

Herald-Journal

Noel Swain: Positive Criticism

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Positive criticism.

Sounds sort of oxymoronic, doesn't it?

What's positive about criticism? Most people hate it. However, when we are treated poorly, especially by a business we're patronizing, we want to just lay into that business owner, don't we? For the most part, however, we never mention it because we believe our criticism will not receive a positive reaction. So, we never mention it, except to our friends, family and co-workers. That doesn't help the business' reputation much.

This recently happened to me, both when I was on the business side and when I was the customer. One Monday not long ago a client called and asked me if I knew why he was calling. I answered that "no," I didn't. He told me that he had emailed me the week before asking for a form he had not gotten from an investment. I had emailed him back to say that our service manager was on vacation and it would be the next Monday before we could get that to him. It was mid-afternoon on Monday and he had not heard from us, and he was frustrated. He suggested we do some cross-training of our staff so each one in our four-person office could do each other's jobs. What he didn't know was that we already had started the cross-training, but that the person being trained was out with the COVID virus. So, even though it was obvious he was frustrated with us, he offered a suggestion regarding how we could improve. While it wasn't fun to hear how we were not up to our normal standards, I knew I

needed to hear it and work harder on making our service even more responsive.

On the customer side, one recent morning I had an appointment to take my dog to the vet. They are not yet allowing owners into their clinic, so we are supposed to pull up and they'll have someone come out to retrieve our dog. They told me to be there between 8:00 and 8:30 AM. I got there at 8:00. By 8:15 there had been two other cars pull up and had their dogs retrieved by the office staff. I got out of my car and walked up to the front door. A sign said I was supposed to call them when I got there to check-in. It was a small sign, unreadable from the parking lot, and no one had told me to call them when I got there. Then I had to wait another 15 minutes for them to retrieve my dog so I could come to work.

Maybe it WAS my fault for not walking up to the door when I first got there so I could see their phone number, but I do believe they could have been more pro-active with me. But, like I said before, I didn't say anything. I just came on to work. And even though this vet's office is very convenient to my home, I'll probably switch veterinarians.

I tell you those stories for this reason; if someone has the courage to offer you some positive criticism, don't ignore it. Listen intently. Thank them. Then act on the suggestions if you can. You'll most likely keep the customer and improve your business. What does all this have to do with investing? Well, I think that the better the adviser listens, the better his advice is likely to be. And, as Forrest Gump once said, that's all I have to say about that!