

# The Herald

## Defining good service

Dave Eatwell / for the Puyallup Main Street Association

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Last week I attended the 22nd annual Washington Downtown Revitalization Institute held in Wenatchee.

It was a very good conference, very well worth the investment. One of the presentations that stood out was the opening keynote by Michael Meines, an experienced trainer in customer relations. Meines' talk stood out because it ran against the grain of presentations on customer relations that I have heard before.

I have always recoiled at the timeworn "The customer is always right" and "The customer always comes first" attitude. Those statements, at face value, imply that "The staff person is always wrong" and "The staff is not a priority." To me it was intuitive, but Michael Meines is the first recognized authority to affirm what I have always felt. Good customer service is not so much about who is right. And, at the end of the transaction, both the customer and the staff person should have their needs met.

Again, Meines gave voice to a concept to which I have always secretly subscribed: In the service business, selfishness works. In this impersonal world of cell phones, text messaging, e-mails and similarly homogenized human interaction, all anyone really wants is to be treated with dignity by those people with whom he or she comes in contact. And if you want to be treated with dignity, the best way to establish and maintain that trend is to treat other people with respect. Sounds simple enough.

Meines articulated another sentiment that has guided much of my life: The most valid reason to provide service to another person is that it makes you feel good.

Sure, a lot of altruistic, selfless reasons can be tossed around, but this is the one that sticks. If it does not make you feel good to help someone resolve a problem or to share your expertise and knowledge on a product or service, at some level it probably shows in the way you deal with that person. Unfortunately, profit motive is not an especially endearing purpose. We have all had encounters with

misplaced people behind a counter who made it plain that their life was being interrupted.

On the other hand, everyone has their own Nordstrom story of how a Nordy's associate went out of the conventional boundaries to meet your needs. For me, it was a brand of men's cologne that went out of production. No one else had carried it for a few years. A friend told me that she saw a bottle of it in a Nordstrom store in a city some distance away. I called the store and they had it back in a storeroom. The sales clerk took my credit card information, charged me the close-out price and shipped the cologne to me without shipping or handling fees.

Nordstrom empowers their sales associates to do what makes them feel good. Serving their customers make the sales associates feel good at the end of the day.

It is up to each person who works in retail or service business to find what about their business makes them feel good. Then make it the focal point of your day.

Meines had a lot more to say in his 75-minute presentation and I encourage anyone in retail or service to look him up on the Web. But only do it if you feel good about it.

Dave Eatwell is the executive director of Puyallup Main Street Association. Visit the Puyallup Main Street Association at [www.puyallupmainstreet.com](http://www.puyallupmainstreet.com).

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