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## Ideas For Success | *February*

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### Change Leader

In 1987, I bought a new Ford Bronco II. Loved that car. Except one thing: when we sold it five years later, I'm pretty sure we had paid for it

Snowmageddon hits Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and the East Coast. The Abominable Snowman takes up winter residence in Dallas-Fort Worth and throughout the Deep South. Whoever said, "Hell will freeze over when the Saints win the Super Bowl," was off on his geography. I don't know if global warming is real... but I'm fairly certain something strange is going on out (or up) there.

While you can't control the weather, you can control whether your organization treats customers the right way. This month, I'm sharing three personal experiences since the last issue. As you'll see these range from good, to bad, to ugly. Read them and consider which stories your customers are spreading: ones that make your company shine or those that paint a negative picture? People talk... and you decide what they say.

**Expectations Exceeded** - Every six months I purchase ASICS Gel Kayano running shoes online from Zappos, which provides free shipping for delivery and returns. When I ordered a new pair in January, Zappos sent an e-mail stating they were providing an upgrade to "special priority shipping status so you can receive your order even faster than we promised." My shoes arrived in three days, and Zappos delivered on its commitment: "We like to think of ourselves as a service company that happens to sell shoes, clothing, and a whole bunch of other stuff."

**Promises Unfulfilled** - I realized over the holidays our collegiate daughter had no way to backup her laptop, so I went online to the popular electronics retailer and purchased an external hard drive, scheduling delivery to her apartment. Then I discovered, oops, that's the old model; I intended to get the new version for \$10 more. Immediately I called customer service and Reginald cancelled the order. "Look for an e-mail confirmation in the next hour, then go online and select the one you want," he said. Three hours later, no e-mail. I called again, and Dani said: "There's no indication in the record you contacted us, and you're past the one-hour window." She said my daughter would need to wait for the shipment and take it to a UPS drop-off location or return it to their Austin store. Dani was polite, understanding and apologetic - and sent us a \$15 gift certificate for the inconvenience. She made a solid attempt at recovery - and saved a loyal customer.

**Time Wasted** - I should have known better when the radio ad said, "Bring your entire office for \$19." However, Rudy Giuliani was the one asking... and he said Colin Powell, Lou Holtz and Sarah Palin would be speaking, too. So I ordered tickets for Kathy, three of our senior executive clients and me to attend. I should have known the morning of the event when radio

twice. Our mechanic joked Ford is an acronym for Fix Or Repair Daily.

That may no longer be true. When Alan Mulally left Boeing to become CEO, he brought a new perspective and approach to make Ford "fundamentally different." He listened to customers to understand their expectations, and set the bar high: "To be best in class in quality, fuel efficiency, safety, smart design and great value."

I heard Mr. Mulally interviewed on *The Car Guy Show* with Jerry Reynolds, and he said, "I love making the coolest vehicles in the world." Ford's goal is "to serve all of our customers with the vehicles they really want." Ford made \$2.7 billion last year and paid back \$10 billion in debt - without taking a nickel in bailout money. Who would have thought?

My daughter might look good in a Fusion when she graduates.

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reporters were saying, "Traffic into downtown is in gridlock." However, we had blocked out the day. So on we journeyed. I should have known better when we walked into the arena and the usher said, "There are no seats, you'll have to stand." However, another kind soul led us to the upscale restaurant overlooking the stage and said, "You can sit in here." So we stayed. Three hours later, what had we achieved?

Hearing someone we didn't recognize say you could have anything you want in life, if you believe. Watching a 60-minute canned presentation on investing by a speaker who used Enron as an example, without acknowledging he was standing four blocks from its failed headquarters. Listening to the event's co-founder tell us about all the obstacles she overcame while showing slides of herself in photos with Mother Teresa, Jerry Lewis, Joe Montana and others - and saying, "Please don't think I'm dropping names. I'm just trying to show you how blessed I am." We stayed through lunch - which consisted of standing in line for 45 minutes to buy a hot dog - listened to Gen. Powell (who was excellent)... and when another unknown investment guru took the stage, we left.

I accept blame for this debacle for not thinking it through in advance (you get what you pay for). I also think the event company, and by association every keynote speaker, participated in sleight of hand. If they had mentioned, "You'll experience traffic jams, frustrations, long lines, be subjected to other speakers selling their services, and hear shortened speeches by famous people," we would have been prepared. Instead, 20,000 employees spent nine hours not doing their jobs. If attendees each are worth \$50 per hour to their companies, that's \$9 million in productivity lost.

**Words of Wisdom** - The root of the above examples rests in expectations. Zappos created surprise and a pleasant experience I couldn't wait to share with you. By failing to follow through, the big box electronics store made it hard to do business with them. As for the motivation organization, this is their 25th year, so the model works... just not for me.

*"The first step in exceeding your customer's expectations is to know those expectations."* ~ Roy H. Williams

Read that again. Now ask yourself, "Do we know?" Ask your team. You might discover things aren't as aligned as you thought - which would create great opportunity for you to improve the way you connect and interact with customers. If that happens, the day we gave up to 'get motivated' was worth it.

Until next time, continued success in all things.

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