



JOHN FRYE

Some customers, by their attitude, almost seem to ask the service technician for overcharging and poor service.

HOW TO BE A GOOD SERVICE CUSTOMER

CC **M**AC," Barney said to his employer, "do you know the name of the joker who first said, 'The customer is always right'?"

"Can't say as I do, right offhand," the service shop owner replied, "but you sound as though you don't agree."

"I most certainly don't," the redheaded Irish youth said emphatically, "and I'll bet that glib-tongued guy would choke on his words if he had to deal with some of the chiseling characters who come in here."

"I get it! You've just had another run-in with Catalog-Carrying Charlie!" Mac guessed, grinning broadly.

"You're so right. He left just before you came back from lunch. He was in here brandishing that dog-eared wholesale electronic parts catalog of his under my nose and demanding to know why we charged him \$1.40 for a radio tube he could have ordered from the catalog for only \$0.83."

"I hope you told him."

"And how I told him! I said if he had known which tube he needed, and if he could have been sure that was all that was wrong with his radio, and if he had been willing to pay postage on the order for the tube plus the charge for his check or money order, and if he had been willing to wait a week on the tube, and if he had been willing to accept the fact that if the new tube were bad he'd have to pay postage to return it, he probably could have ordered the new tube for only slightly more than we charged him."

"What did he say to that?"

"He spluttered a lot, but I didn't let him off the hook that easily. I went on to explain the difference between the wholesale and the list price of the tube was to **pay us** for giving time and place utility to the electronic parts we stock. We're being paid for having those parts right here waiting on him when he needs them. What's more, we made sure that (a) his radio really needed that particular tube, and (b) that was all it needed. If his new tube becomes defective within the warranty period, we replace it immediately at no charge. Since we must pay rent, lights, heat, water, telephone, insurance, and several other bills if we are to keep this place open, ready for his convenience when he has trouble with his electronic equipment, we can't sell parts for what they cost us any more than can any other store."

"I'll bet that sent him off talking to himself."

"It surely did. But Charlie isn't the only pain-in-the-neck customer we have. The Electronic Hypochondriac is just as bad. You know the type I mean. He's the sort who is constantly looking for trouble with his electronic gear. He calls us to see if we don't think maybe the bass response of his hi-fi isn't a bit too boomy, or if the linearity of his TV set isn't a bit imperfect, or if perhaps the sensitivity of his radio may not be off a trifle. Then he becomes indignant if we charge him for telling him there's nothing wrong with his equipment but his imagination."

"My pet peeve is the Stop-the-Presses Guy," Mac said. "He's the bird who comes dashing in all in a lather and gives us a terrific song and dance to the effect he has to have his radio or TV set repaired immediately. It reportedly belongs to a poor old aunt who is a shut-in and lives only for her

programs. Every hour she is without her radio or television set causes her acute mental anguish and may even shorten her life. We drop everything and get the set out my pronto. Then what happens? It sits here for two or three weeks before the guy drops in very casually to pick it up, lingering only long enough to gripe a little about our 'hounding' him to get the set!"

"The Belittler rubs me the wrong way just about as much," Barney went on. "He's the one who tries to beat down the service charge in advance by 'belittling' the difficulty in the set. He assures you there can't be much wrong. 'Probably just a weak tube or a loose wire,' he tells you. He reasons there can't be much wrong 'because it was playing perfectly just before it quit.' I like to remind him that sounds very much like what they say about a fellow who drops dead of a heart attack."

"You've got a real mean streak in you," Mac said with a grin. "But how about the Man with a Relative in the Racket? Said relative is usually a nephew who 'is taking up radio' in the army or maybe a cousin who wires houses and consequently 'knows a lot about electricity and radio and stuff like that.' At any rate, this relative looked at the defective set and instantly knew what was wrong with it—which is a pretty neat trick that I wish I could emulate. He would have fixed it himself if he only had his equipment with him, but he assured our customer that 'any serviceman worth his salt could fix the set in ten minutes and should not charge more than a buck or so.' That leaves us with the ticklish and thankless job of proving the genius relative guessed wrong—which he does, of course, in the great majority of cases."

"Suspicious Sam is probably the hardest to stomach of the whole lot," Barney offered. "He has read every article ever published on the general subject of 'The TV Serviceman Will Gyp You' and quotes freely from them at every opportunity. He makes it plain he is on to all our little crooked ways and schemes and that he is not going to be gypped without a struggle. He wants all work-even major realignment-done right in his house, and he breathes on the back of your neck every moment you're working on his set. He demands actual proof that every component you remove is bad, and he threatens you with the Better Business Bureau if a replacement part is not an identical twin of the one you removed. His whole attitude is a constant reminder he fully expects you to try to cheat him; and, quite candidly, were I going to cheat anyone, he would be the one I'd do it to—just to prove how foolish it is to try to check up on a technician working at something you know nothing about."

"That brings up a subject about which I've been thinking for some time," Mac remarked. "Perhaps we've had too many articles on how to be a suspicious customer and not enough on how to be a good service customer. After all, the brutal fact is that it is no longer a customer's market; it's a repairman's market today. There are simply not enough available service technicians to take care of all the radios, TV sets, automobiles, washing machines, and other household appliances that break down by the thousands every hour. A good service technician can have all the business he

wants and more; so a customer is not doing him a tremendous favor by dumping an ailing piece of equipment on his bench.

"Rut if he is a good technician, he still takes pride and satisfaction in doing a good repair job, especially for a customer he likes and respects. On the other hand, he is not at all inclined to try to hold a whining, complaining, chiseling customer; and he certainly will not make a special effort to do a first-class job for *one* of these. The sooner such a customer takes his business elsewhere, the happier the service technician will be. Maybe that's not the way it should be, but that's the way it is; and the service customer must face up to it if he hopes to get good service."

"Hear, hear!" Barney applauded. "And since service technicians are also service customers, I've got an idea. Let's see if we can't cook up a sort of Ten Commandments for our service customers that will also apply when we have to have our automobiles or washing machines or lawn mowers repaired."

"Not a half-bad idea," Mac agreed. "Let me start with the first commandment: Make sure you really *need a service technician before you* call one. Make sure the device is properly plugged in. Are all switches and knobs in the proper position? Are the antenna leads in place? Is the station on the air, or are you sure the TV cable system is functioning? If you haven't used the equipment for a spell, get out the instructions and study them. You know, for example, how many radios we get that have nothing wrong except the radio-phono switch is in the phono position, a bandchange switch is set to a dead short-wave band or the FM position. By sheer coincidence, of course, such things are especially prone to happen after a visit from grandchildren."

"I think Commandment Two should read: *Pick a service technician you think you can trust.* Rely more on the recommendation of friends and neighbors than you do on advertising claims. If you know one good technician—be it a garage mechanic, appliance repairman, or what have you—ask him. One technician is usually a good judge of another, even in a different line of work."

"Number Three: Be Ready for *the technician when he* calls. His time is valuable, and you're paying for it. Have all pertinent symptoms written down. List any long-standing little annoyances, such as loose knobs, you want repaired while the technician is working on the set. And have everything cleared off the top of the TV set before he arrives."

"Number Four: *Don't hesitate to ask* for an estimate before okaying *the repair*, and *find out the estimate charge*

when you call **the** shop," Barney advised. "A reputable technician will respect you for doing so."

"Number Five," Mac chimed in, "might go: **Don't expect a technician to display much enthusiasm for working on foreign-made electronic equipment.** It may have been low in cost and work well, but when it fails it's tough to service because of a lack of adequate service information and the difficulty of securing replacement parts."

"Here's Number Six," Barney offered: **"Don't try to tell the technician what to do.** If you do, he will carry out your suggestions first and then find what is really wrong with the set and fix it. You'll be paying for things you didn't need."

"Along that same line, I can suggest three other commandments." Mac said. "Number Seven: **Don't try to rush the technician.** Give him time to do a good job."

"Number Eight: **Don't insist on watching the technician work or try to help him.** Good troubleshooting requires intense concentration and the application of all the senses. Talking to the technician or allowing children to annoy him is bound to cost you money."

"Yeah, that reminds me of a sign I saw in a service shop. It read: 'We charge five dollars an hour; or seven dollars if you watch; or ten dollars if you help.'"

"There's more truth than poetry there," Mac chuckled. "Anyway, here's Number Nine: **Let the technician know you respect both his ability and his honesty.** People—even technicians—have a funny habit of giving what is expected of them."

"Let me suggest the last one," Barney said. "Number Ten: **If you are pleased with the repair job call the shop and say so.** This will doubtless astonish them no end, but it may very well react in your favor the next time you have to call them."

"Amen," Mac concluded; "and let's be sure that you and I remember all these when we are asking for service instead of dishing it out." A