

Inside BUSINESS

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The Canterbury Sales®

The Lemonade Shirts

By Andy Gole

I had a wonderful experience at a Marriott Hotel recently – they lost two of my shirts. The overall experience was so positive that I found myself telling the story in a tough sales meeting.

I was visiting a dissatisfied customer, trying to retain the business. The supplier I represented had not paid attention to this customer's needs, leading to service and quality problems.

The customer had lined up an alternative source of supply, it was the 11th hour and our top management had decided to try to save the business. They flew in the vice president of marketing and the manager of plants. We faced an extremely difficult selling situation.

"Sometimes you just don't know how good someone is until they mess up and make it right."

I opened the meeting by telling the customer's president the story of the Lemonade Shirts. The following dialogue ensued:

Andy: As I dressed this morning and looked at my shirt, I thought of you.

Customer: Why is that?

Andy: Because I stayed at a Marriott recently. You know how you always tout the Marriott Hotels. I was staying at one in San Diego, needed my two shirts pressed, and sent them to be laundered. But I had a problem.

Customer: What happened?

Andy: They lost my shirts. I was quite upset. Not only did they lose the shirts, no one knew what was going on.

Customer: What does this have to do with me?

Andy: It's what they did next. They were appropriately concerned. Then they gave me two options: they would take the price of the shirts off the bill, or they would go to Nordstrom's and buy me replacement shirts, at their charge, pressing them so I could wear them at once. Since I needed the shirts, I selected this option. That evening at 5:00, when I returned to my room, there were two new, freshly pressed shirts in my closet.

Beforehand, the Marriott

was just another nice hotel. By their commitment to making the situation right, they became very special. They had turned lemons into lemonade. Sometimes you just don't know how good someone is until they mess up and make it right.

This is how I opened the meeting. It lasted about three hours. The manager of plants made a very strong case as to how we would fix any problems. By the end of the meeting, the client committed to continue the business with us, if we performed as promised.

As we were getting ready to leave, I closed with these comments:

Andy: As we leave, I'm reminded again of the lost shirts. I didn't know how good the Marriott was until something went wrong and they made it right. Now that we've made and acknowledged a mistake, watch us fix it. Just watch us shine.

The president laughed and said: I've been waiting for the other shoe to drop since you opened the meeting.

We had a great meeting.



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Andy Gole has taught selling skills for 17 years. He started three businesses and has made approximately 4,000 sales calls, selling both B2B and B2C. He invented a selling process, Urgency Based Selling®, with which he can typically help companies double their closing or conversion ratio. Learn more about Andy's method at www.bombadillc.com or by calling him at 201.415.3447.