



Are You Listening? Check Your Dashboard!

*“If you make listening and observation your occupation
you will gain much more than you can by talk.”*

-Robert Baden-Powell

Warning Lights

I inherited my mother’s 2005 Mercury Grand Marquis last year and my wife inherited her father’s 2008 Cadillac DTS this past summer. Our driveway looks like a used car lot!

The Cadillac rides nice, but it has several problems. The dashboard lights up continuously telling us that the tire pressure is low on two tires and the airbag warning light stays on all the time. We immediately took the car to a dealership where the service manager said that there is nothing wrong with the car; the sensors are just faulty. He said my wife could drive with peace until she wants to change out the sensors.

When you think about it, your business has several “warning lights” that go off telling you something needs attention. Sometimes you keep going and ignore them (like we were told to do with the Cadillac). But often the warnings should warrant your attention immediately. These require you to make changes or repairs right away.

Every year millions of people tune in to watch the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day parade. Many watched in horror in 1997 when the winds were so gusty that several of those enormous balloons that delight children were blown out of the line. The Barney balloon was punctured and had to be dragged down and deflated. The Cat in the Hat balloon blew into a light pole, dislodging it. The pole came down on parade viewers and put a young lady in a coma for one month. She sued the parade, Macy’s and the light pole makers.

The crashing balloons in 1997 changed the way the parade preparations are made forever. Since this incident, the parade has paid closer attention to wind warnings. There was a threat that the balloons might not be displayed in 2019, but the “all clear” message was issued, and the parade went on. Otherwise insurance companies wouldn’t allow the parade to continue unless certain safety measures were in place.

What “warning light” is your business receiving from dissatisfied customers? Are your employees happy and conveying a pleasant message of business to your customers? Is your organization generating good feelings to do business with, or is it chasing business away?

The second step in Reinvention (after questioning every single thing you do and processes you have in place) is to listen to your complaints. I call it, “Checking Your Dashboard for Warning Lights.”

Carrier Complaints

In last month’s article we looked at the creation of the iPhone. Do you remember the top complaint about the new device? Initially it was only available through a contract with AT&T. Their network didn’t have the best coverage for cellular service and sales were stunted. The catch was if you wanted an iPhone, you had to switch companies and use a less reliable carrier.

Daniel Lyons, former Senior Editor at Forbes wrote, “Early on, Android phones were pitched as kind of ersatz iPhones, devices that could do most of what an iPhone did - but were available on carriers other than AT&T, a relatively horrible network that was the biggest source of complaints about Apple's transformative device.”

Forbes continued, “I used to be a pretty hard-core iPhone fan. But over time, I grew more and more frustrated with the lousy service on AT&T. My iPhone simply could not reliably make and hold a phone call. Not just in New York and San Francisco, where I spend a lot of time, and where AT&T's service has been notoriously bad for years.”

That complaint and many others drove Apple to record sales when it was addressed. At the end of their exclusive contract with AT&T, Apple made the phone available to all carrier services. In my book, *Reinvention Made Easy: Change Your Strategy, Change Your Results*, I wrote about the scarcity of iPhones at Verizon the month they became available. Verizon’s online ordering system was sold out in mere days when the new device was introduced. Retail stores couldn’t keep up with demand, either. Verizon learned that they were selling more phones because of their carrier service to customers.

“I'm a very strong believer in listening and learning from others.”
-Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Pizza Problems

What are your customers telling you about your business? Do you believe them? Are you listening to their concerns? With the presence of Yelp, Trip Advisor, Google Reviews, HubSpot and TrustPilot your customers can (and DO) review your services. I have left reviews of great service and very poor service and give detailed examples of both.

My model train club meets every week for dinner before going over to the clubhouse. Up until last Spring, we went to a Pizza restaurant and the service was great. Most evenings we made up 80% to 90% of the customers in the place. It has very few patrons on other nights.

Then a new manager took over. Immediately we noticed the service went downhill. Service slowed down and was surly. The new servers treated us like it was a hassle and getting in their way of resting. The food preparation and accuracy of orders became poor. After several concerns expressed, we noticed no change.

One evening our usual orders were delayed by over an hour and delivered cold and incorrectly. Our server vanished and we had problems getting our bills. When a member expressed concern nicely to the cashier, she snapped at him about how he had no right to criticize them. I witnessed this and wrote about it on Yelp. Another member reviewed the incident on Google Reviews. We haven't been back.

The new place we go is wonderful and loves suggestions to improve menu items. They are thriving. It's not our patronage; it's management that listens to customers, attentive wait staff and responsive management. Meanwhile, the restaurant where we used to dine is struggling for business... and clues, too. They believe they are right to serve customers their way – not the customer's.

*Every one of us have things that we believe about ourselves when nobody else is looking, nobody else is listening, nobody else is monitoring what we're doing.
We believe things about ourselves.”
-Dr. Phil McGraw*

What's Your Listening Policy?

Whenever I am in Canada, I enjoy stopping in their A&W restaurants. The fast food chain is much stronger there than in the US. Their CEO, Susan Senecal, has been credited for reviving the franchise. She has led the way for A&W to open 37-45 new stores annually for the past several years. Susan says her team listens to young people, because they know their future is in franchising.

Under her leadership, A&W introduced several menu items to reach the Millennials and Generation Z population that paid off financially. Their marketing team introduced non-hormone burgers. Off that success they made more changes as they listened to their clientele better.

Today they feature vegetarian burgers (something Burger King just introduced in the US), downtown stores open 24 hours, enlisting more Millennial franchisees and training more younger people to not just work in, but manage the stores.

Senecal says that the trend is now leaning strongly toward breakfast as an all-day offering and more Beyond Meat items. She says that responding to what people want is the chain's driving force.

The greatest need I find when I am contracted to lead sales workshops is instructing sales account executives to listen more than talk about themselves and their "features." If you listen to customers and prospects, you'll find more needs and discover benefits you can sell. Every sales manager should teach their teams to listen better. Practice listening exercises in meetings. Require new hires to observe. Learn to diagnose problems and sell based on existing needs, not pre-supposed thoughts.

*"Learning about and from your customers isn't always easy
and requires a commitment to continual observation."
-John Rampton*

What would your team look like if every individual was required to be a Professional Observer, rather than server, sales rep, team member, manager, director or deliverer? Your ability to listen is the greatest skill you can develop in business. Listen to peoples' complaints, listen to their joys, listen to their stories and listen to their frustrations. Develop a "Listening Policy." This policy will guide your priorities and renew your vigor. It will also be the best step you can take to reinvent your business and personal attitude.

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