

(Style on a Dime) Getting your money's worth... every time

Written by Marcia Humphrey
Friday, 14 August 2009 16:11

Being a frequent (bargain) shopper, there is one thing that I feel quite strongly about- good customer service. While I understand that all of my bargain hot-spots won't yield the same level of service (think Macy's vs. Goodwill), when I am patronizing a reputable establishment, I expect to be treated in a befitting manner. That's why I was so outdone after an overnight stay at the Doubletree in downtown Minneapolis.

See, I left my favorite high-end designer blouse in the hotel room and immediately called the next day to retrieve it. After speaking with the housekeeping manager, I had a feeling the outcome would not be a good one. His lack of professionalism and then his lack of follow through prompted me to contact the hotel's general manager. After leaving about three detailed messages with Mr. General Manager and receiving no return call, I was fighting mad (we are talking about my favorite white blouse here!). At this point I realized that I'd likely never see my blouse again, however, I refused to allow the hotel staff to disregard me and my money like that (After all, this was one of those rare occasions where I had paid full-price for the room!) The fight then went from being about my blouse to being about the principles of common courtesy and respect.

To make a long story short, I contacted Doubletree's corporate office (they are part of the Hilton family of hotels), and ultimately received a suitable apology. It came in the form of a voucher for a free night's stay at any of the Hilton hotels or suites. Still a bit upset over my beloved blouse, I was unsure if my relationship with Hilton Hotels would ever be the same, but I definitely planned to use the voucher during our family's summer "down south" road trip. When we arrived at the Embassy Suites in St. Louis, we were greeted with outstanding customer service from the manager. She not only redeemed our voucher, she informed us of other specials that were available. In short, she demonstrated that she valued our business and that made all the difference! The next morning we enjoyed a complimentary made-to-order breakfast buffet. If purchased separately, the breakfast alone could easily have cost over \$60 for our crew of five! We had a great experience and I am no longer mad at the Hiltons (or Paris!).

The point I am trying to make is this: When you use your hard-earned dollars to purchase goods and services, get what you pay for. Don't support businesses that treat you poorly. Your money is your power. In addition, if you don't receive good customer service, instead of leaving as a secretly-disgruntled customer, make some noise! Okay, I don't mean literally, but figuratively. Write a letter or send an email to the company president. Depending on the situation, consider contacting the Better Business Bureau, or local newspaper. Politely, yes politely, state your concerns and disappointments. Don't lie, don't over exaggerate, and don't be unreasonable. Be persistent and professional and give the offending company an opportunity to make amends and win you back as a customer.

Everyone is entitled to a few mistakes, so make allowances for others' imperfections and whenever possible, leave room for reconciliation. Although I would have preferred retrieving my blouse over receiving a free night's stay at the hotel (seriously, the blouse was 'all that'), I was satisfied with their efforts to make restitution. We enjoyed a comfortable night's sleep and awoke refreshed.

I am reminded of a Bible verse in Proverbs which basically states that everyone enjoys a fitting

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reply; it is wonderful to say the right thing at the right time! Proverbs 15:23 This wisdom should flow in both directions. Not only should you expect to get the treatment you deserve as a customer, you should always extend the same respect (and necessary restraint) that you desire while expressing your viewpoint. Even in your dissatisfaction, choose to use words that will compel others to help and not hinder you. The outcome will always be much better. Enjoy!

Marcia Humphrey is an interior decorator and home stager who specializes in achieving high style at a low cost. A native of Michigan, she and her husband, Lonnie, have three children.