

## Your Employees = Your Brand

April 5, 2016 by J.W. Morton in Branding

If you've ever doubted your employees' importance in promoting your brand, I believe this story will convince you otherwise.

### It started innocently enough

I had worn out my New Balance walking shoes. I went to kohls.com and found two pairs I liked, both on sale. I also had \$10 in previously earned Kohl's Cash, which made an already good deal even better. And I put it on my Kohl's card, saving another 15 percent.



I was happy with my transaction until the shoes arrived and didn't fit. So I schlepped the shoes to the Cedar Rapids Kohl's and went to customer service. I said I'd like to exchange them if the store had my size in stock. That's when things got complicated.

### You have the right to an attorney

Because the shoes were purchased using my Kohl's Cash and because I earned Kohl's Cash with the purchase, and because I received a discount for using my credit card, it was not going to be a clean exchange or refund. Boiled down, the simplest solution, and the one that wouldn't involve getting an attorney involved, would be to find shoes at the exact same original price as the two pairs I bought.

My head was beginning to pound. I, despiser of all things shopping, shopped online to streamline the unpleasant task. Despite my best efforts, I was at Kohl's...shopping.

### Hi-ho, it's off to shop I go

I dragged myself to the shoe department only to return to customer service in defeat 15 minutes later. I said they didn't have my size. "What now?" I asked fearfully.

The pretty young 20-something associate, whose experience in customer service had given her wisdom beyond her years, looked at me sympathetically. "The best solution is to order the shoes online in the size you want and charge them to your Kohl's card. When the new shoes arrive, bring in all four pairs, along with their packing slips. We'll take the first two pairs off of the card."

My body slumped with despair. "I just wanted shoes," I wailed. She nodded compassionately. "I know," she said, patting my arm. "Sorry it's so much trouble but the sale, along with the discounts and Kohl's cash, make it complicated."

You really have to appreciate the irony. (You have to because /refuse to.) Someone who shops online because she hates shopping malls ended up going to the mall twice because she shopped online.

### But wait, there's more

The friendly Kohl's associate told me I could order the shoes from the in-store kiosk by scanning the bar codes on the shoe boxes that were beginning to feel like the heavy chain that Marley's ghost had to drag around because of his misdeeds. Sheesh.

Me and my two boxes of shoes made our way to the kiosk. I scanned the bar codes as instructed, selected the shoe size I wanted, was in the home stretch about to finalize the transaction when I hit a wall. The stupid kiosk wanted me to "go back and provide missing information" but I didn't want to. The way my luck was going, I feared selecting the "back" option would wipe out the fields I had painstakingly completed. Spotting the "Push button for assistance," I did.

Who should appear through the door beside the kiosk but Katrina, my customer service angel. I explained what happened and she immediately took my side. "It doesn't work very well," she said. Faster than you can say, "Shopping is the devil's work," my new BFF made a few deft pushes on the kiosk monitor and presto...transaction complete.

### 10 days later

When the new shoes arrived, I tried them on and (eureka!) they fit. But my happy buzz was killed by the thought of the impending return visit to Kohl's. I schlepped to the store with my four shoeboxes in tow.

My BFF angel from last visit was not at the customer service desk. Instead, I was helped by Maureen, a 40-something BFF angel-in-training. I quickly recapped the outcome of my last visit and Katrina's instructions to bring in all four pairs of shoes. "Katrina said anyone at customer service would know how to make the exchange." I held my breath, suddenly fearing I had gone too far.

"I've done this before," she said. "I just need to remember how." After several minutes of studying my receipts, my Kohl's card and her computer, Maureen decided it was time to summon help. Her manager arrived quickly, listened to Maureen's explanation, and just as quickly told her how to void the first purchase without complications.

### The moral of this story

I have long felt that shopping, both buying and returning items, is like visiting hell. My potentially hellish Kohl's shoe crisis turned out to be not so bad. While I can't say it was enjoyable, I can say it was a positive experience. Why? Because Katrina and Maureen were helpful, courteous and solved my problem.

Kohl's tagline is "Expect great things." That's the company's brand promise to its customers. And the only way Kohl's can fulfill its promise is with buy-in of employees at all levels. That means it is essential for management to hire the right people and train them so that each employee embraces and delivers on Kohl's brand promise.

Which is exactly what Katrina and Maureen did. Granted, the solution they came up with was not a fast one, but I came away feeling good about Kohl's. We may not hang out together on Saturday night, but we will definitely do business together in the future.