

ETHICS ROLL CALL

L I S T E N I N G T O T H E I N N E R V O I C E



Serving Others Publically or Privately?

by Dan Primozic, Ph.D.

We are consistently reminded that “customer service,” “public service,” or what I will call for the sake of simplicity “serving others,” is not quite up to par these days – and perhaps it never was. We are bombarded by true stories from the business world concerning outrageous and degrading shows of customer *disservice*.

One particularly troubling report of such customer disservice came to me recently in a flight magazine under the title “Must Read.” I mention the source of this report because, ironically enough, I read the entry (that I, apparently, just *had* to read) after an equally troubling bit of customer disservice that I suffered at the expert hands of the airline that I chose to fly with that day – which shall remain nameless. For reasons that I do not fully understand myself, I have decided to spare that airline their share of well-deserved suffering in payment for my under-served suffering. Perhaps this is due merely to a deficiency in my upbringing.

The flight magazine article concerned a book by Emily Yellin entitled *Your Call is (Not That) Important to Us: Customer Service and What it Reveals About Our World and Our Lives*.¹ According to the author of that work, we have come a very long way from “the customer is always right.” From my own experience I cannot but agree. I recall my own training as a department store clerk in my early work years. I was taught the age-old allegory of what I refer to “business ethics in a can.”

Marshall Field, the owner of the then world famous Chicago department store, was said to have overheard one of his clerks arguing with a female customer who wished to return an item that she had purchased from his store. Field allegedly stopped the clerk mid-sentence and uttered the famous order to “give the lady what she wants.”

Now, even though I do not believe anyone in their right mind ever expects any such imperial treatment from those who are paid to serve us, I brood over the distance between those glorious “customer service” days of yore and what we all experience far too often today. Does it really need to be as bad as it has become? But just how bad is it? How badly do we treat each other as human beings, even when we may earn our living for *servicing* others?

One exceptionally revealing tale of this kind of woe came in the Yellin excerpt. Yellin recounts how, in 2007, seventy six year old Mona Shaw had taken her disappointment with the customer disservice she received from her cable company where no one had gone before. A technician was scheduled to install her cable, internet, and telephone service and arrived two days late, only to have left the installation half undone, never to return. This communication condition was worsened further by the company cutting off her existing telephone service entirely without warning or reason.

She and her husband found it necessary, therefore, to troop off to the local physical cable office to straighten out this mess only to be told that the manager required them to wait outside the office in the summer Washington D. C. heat, which they did for over two hours. They were

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INSTITUTE FOR LAW
ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION
(THE CENTER FOR AMERICAN
AND INTERNATIONAL LAW)
5201 DEMOCRACY DRIVE
PLANO, TX 75024
972.244.3430 OR
800.409.1090
972.244.3431 FAX
WWW.THEILEA.ORG

ETHICS CORNER

There is an old but very worthy book that Benjamin Franklin wrote in the late 18th century called *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. In it he reveals a plan he developed at the age of twenty regarding the regulation of his future conduct that he put together on a sea voyage from London back to the United States. He wrote about this plan that he lived according to (more than less) when he was seventy-nine and said that he was solidly committed to the plan for the rest of his time on earth because by following it he was awarded significant happiness thus far.

His plan was comprised of thirteen virtues, each one with accompanying a brisk description (descriptions for which he was well known). We will present those thirteen virtues and descriptions as quotations in the next couple of editions of *Ethics Roll Call* (beginning with this edition). We think that, at best they just may do us the good that they did for Franklin and, at worst they can do us no harm. And after all, that is the primordial moral sentiment that we can commend to anyone: "First do no harm."

SERVING OTHERS

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then informed by an employee who leaned out the office door that the manager had left for the day and the company was grateful for their visit. Evidently, their visit was (not really) important to the manager.

After a weekend without any television, internet or phone service, Mona, a retired military nurse, and volunteer in a few local and national organizations, and her husband took hammers in hand, stormed back to the cable company office, whacked the keyboard, monitor and telephone of the cable customer service representative off their desk, and not only stood their ground when police arrived on the scene but gave a parting shot to another office telephone as they were escorted out and handcuffed. Mad Maxine, indeed!

Washington Post reporter, Neely Tucker is quoted in the Yellin piece as saying the follow-

ing about all this, which will likely capture some of the righteous, yet in this case criminal, indignation the Shaws and many of the rest of us feel when treated with such consummate disrespect:

Who among us has not longed for a hammer in this age of incompetent 'customer service representatives,' of nimrods reading from a script at some 800-number location, of crumbs-in-their-beards plumbing installation people who tell you they'll grace you with their presence between 12 and 3, only never to show? And you'll call and finally some out-sourced representative slings a dart at the calendar and tells you another guy will come back between 10 and 2 next Thursday? . . . And there is nothing, nothing you can do. Until there! On the horizon! It's Hammer Woman, avenger of oppressed cable subscribers everywhere! (Cue galloping *Lone Ranger* theme).ⁱⁱ

Clearly, if this specific cable company – again, escaping here the dishonor of being named – continues in this sort of customer disservice, it will likely eventually go out of business, even though at this point it enjoys a near monopoly in its region. The laws of business and economics will inevitably catch up to this sort of staggering incompetence and another, brighter, newer, better, more service-savvy company will snatch the market share and drive the huge, lumbering corporate ogre over the precipice of unprofessionalism. Marshall Field knew that, inevitably, the lady will get "what she wants," if not from his store then from a competitor that knows that good, reliable, and fair service is the very kernel of how people want to be treated by people that they are paying to provide it to them.

But, what does any of this have to do with law enforcement ethics? Plenty, as it turns out. With "to serve and protect" painted across police cars throughout this nation, the public somehow seems to expect that kind of treatment from the public servants that blatantly espouse those sentiments and draw tax-based salaries for so doing. And the law enforcement professionals that do so rightly take pride in those sentiments and the performance of the duties that manifest and justify those words. Yet, we are all painfully aware that this noble "talk is not always walked," and there are a small yet destructive minority of police employees that besmirch the

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**TEMPERANCE:
EAT NOT TO
DULLNESS AND
DRINK NOT TO
ELEVATION.**

**BENJAMIN
FRANKLIN**

SERVING OTHERS

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good name of the profession by betraying, cheating, and sometimes even abusing the public that they are sworn to serve. We take solace in the fact that those are a small minority of the police community but, yet, we should remain vigilant concerning this notion of “service to others” because so much of the weight of public trust rests upon it.

ⁱ Emily Yellin, *Your Call is (Not That) Important to Us: Customer Service and What it Reveals About Our World and Our Lives*, Free Press, 2009.

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*

Anatomy of Honorable Apology

by Dan Primozić, Ph.D.

Often as not, it really does come down to what we were taught as children. If you do something wrong to someone, you are, first, to feel badly about that and internally recognize the wrong that you have done. Then you are to transmit this heartfelt sorrow and apologize to those to whom you have wronged and that apology should look something like this: 1) take responsibility for the wrong — admit your wrongdoing and your subsequent self recrimination for it, 2) say to those wronged that you are truly sorry for the wrong (because you truly are sorry for it) and, 3) try to “fix it” or make the wronged person “whole” again (or somehow return to them their inherent, pre-wronged dignity). To perform the apology in this way for these reasons is to do the best one can to restore and

reconcile with those wronged and to try to reclaim their integrity for them and also one’s own integrity thereby.

This is an *honorable* apology and is the kind that should “work.” It is valuable because it is honorable and not because it should “work.” It should “work” because it is honorable. Ultimately that is why it is valuable: because honor is a value.

There has been a large raft full of noteworthy “apologies” covered in the media lately. The most prominent and most unsuccessful of those has been that which Tony Hayward offered on behalf of BP for the destruction and misery caused by their oil well in Gulf of Mexico. His can be seen as a study in the non-apology apology and one that did not “work.” He claimed to be sorry for the accident and at the same time also claimed that it was not BP’s fault. So, there was not realization and recognition of a wrong BP had done; no self recrimination for anything he and the BP staff could and should have done better, no taking responsibility for the wrongs that came about to the oilers, Gulf businesses and people or the environment; no true sorrow for his part in this (or lack of knowledge of it); and only a fear of deeper lawsuits if he did not try to compensate those hurt by the crisis or “fix” the mess that BP had caused. This apology hardly meets the requirements listed above for what an honorable apology looks like. And it surely did not “work.”

It was not honorable and did not work (and hence, was of little or no value) because, it lacked the most important piece of the anatomy of a valuable apology: it lacked the heartfelt, true sorrow for the wrong done. It lacked the true sorrow that comes along with knowing that there has been a fracture in one’s own integrity by causing harm or suffering for another person. That character “chain” of good and virtuous activity that one has developed over

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**SILENCE:
SPEAK NOT BUT
WHAT MAY
BENEFIT OTHERS
OR YOURSELF.
AVOID TRIFLING
CONVERSATION.**

**BENJAMIN
FRANKLIN**



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ANATOMY OF HONORABLE APOLOGY

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time has been broken and that, indeed, is a true pity.

It is clear that what Hayward was truly sorry for was all the complexity and problems that befell him and his company as a result of the crisis. But that should not be the target for an apology to another person. That is the target for a “self-apology” for a pain in the neck that was not there before the oil spill took place. Though I may understand that at some level, it does not lift to the level of an honorable thing.

I have gone to his treasure chest before in these spaces, and I now return to our old friend, Aristotle, again (and without apology). In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle point out that in order to perform virtuous acts virtuously:

The agent also must be in a certain condition when he does them; in the first place he must have knowledge, secondly he must choose the acts, and choose them for their own sakes, and thirdly his actions must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character. (1105a30-33)

So, according to Aristotle, for an apology itself to be virtuous, the one who says that he is “sorry” must know that he has done something wrong and must choose to apologize voluntarily and for the sake only to express his sorrow for his wrongdoing and not for the sake of something else. He must also do so from the platform of a “firm and unchangeable character,” because without that platform of character that has been established by having habitually performed virtuous acts, the person would not know that he had done wrong to begin with. Knowing right from wrong is established by a long habituation of doing right and avoiding wrong, just as knowing how to craft a fine cabinet is accomplished by many years of trying, failing, and learning to craft a fine cabinet by doing it again and again. This kind of learning and teaching of how to do the good and virtuous things provides knowledge of why specific acts are virtuous, some others are not, and which kind of habitual practices lead to which kinds of further choices and activities, etc.:

Hence any one who is to listen intelligently to lectures about what is noble and just and,

generally, about the subjects of political science must have been brought up in good habits. For the fact is the starting point, and if this is sufficiently plain to him, he will not at the start need the reason as well; and the man who has been well brought up has or can easily get starting points. (1095b 4-7)

This is all well and good. But where does this leave our discussion of the honorable apology? These days, it seems that apologies are valued because everyone knows that they are expected and, are therefore valuable to those who give them. Those non-apologies are seen as “good PR.” But, even if they have come to be *valued*, as mere PR moves they are not *valuable* because they are not honorable. They are not honorable because they are performed with the wrong target in view. They are performed from fear of increased liability and increased exposure to lawsuit and attendant damages. As such they are performed because of something external to the good of doing for its own sake. It is something that is done not entirely from one’s own volition, but instead is done because one is compelled to do so from external, involuntary, unwelcome circumstances. Such actions are not necessarily honorable or praiseworthy:

But what about actions done because of fear of greater evils, or because of something fine? Suppose, for instance, a tyrant tells you to do something shameful, when he has control over your parents and children, and if you do it, they will live, but if not, they will die. These cases raise dispute about whether they are voluntary or involuntary. . . . What sort of things, then, should we say are forced? Perhaps we should say that something is forced without qualification whenever its cause is external and the agent contributed nothing. (110a 5-110b3)

How does the above shed light on Hayward’s apology? I think it clear that his was the kind generated by something external, something he feared, something like the increased corporate exposure to liability. It was not coming from a sorrow within him for the wrong done to other people: hence he contributed nothing to the apology. His sorrow was for the wrong target. It was for a feared and anticipated loss of corporate PR and money and perhaps his own job. It was not for the wronged people and environment. It was therefore, not an honorable, virtuous, voluntary apology done in the right way, for

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**SINCERITY:
USE NO HURTFUL
DECEIT. THINK
INNOCENTLY
AND JUSTLY;
AND IF YOU
SPEAK, SPEAK
ACCORDINGLY.**

**BENJAMIN
FRANKLIN**

ANATOMY OF HONORABLE APOLOGY
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the right reasons, from the right platform of character.

His apology, therefore, did not “work” because it was not an apology but rather a technique to dodge unwelcome consequences. Everyone caught that fact about his apology. And they did not even need to read Aristotle or this article. It just shows. Some things are simply self-evident facts to those who might still retain the semblance of good character.

The Power of Perceptions

by Dan Carlson

Sitting at the kitchen table before heading to the office, the police chief picked up his coffee cup and opened the morning newspaper. As was his custom, he scanned the headlines and checked the sports scores ... and then his eyes fell upon a community-interest article about his agency. He knew that the piece had been in development for several months, and that the author – a high school journalism student - had interviewed a number of department employees, and had even taken part in a Citizen’s Police Academy. But he hadn’t seen a preview of the work, so he held his breath as he started to read what she had written.

Overall, the chief was satisfied with the positive tone of the article. He was especially pleased with the author’s observation that writing the piece had caused her to get know police officers better and given her a greater appreciation for the work that they do. Using a personal example to make her point, the writer acknowledged that while many high school students – herself included - were wary of the police, her experience in writing this piece had allowed her to see officers in a different light.

Near the end of the article, the author reported discussing her new-found understanding of police with a patrol sergeant. Telling him how much she valued being reminded that cops are good people who do good work in the community, she asked him about his views of citizens. According to the article, the sergeant replied: “People either love us or hate us ... and most people hate us.”

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Internal Affairs, Professional Standards and Ethics: Mark Your Calendars

We invite you to join us for the following course that speaks to ethical issues that “go to the heart of policing:”

The *Internal Affairs, Professional Standards and Ethics* course will take place from November 1-5, 2010 at the Center for American and International Law in Plano, Texas. This course prepares law enforcement personnel to manage internal complaints and investigations while addressing current legal and ethical issues and constraints.

All of our courses at the ILEA have a healthy dose of discussion concerning ethical issues in law enforcement. The course mentioned above is aimed at maintaining and enhancing the integrity of policing. Don’t miss the chance to join us for these widely-acclaimed learning opportunities.

For additional information on this course or other ILEA courses, please visit our web site at www.theILEA.org.

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Editor Daniel T. Primozić
Staff Assistant Tracy B. Harris

ORDER:
LET ALL THINGS
HAVE THEIR
PLACES. LET EACH
PART OF YOUR
BUSINESS HAVE
ITS TIME.
BENJAMIN
FRANKLIN

THE POWER OF PERCEPTION

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The chief put down his newspaper, looked out his kitchen window and sighed. He realized that he had some work to do when he got to the station.

Upon arriving at his office the chief summoned the patrol sergeant, showed him the article, and asked if the “most people hate us” quote was, in fact, accurate. The sergeant said it was. The chief then asked whether this observation truly represented the sergeant’s perception of how citizens view police officers, and the sergeant confirmed that it did.

Thanking the sergeant for his candor, the chief pointed out that while the sergeant had neatly separated the community into two distinct groups – those who love us and those who hate us – he had failed to mention the largest segment of the population ... those who are ambivalent about the police. And it is in this middle group – where people don’t think about the police until they find themselves engaged in some interaction – that the police have the greatest opportunity to influence a citizen’s decision to join either the “love us” or “hate us” group.

The chief could have continued on, but he decided to let the sergeant research the issue on his own. He instructed the sergeant to get on the internet and visit the home page of the Arizona POST (AZPOST.gov), where he would find an article titled *Confidence and Caution: Arizonan’s Trust in the Police* (July, 2007). The chief told him to read that article (which details the findings of a statewide survey of citizen perceptions of police in Arizona), reflect upon it briefly, and then report back in two hours.

When he returned to the chief’s office, the sergeant said that the article made a number of interesting points. Several, though, jumped out at him:

Citizens participating in the survey said that the single most important attribute that a police officer should have is the ability to treat the public with respect.

In referencing a 1997 Arizona study, the article pointed out that citizens and police both agreed that it is **most** important that police officers be honest, ethical and impartial.

Disappointingly, police officers responding to the 1997 survey said that learning about and becoming known by the community was, to them, **least** important.

The sergeant noted that, to him, the last point had the greatest meaning, for if police officers see little value in connecting with citizens, then all the hard work that has gone into building strong bonds with the community has been for naught.

“Keep that last thought in mind,” suggested the chief. “Now ask yourself how comments like those in today’s newspaper affect the perceptions that citizens have of law enforcement. In other words, do those sorts of observations make it more likely – or less likely – that people in the community will view our department as one that is open, approachable, trustworthy and committed to community policing?”

Elsewhere in this issue, the article titled “Serving Others Publically or Privately?” discusses the notion of customer service and today’s seemingly-endless litany of horror stories about the travails of trying to get an entity – either private or public – to deliver the service they are supposed to deliver. The difference, though, between faulty service by an airline and rude or uncaring behavior from a police officer is obvious ... the aggrieved traveler can patronize a competing carrier next time, but the offended citizen cannot choose to interact with a different police agency.

Smart airlines know the value of good customer service for they understand that the major problem is not the single dissatisfied customer ... it is the twenty-five other potential travelers who may never have flown with them, but who have now decided that they never will because of what they have heard or read about the experiences of that first fellow. Smart police departments also know how this works, for they understand that the way individual citizens are treated can have an impact well beyond that one interaction ... these “moments of truth” have the potential to affect the perceptions of twenty-five others who may never have come into contact with a police officer, but whose views – either positive or negative - have now indelibly been formed by the way that first citizen was treated.

**RESOLUTION:
RESOLVE TO PER-
FORM WHAT YOU
OUGHT. PERFORM
WITHOUT FAIL
WHAT YOU
RESOLVE.**

**BENJAMIN
FRANKLIN**