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9 February, 2011 - 09:43

Leader's Perspective

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I once considered printing "Please Complain" in big red letters on my business cards. You see, one of the great frustrations for a foodservice equipment service company is that operators and staff sometimes don't tell us there's a problem until it's too late for anybody to be happy.

Here's how it works. An equipment end-user isn't happy with some repairs or maintenance that a service company provided. The operator calls the dealer that provided the equipment in question. The dealer calls the manufacturers' rep who created the sale. The rep, naturally enough, calls the factory.

At that point, different factories take different courses of action. The best equipment manufacturers call the involved service company, tell them the problem related by the operator and help work out a solution that satisfies all of us

in the channel. Sadly, that's not always the case. And, even in the best case scenarios, all those indirect complaints take time to process, which just makes things worse for the operators and servicers.

So, here's my plea: Call us first and give us the opportunity to make it right. I know that nobody likes to complain. Most of us don't deal well with confrontation and there's nothing more intimidating than telling somebody the equivalent of, "You've got bad breath."

Everybody in the foodservice and restaurant industry is encouraging customers to tell them what needs to be improved and which problems need the most immediate resolution. We're all coming to realize that it is far better that customers bring their problems to their service and product providers, rather than posting their complaints on Facebook or Twitter.

There's a truism that reminds us that a customer whose complaint is resolved becomes more loyal than a customer who never has a problem. I know I get a positive vibe when I read an internet review of someone who had a problem that was resolved. In fact, some of the strongest customer relationships I've developed over the years started out with a complaint.

Now I've been told that it's bad form to ask your customers to do you a favor, but, I beg you, do me a favor. Please complain.

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