

**SEPTEMBER 2001:
TOO AFRAID TO
COMPLAIN**



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According to researchers, the second most common reason why people don't complain is fear of retribution. That is, customers are afraid that the person or organization to whom they complain will do something to make their situation worse. It's easy to relate to this when considering whether to complain about a bad tasting dish in the middle of the meal. It is much safer to just not eat the offending portion than to risk what the kitchen staff might do to your food when you aren't looking!

I had an experience of fear of retribution this past month which drove home the point that organizations need to assure their customers they want to hear from them without the risk of being punished. I was on a flight out of Las Vegas to San Diego on a hot Sunday afternoon, with the temperatures sitting somewhere around 106°. That's no problem in an air-conditioned lounge, but sitting in that heat for half an hour in a non-air-conditioned airplane parked on the tarmac is simply unbearable.

Before boarding the flight, gate agents made frequent, loud, and demanding announcements that they needed everyone on the airplane in the least amount of time so we could make an on-time departure. As nearly as I could tell, all the passengers cooperated even stepping into the rows of seats so the aisles wouldn't be blocked and other passengers could get by. In fact, the passengers deserved a reward for how cooperative they were. The plane had arrived late, but we filed on to that aircraft so intently, we were ready for an on-time departure.

Then we sat. And we sat. And we sat some more, without air-conditioning in stuffy 106° temperatures. After awhile, I looked to see if there were flight attendants around to find out what was happening. None were to be seen. They had stepped back into jet ramp close to the doors in the terminal where air-conditioned air was nicely flowing over them. No announcements were ever made. But we passengers say there quietly, enduring the situation and not saying a word in complaint.

After 15 minutes, I was inclined to say something. But I resisted, as no one else was complaining, though everyone was talking about the situation. After 20 minutes, I was definitely not happy. I began to contemplate getting out of my seat, finding a flight attendant to register my discomfort and to find out what was causing our delay. This was of particular interest to me since we had so nicely accommodated the airlines' demands to get to our seats as quickly as possible so we could have an on-time departure.

A little voice of internal warning cautioned me that I was so annoyed I would probably engaged in a conversation as heated as I was physically feeling. The flight was over-

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booked, so I knew they would have no difficulty throwing me off the plane and substituting someone else who wanted to go to San Diego. And I couldn't risk that.

Passengers were certainly discussing the issue, but none of us wanted to risk getting ejected from the airplane by standing up walking down the aisle and finding someone who represented the airline.

Then, suddenly, as if nothing had happened, the plane's engine's started up and we taxied out to the runway and flew to San Diego. No explanation was ever given to us. No apologies were made. Business as usual.

Did we as passengers participate in this charade? Of course we did. But if everyone on that plane needed to get to San Diego that afternoon as I did, perhaps none of them were willing to risk losing their seat by complaining.

Were you to ask this airline if anything out of the ordinary happened on that Sunday afternoon, they would no doubt report it was a flight without incident. They should know that I, and a number of passengers seated around me have no inclination to fly this airline again. It was my first time on this airline in years and hopefully it will be my last. Most businesses don't have a clue as to the discontent that exists and is never raised. To avoid the type of problem that happened that heated Sunday in Las Vegas, a business has to ask itself a simple question: "What kinds of problems can we create for our customers if we deny them our products or services?" The more critical the answers are to this question, the more likely you aren't hearing from your customers when they are upset. We're too frightened our situations are going to get worse!

WHAT WE'VE BEEN DOING: AUGUST IS DEFINITELY A HOT MONTH IN LAS VEGAS.

For those of you who want to keep abreast of the temperature here in Las Vegas, let me report that August is definitely hotter than July! But it's still bearable, and the evenings are glorious. The temperature is so consistent with body temperature that it's hard to feel where you end and the rest of the world begins. It creates a wonderful feeling of connectedness.

We are still actively worked with the Isle of Capri Casinos, delivering Managing People First seminars (8 half day sessions covering 8 topics that relate to Putting People First and are specifically designed for Managers and Supervisors). Peta Peter, Bill Oden and Paul Holden worked in Biloxi, Lake Charles, Natchez, Tunica and Bossier City.

Bill Oden also flew to Ohio to work with Eurand America, dealing with the topics of Leadership and Delegation and Empowerment.

Janelle Barlow had the opportunity to work with Compass Learning (formerly known as Josten's Learning) in San Diego. If any of our readers are doing home learning with their children then be sure to visit their web site. They have some dandy products and their call center is staffed with energetic, capable, and highly concerned individuals. She also began the month completing work with Chevron in San Ramon, California.

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The United Jewish Appeal Federation in New York continues to train the A Complaint Is a Gift. They became certified to offer the course 5 years ago. We are proud to have them as a client!

On a personal note. Many of you know we moved our offices to Las Vegas in the middle of March, 2001. At that time, Janelle and her husband, Jeffrey Mishlove, were in the process of building a new house. We had plans of it being done by perhaps May. The good news is that the job has finally been accomplished, and Jeffrey and Janelle met the moving van at their new location on August 27th, which also happens to be their 23rd wedding anniversary. We are continually amazed at how the world enables us to multitask so effortlessly!

Lewis Barlow has joined us in the roll of Account Manager. He has been working in China for the past three years in Shanghai and Beijing, and we are thrilled to have his expertise in business development and account management. (By the way, he is fluent in Mandarin, so if any of you would like to place an order in Chinese, we now have that as one of our capacities!) He is in the process of helping us to rethink our business model and strategies. We'll tell you more about this as our plans unfold over the next few months.

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