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Thank You for Your (Customer) Service

Ellen C. Wells



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Like many kids, Teenage Ellen had braces. The orthodontist's office was about a half mile or so from my Junior High, and if it was good weather, I'd walk to my orthodontia appointments, which were usually scheduled for my lunch period. I could chow down my bologna and mustard sandwich on my way back.

I remember one of those visits to Dr. Big Thumbs vividly (seriously, there should be a thumb size limit for anyone in that profession). It was a lovely spring day, made only lovelier by the happy blue sky. One of those days where you'd just sit outside and forget your duties and obligations and soak in the sun. Ahhhh...

No, I did not stop and linger. But that is what I imagine my orthodontist did, or perhaps the assistant, as I was kept waiting in the Chair of Dental Doom for nearly an hour. I had been shown into the procedure room, was placed in the

chair, had the bib tied around my neck and was tilted back in the chair—and then was left alone to contemplate an M. C. Escher painting of a canal flowing uphill and cascading down and up and around again and again and again. I was a teen—of course I didn't get up and see where everyone had gone, nor did I give them heck when they eventually realized I was still there. The doctor and the assistant walked in sheepishly, but didn't even express their regrets.

When someone asks me for an example of bad customer service, that's the real-life experience I share. On top of suddenly becoming invisible (so not cool for a teenage ego), I wasn't given the respect of an apology.

If I look on the bright side (as the Monty Python troupe encourages one to do), I've been given the opportunity since this orthodontic debacle to experience some much-superior, in-person customer service interactions. Many have happened in the past few months in small New England towns. Want some for instances?

Bay State Window and Door, where I took my window screens for repair and replication. A bowl of cat treats alongside the dog treats on the counter, I puzzled? For the cats who damage the screens, I was told. It was a fun, tongue-in-cheek thank you to the screen-damaging cats for their business. I like how Bay State rolls, so much so that calling them for quotes on two screen doors is next on my to-do list after finishing this piece.

Lowe's window treatment department, where I placed a hefty order. My new BFF Linda automatically adjusted my order based on a quick visit before the blinds came in, and also saw I was being charged too much. In the end she

saved me well over \$100.

The paint guy at Ace Hardware (who is also the yard guy and the electrical guy and the plumbing guy and ...).

“Honestly, I can’t tell a whole lot from the paint chip you brought in, and the sample might be different for you than it is for me based on the dirt on my hands, but I’m going to tell you this: I’m going to guess the previous paint was this (picks a can off a shelf). Here’s a range of brushes to use with latex paint because of XYZ. Any will do. You should be all set.” It was a perfect paint match and I’ll go nowhere else from now on. Plus? All T, no shade gets my business every day of the week (you Drag Race fans know what I’m talking about).

The way I see it, what all good customer service has in common is an origin of honesty. Be it the servers from whom I ask their personal opinion of a menu item or the cable guy who explained I didn’t need this extra package and could save a bunch, these folks speak from a place of truth and experience. Maybe they end up telling you something you don’t want to hear, like you can’t grow sunflowers in the shade. But in the end, they’re giving you the respect you deserve. **GP**