

Don't Make Someone Want to Strangle You



By Scott Burt

This month's column has absolutely nothing to do with painting and everything to do with business practices. The simple things that probably many of us take for granted, but that make all the difference in the world to the person on the receiving end of our services. You know, those who write and hand us checks.

Recently, I had a problem with my laptop. The DC jack (which is the little receptacle that you plug the charger into) had become sloppy and would no longer allow for a solid connection through which to charge the battery. There are many aspects of my life in which I will break out tools and do things I shouldn't, but electronics is not one of those aspects.

I felt like a consumer. Like one of my (or your) customers. When they get that first thought: "We need to get the house painted, what do we do?" Only it was: "I need to get this laptop repaired quickly, what do I do?" In classic consumer form, my first stop was at one of those large home appliance/electronics stores that has an in-house squad of nerds who do stuff for electronically inept people like myself. I went in expecting some geek to break out a tool kit and a soldering gun, grab a new jack from the shelf and fix my computer on the spot. I was not so pleasantly surprised to learn that they send out repairs like that to the service center, because there is soldering involved. This process would take a week and would cost \$100.

Deciding to take my chances with a more local service, I went on the prowl. I made several phone calls to everyone I know, asking if they knew a good computer repair service for my laptop. Unanimously, everyone told me that no one really repairs things like this any more, you just buy a new one. I remembered buying a new washer and dryer last year for similar reasons and thought in some depth about our disposable society. I needed a coffee in order to process this dilemma, so I pulled into Starbucks. I had never noticed, but conveniently located right next door is a

I showed him my computer issue. He told me that a new DC jack would cost exactly \$189 and that it would have to be sent to their downtown tech facility, which should take no more than three days, probably more likely one or two. In classic consumer form, I was willing to pay \$89 more to get my computer back in a day or two instead of a week. I emphasized to him that I needed the computer back as quickly as possible and was willing to pay that price to have it in a day or two. I filled out a repair order and left the computer. This was on a Tuesday.

So, I waited until Thursday to call.

The same kid from Tuesday told me that my laptop was still at the service center, should be back any time. On Friday I called again and got an answering machine. I left a message indicating that it was day four of what was promised to me as a three-day-or-less project. No one called back. On Saturday, I called again. The punk kid told me that the DC jack had been

replaced but that the power cord I left with the computer appeared to be shorted out, so they had ordered a new one.

My blood pressure spiked. I told him that I had an extra power cord and would be right over. He told me that the computer was still downtown at the undisclosed service center, which I now suspected to be some computer science major in a dorm room. Punk snowboard kid explained that he was the only one in the store and would not be able to pick the laptop up until after work, which would put us into Monday. I told him I would be in the store on Monday morning at 9:00 a.m. with another power cord.

Well, as you might imagine, I was in

“Always do what you say you are going to do, when you say you are going to do it.”

small, local computer service and support center. Score!

To heck with the geeks, I would support local, modest, independent technicians. When I walked into the shop, I noticed the front counter with a large curtain behind it. While it looked kind of creepy, I was open minded. From behind the curtain sprung a kid of about 20 wearing all black, including a stocking cap similar to the infamous one OJ wore that night. Most notably, this kid's eyes were popping out of his head. He looked like he would be as comfortable snowboarding a half pipe as setting up a network. Wow, I thought, perfect little computer geek for this simple repair.

the store on Monday morning at 9:00 a.m. and my computer was not there. Something had come up, which made it impossible to pick it up on Saturday after the store closed. My guess is that Saturday afternoon there was some good spring snowboarding to be done. He promised me that my computer would be back in the store by 3:00 that day. I returned at 3:00, no computer.

With a week gone by now, I called in on Tuesday morning and asked to speak with the owner. The owner told me that the jack had not been replaced yet and that it would be at least another couple of days, as the service center was very backed up. I am pretty good with words, both written and verbally. There were no words to describe my mental state at that point other than "I will be in your store at 3:30 today to pick up my laptop, fixed or not."

I was running early, so I stopped at the Starbucks next door. Sitting there, sipping on a chai and pondering everything

that was wrong with this situation and what could be learned from it, I saw the punk snowboard dude wheel into the back parking lot of the computer store in a clapped-out Subaru. He ran inside carrying a laptop.

That was my cue. I wandered across the parking lot and into the store. "I'm Scott Burt, here to pick up my laptop." Some other kid was behind the counter. "What kind of laptop was it?" I felt that vein in my forehead start to throb. "HP G60." The kid goes behind the curtain and aimlessly wanders around the room full of computer carcasses for about 10 minutes. Makes a phone call. The snowboard dude is nowhere in sight. Somehow, a few minutes later he comes out from behind the curtain, hands me my computer and two power cords. He explains to me that they had been unable to do the repair because the power cord I had provided was the wrong one for the computer. He shows

me how it doesn't fit the jack. With a very deep breath, I tell him that this is not the power cord I provided. Without hesitation, he goes back behind the curtain, comes out with the right one. I take my stuff and leave.

There are times when I have a lot of sympathy for what consumers go through in the attempt to receive honest treatment in the procurement of services that they don't know much about. As I drove off with my now one-week-out-of-service laptop, I remembered something I learned from a boss I had in high school. "Always do what you say you are going to do, when you say you are going to do it." That's not so much to ask. **APC**

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