

**APRIL 2001:
CUSTOMER SERVICE
AND WEIGHT LOSS!**



MONTHLY FEATURE COLUMN: CUSTOMER SERVICE AND WEIGHT LOSS!

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Patricia Seybold has a new customer service book out, called *The Customer Revolution: How to Thrive When Customers Are in Control*. The book makes me think of weight control and dieting.

Seybold's main point is that customers get to decide what happens in the market. I just wish she would tell this good piece of news to some of the suppliers we deal with at TMI and ones with whom I personally interact. Because we have made a huge move (both home and office) in the past month, we have had the joy and opportunity to deal with hundreds of suppliers. In contrast to Seybold's notion, we generally don't get to decide what happens. In fact, we frequently feel at the mercy, and make lots of decisions cutting our losses.

Seybold and her coauthors write, "Thanks to the Internet and to mobile wireless devices, customers are challenging and disrupting the standard practices in virtually every industry." This might be true if we could get in contact with them. Having just spent several hours attempting to reach a supplier, and then getting my e-mails bounced back to me, doesn't make me feel much in control. We have left dozens of phone messages for a huge variety of people and have heard nothing back. I wish it were as Seybold describes.

One of Seybold's strongest points of advice is that companies should develop strong relationships with customers. While this idea is not new nor revolutionary, she does propose that in the future, people will assess a company's stock value based on the strength of its customer relationships.

A business client and friend recently sent a statement by Stew Leonard, Jr., to me. Leonard is the president of Stew Leonard's, a three-store grocery chain based in Norwalk, Conn., with \$245 million in sales. It is legendary for its customer service.

Leonard is quoted as saying, "I equate customer service to losing weight—it's the kind of thing everybody knows about but is hard to do. Before you embrace it, you have to look in the mirror and say, "Do I believe?"

This is a wonderful quote, and I think the last part of this statement should be, "Do I really want to do it?" You can "believe," but you have to "want" to lose weight.

Customer service is absolutely like losing weight. Stew's right about that! Most people who are a little overweight, which seems to be most Americans, know they should take off a few pounds. Most people go on diets at one time or another. They try it for awhile. Then they revert to their old patterns when they get hungry, depressed, or just want to reward themselves. They want to try the latest diet fad (The easier the better!) and are genuinely shocked when it doesn't work. They want to change only for awhile, and then they want to revert to old eating habits that maybe used to work years ago.

All these things happen with customer service as well, and it is probably why Seybold's book is good advice rather than descriptive of a trend! Organizations know they should focus on customer service to an inch of their existence. So, they try one thing and then another. But they're not really committed. They sacrifice customer service when the organization begins to show poor financial performance.

Yet, we also know that when you want to truly want to lose weight, it's remarkably easy—compared to when you think you "should" lose weight but don't really want to.

Likewise, customer service is not that difficult when an organization makes a commitment to it. When they really want to do it. When they understand, it's the customer's way, or it's no way. When it gets into their blood, into their brand, into their daily conversation, into their life. Seybold certainly makes this point, and for this point alone, her book deserves a positive rating!

WHAT WE'VE BEEN DOING: WE MADE IT!

We have officially relocated to Las Vegas, home of the 4th largest Chamber of Commerce in the United States, the fastest growing community in the United States, home to TMI, US—and, oh yes, all those casinos. And here's another interesting statistic about Las Vegas. Twenty-five percent of the population has lived there less than 5 years! It definitely is a new city.

We've been too busy to even drive by the Strip, and life in the rest Las Vegas goes on remarkably like any other community in the United States. Children go to school, businesses sell lots of fast food, and we all try to avoid getting into a car accident in the morning traffic. Certainly life at TMI has been a little different this past month, but we are probably 90% settled in to our new location.

We'd like to extend an invitation to everyone who makes it to Las Vegas to drop by our offices. You'll get to see the splendor of the mountains that ring the city, enjoy some of our exquisitely beautiful weather—at least at this time of the year. We are told that we have approximately another month of temperate sunshine, and then air conditioners are a must.

In the meantime, we continue to offer our services to clients. We continue to book business, even as we hire new staff and meet the needs of our existing clients.

April, 2001

Janelle went to a Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce meeting for new people and promptly won an interview on a local radio station during which time she gets to talk about the TMI business. She was tempted to play the slots after that bit of luck! Several of us from TMI also went to the 90th anniversary of the Chamber on our first day in town. Elvis sang. Everyone wished the Chamber a long life—300 years in the future. Someone commented that Elvis would certainly still be around! Such is life in Las Vegas.

Our new address is:

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**Our e-mail addresses and web page remain the same:
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