation is easily over 30 degrees in a single day. When Janelle swims in the morning, she has encountered temperatures that read under 30 degrees Fahrenheit. We can't swear to that temperature; we only know that's what the thermometer reads. It's brisk getting in and out of the swimming pool!

We've been busy in some unusual ways this month. Definitely we are still working, Paul Holden and Jossie Aguilar conducted seminars for the Isle of Capri in different locations. Bill Oden worked with Eurand America in Ohio on a variety of programs. And Janelle Barlow spoke to the World Bank in Washington, D.C., on the topic of Stress Management. It's exciting to be in D.C. While there, one of the World Bank offices had to be evacuated because of a bomb threat. We out on the West Coast just don't have that sense of immediate danger that people are experiencing now on the East Coast. Our hearts are with you!

In addition, Janelle attended the annual Board Retreat for the National Speaker's Association in Tempe, Arizona. She also participated in a Celebrity Series for the

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Washington, D.C., Chapter of the National Speaker's Association.

Janelle and her husband, Jeffrey Mishlove, flew to New York to take Mayor Rudy Giuliani up on his invitation to visit the Big Apple. They walked the perimeter of Ground Zero. While it is not possible to get immediately into that area (it's being treated as a crime zone), you can get to within a block and a half of Ground Zero in certain locales. After two months, the site still exudes strong odors; from the top of the Empire State Building you can see smoke coming from what now is a vacant space in lower Manhattan.

The most impressive site is the large area that is roped off. The large buildings that are located close to the former World Trade Towers now look majestic again. Against the WTC, 60-story buildings looked puny. It's heart-wrenching to think of the agony that so many people endured on that day.

It's also disturbing to see buildings that still have to be torn down. The amount of living space that is no longer inhabitable is immense. Buckminster Fuller once pointed that everyone on planet earth would fit on all the real estate in Manhattan, and it would be no more crowded than a crowded cocktail party. Put in those terms, all that space in the area of the World Trade Towers was vast.

The shrines that surround the area are emotionally moving. And people flock to the area, needing to see, needing to understand. Understanding is definitely beyond such a trip.

We (Janelle Barlow, Peta Peter, and Lewis Barlow) have been considering what the ramifications of the terrorist attacks would be. It became immediately evident that not everyone feels comfortable flying any more. It occurred to us that videoconferencing has a chance of being used to its capacity as a response to people not wanting to fly so frequently.

We checked all our sources and found that there has been basically nothing written about the "presentation" side of participating in a videoconference. As a result, for the last two months we have been avidly working on a book, most likely to be called Smart Videoconferencing. It will cover four points:

- when and how to integrate videoconferencing into business communications,
- appropriate strategies for leading and participating in virtual meetings,
- how to make videoconferencing equipment your friend, and
- how to look and sound your best while on camera.

Berrett-Koehler will publish the book, and it should be available in June or July, 2002. The book is already generating a lot of interest because there is simply nothing available on the presentation side of videoconferencing. There is a great deal written about VC technology, though most people just want to use the equipment and not be burdened with understanding the difference between h.323 standard and h.320 standard.

We'll keep you informed as to what is happening with the book. We're very excited about the topic and very saddened that it took September 11 to generate the idea.

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