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The Reactor

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Service is Key to Success

I've been thinking about a couple of businesses in town. One I saw move from Sharp Park to Pedro Point to Linda Mar to Eureka Square. In its 20-plus years in business it has bounced around, yet it's had a consistent business philosophy throughout.

The other business has been on the same corners 33 years. In that time, its plan for long-term success was simple. Service, service, service.

I have been in Pacifica long enough to see many businesses come and go. Many of them went out of business through bad luck or bad judgment. Some simply did not understand the problems they were facing. One man opened a restaurant with a windfall from a successful lawsuit. He seemed determined to dissipate his funds as fast as he could. He succeeded. The restaurant became a success, but under different owners and a different specialty.

Another man ran his deli by the book, literally. He read that he should ring up at least 25 cents each time he opened the cash register, or he would lose money. A couple of teens came in to buy a 15-cent Pepsi. He ran them out of the store. "I can't afford to deal with you!" he yelled. Didn't take him long to go out of business.

A few years after he quit, another deli operator put up a small sign refusing to accept checks. I stopped for lunch. I didn't notice the sign until I had ordered. I had not touched the sandwich before I started to write him a check. He demanded cash, and threatened to call the police on me, though my only fault was not seeing his sign. We eventually compromised, but I never went back. A hoagie isn't worth the hassle.

In contrast to these gentlemen, there are the Periwinkle stores in Eureka Square, and Dave and Lou's Chevron at Linda Mar Boulevard and Coast Highway. The station is across the street from its 1956 location. It's been Associated, Phillips 66, Texaco and now Chevron. I'm reminded of the movie "Back to The Future." The service is still 1955 style.

Talk about the good old days! I don't buy all my gas there, but every time I pump my own gas at a self-serve station I fume. Every time I leave Dave and Lou's my windshield is clean. My oil has been checked. The price for real service is only a little more than the self-serve down the street. Dave and Lou's mechanic doesn't attempt to fix everything that goes wrong, but what he does is done with dispatch, care and candor.

When I took a class at Skyline, the teacher told us of a great place to buy supplies for the course. "Periwinkle in Pacifica," he said. I had no trouble believing that. Enid Emde and the rest of the staff seem to follow the Rotary Club concept of Service Above Self. The Emides are willing to innovate. They are also willing to admit to themselves when they make a mistake, and go back to more "primitive" ways of doing business. They have carefully built a firm customer base with friendship, quality and service. If that sounds trite, I refer you to the deli operators mentioned above.

The unfortunate fact about both Dave and Lou's and the Periwinkle stores is they aren't amenable to cloning. Pacifica has what is now the oldest Ross store in the civilized world, one of many hundreds, but there will never be a chain of Periwinkles, until someone finds a way to duplicate the Emides. I regret to say they are unique. As for Dave and Lou Nannini, they learned the lesson the big oil companies taught so well 40 years ago, and then themselves forgot. It's a simple lesson. Serve the customer . . . fully, honestly, pleasantly and speedily. Too bad it's been forgotten by so many.

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