

EDITORIAL

with Dawn Brown

The decline of customer service

Recently, I changed cell phone providers. While this task should have been a simple one, the provider I was leaving did its best to make the process as difficult as possible. While frustrating—after all, I had explained that I had already signed on with another provider, my contract was up, and so no matter how convoluted my previous provider made the situation, I was going—on a certain level I wasn't surprised. I might have even been expecting it.

The interesting thing—to me, anyway—about the entire thing was that I didn't switch because of price or coverage, and in fact I had been with the same provider for about five years. The reason I had stayed so long was based purely on their customer service. However, over the past two years I had noticed a shift in their telephone service. Customer service representatives that had at one time been friendly and helpful, had become bored, smug and, at times, even bordering on rude. I decided it was time for a change, but I wonder if the service will be all that much better once locked into another contract.

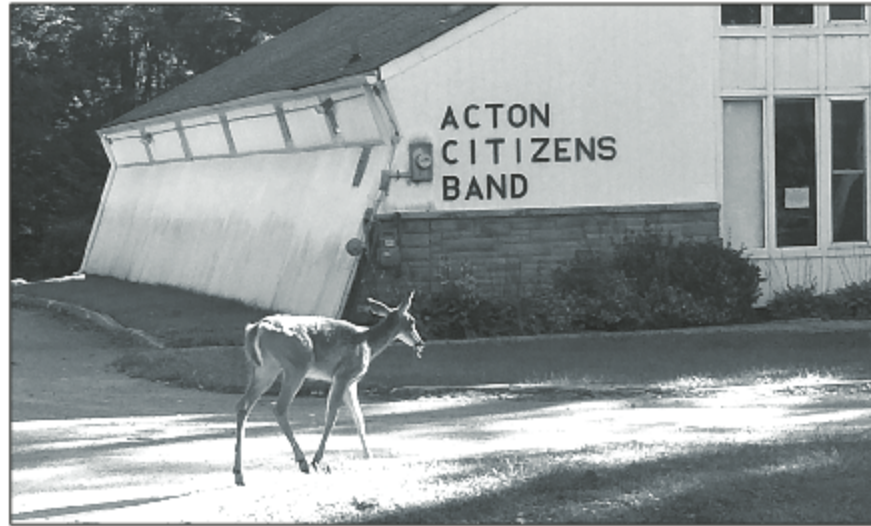
These days, good customer service seems to be becoming a thing of the past, a dinosaur, a lost relic to bygone age. Admittedly, with the aid of the internet, shoppers are becoming savvier, doing their own research before even stepping through a store entrance; often opting to make their purchases online instead. However, for those who are perhaps not as well versed with the internet, or those who want to deal with an actual person instead of a computer screen, they should be able to ask someone a question and get an answer beyond a shrug or an eye roll.

Last year, my husband and I purchase a larger item for our home. The salesman we dealt with was friendly and knowledgeable, without being overbearing, and even following up with us once the product was delivered to make sure the process had gone smoothly—which it had. The delivery people quickly and competently delivered the product despite the size. When I explained, where I wanted it, they didn't sigh or roll their eyes. They set it up, took the time to explain about its use, and answered any questions we had. Because, like the salesman, they had a decent understanding of the product they were delivering.

Having purchased an appliance from a big box store a couple years ago that took four weeks to be delivered, and a half dozen phone calls to their customer service department where no one could seem to answer my questions, followed by two delivery men who felt that carrying said appliance to a room at the back of my house—no stairs, or anything—was such an unreasonable request it warranted a loud sigh and no help in hooking up said appliance, this experience was a night and day turn around.

I can't help but wonder if all the savvy shoppers have in some way played a role in the decline of customer service. If because we the shopper don't demand knowledgeable service, we don't get it. So how do you demand a higher level of service? The only answer I can think of is by where we choose to spend our hard-earned money. The customer service given by a business shows the respect it has for their consumers, and why would we give our money to a company that doesn't respect us?

I noticed one distinct difference between my two shopping experiences. The negative experience came from a big box chain, with all levels of departments and stores. The positive experience was with a small business owner who took pride in his product and speaking knowledgeably about it. His reputation was important to him. All I can say is I will buy from one of these stores again, and definitely not from the other.



DEAR DEER: While the Acton Citizens Band is always looking for new talent to join their ranks, this Sunday morning visitor might not fit in the uniform. - Submitted photo

Emoji's 👍 or 👎



By **Angela Tyler**

What does this J mean? I was receiving business correspondence and at the end it would have the person's name followed by J. I ignored it at first because it was infrequent. I chalked it up to just a typo as a result of the fast paced need to send emails right away in this "day and age". Then I realized it was intentional. I will admit I had no idea that J represented a smiley face. It was a sort of emoji.

Emoji - ē'mōjē/ - e•mo•ji
noun: a small digital image or icon used to express an idea, emotion, etc., in electronic communication

Frankly, I feel like I really had no clue what exactly an emoji was or how to use it until a few short years ago when I moved from a Blackberry to an iPhone. I had no idea that they had been around since the early 1990's. The revelation of the mysterious J was an astounding development in my emoji knowledge. I really thought it was just a typo.

Emoji's now are now a part of my life because I have young kids. Their lives are surrounded by emoji's. They have no clue that a real encyclopaedia is not Wikipedia, yet they can tell me exactly what pattern of keys will provide the exact image of

a brown turd pile also known as the pile of poo emoji.

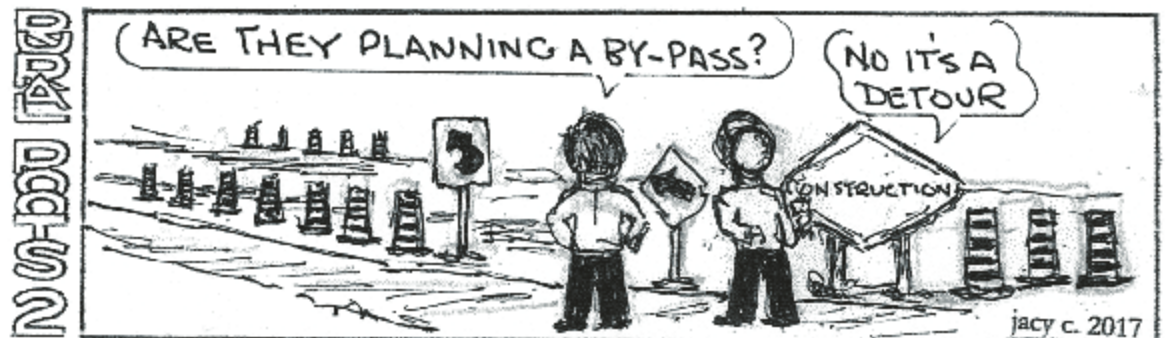
There are a lot of emoji's. In my opinion there are actually too many emojis that have taken over and allowed us to become lazy with properly spelling words, or expressing our opinions during an actual vocal communication. But then again, some of them are kind of cute, and is it really so bad to end an email with a J or a :) .

Emoji's though are complicated. There are actually so many emoji's that there are online dictionaries for emoji's that will also tell you when the emoji was added to the emoji line-up. In the spring there were actually 69 new emoji's nominated to be added to the selection including a curling stone—which, in my opinion, would be far more useful than the proposed bowl with spoon emoji.

Last month, against my better judgement and the advice of what seemed like every movie critic in the world, I took our kids to the Emoji movie. Yes there is an entire movie with

smiley faces and even the pile of poo emoji. The kids loved it because this is what they are growing up with...expressing themselves with emoji's and emoticons. In retrospect, I should have listened to the critics and picked another movie.

Now that emoji's are everywhere including the big screen, should emoji's and things like J be an acceptable form of communication in a business communication? It really doesn't bother me if an email has a J or a smiley face, although I do draw the line at the poop pile. However, it doesn't matter what the business form of communication is, how you are perceived is based on how you present yourself. If your emails or letters are full of slang, short-forms, ill-phrased sentences and such, then that is how you will be perceived. Like it or not, we are judged in some aspect by our written word in business. Adding a smiley face might brighten someone's day, however, business correspondence needs to encompass proper English first and foremost not emoji's. And that revelation is accredited to the business class teachers from Acton High School, circa 1985—I thank you all. ;)



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