

The Timeless Call of Guest Engagement

Epiphany at the Gas Pump

In a recent conversation with a friend, I was asked the question, **“Where does your passion for Guest Experiences come from?”**

Regular readers of this website know of my borderline fanaticism in the area of Guest Experiences related to ChurchWorld, and how much we can learn from the world of “Customer Experience.” Some leaders cringe at those words, but the fact is **people who come to church are consumers**, and leaders in ChurchWorld can learn a lot from good customer experience practices wherever they find them – **even in a 1946 training manual for Gulf Dealers.**

The answer to my friend’s question became a little clearer several years ago.

My father.

After my father was discharged from the Army Air Corps following WWII, he worked at several jobs before he and his brother built a Gulf Service Station outside of Nashville TN. My father operated it for 44 years, closing it when he retired in 1993. Growing up in that gas station (literally – our house was about 100 feet away) **I learned a lot about how to deal with people by watching my father interact with his “customers.”** What I didn’t realize until recently was that his natural, easygoing style was augmented by customer service training materials supplied by the Gulf Oil Company.

It seems that good customer experience is never out of date.

My father passed away in 2012, and changes in my mother’s health required that she move out of the house in which she and my father had started their family in 1954. As my brother and I were going through the process of moving her from her home of 61 years, I took great delight in looking through some of the items my dad had saved and stored over his life. When I found the manual pictured below, I knew it would become a special part of my Guest Experience resources.



Notice the orange dotted line around the vehicle – that’s the suggested travel path for the service man – or two – to take when a customer pulled up to the gas pumps to have gasoline put into his tank (I realize many readers have no clue nor experience of this, but it did happen!). Starting by engaging the driver, here are a few of the suggestions for engaging the customer:

- **Always be prompt** – the service plan starts when you see a customer driving into your station. Whenever possible, be alert and at his side when his car stops, ready to greet him.
- **Greet the customer** – your greeting is your first important step in showing courtesy to the customer, and it should be friendly, cheerful, and always in your own words.
- **Acknowledge the other customer** – when a second car drives in, you should immediately recognize the other customer and saying you’ll be right with him. This kind of greeting pays off because you not only please the customer who is waiting but you also please the customer you are waiting on, who notices that you are courteous to others.
- **Improve the rear view** – while you are at the rear of the vehicle putting gas in, wipe the rear window and tail lights. Should a light be out, call it to the attention to your customer at the proper time.
- **Look at those tires** – while you are back there, take a look at both rear tires for cuts, blisters under inflation, etc. and make a mental note to tell your customer before he leaves your station.
- **Work to the front end** – walk around the right side, cleaning the right windshield, checking the wiper blades, and inspecting the front tires.
- **Under the hood** – check the oil and water levels; it’s your responsibility to protect your customer’s car. If any is needed, ask him if you may bring the levels up to the correct level.
- **Keep alert under the hood** – while you have the hood open, keep alert for other service needs. Train yourself to quickly observe all needs, informing the customer as

appropriate.

- **Collect for the sale** – it is important to give the customer the right change, so count the change back into his hand. If he is using a credit card (yes, they had those in 1946!), learn to fill out the invoice quickly and accurately.
- **Courtesy is pleasant** – before your customer leaves the station thank him and ask him to come in again. By this time you should have learned his name, so make it personal.
- **Help him safely on his way** – if your station is on a busy street where it's difficult to get into traffic, give your customer a hand. Guide him into the moving traffic safely. He may not expect this added courtesy, but he'll be glad to get it and remember it. Every courteous act will be appreciated by your customers, and make them regular patrons of your station.

And a closing reminder:

*With the Gulf Service Plan, every time you do some little service for the customer, it makes him realize that you know your business, and that you're looking after his welfare. These services keep your customer coming back again and again. Good will – the tendency of the motorist to return to a place where he has been well-treated – is being created every time you give him not only what he **wants**, but what he **needs**. He remembers you are the man who looks after his best interests by taking good care of one of his most prized possessions – his car.*

To all of us who live in a 24/7, always-connected world, the actions above probably seem like a throwback or an anachronism of the good old days.

I happen to think they are a timeless reminder that **experience still matters** – especially in ChurchWorld, where there is no “product” per se, but the outcome of the interactions with our Guests may be eternal.

Thanks Dad, for the lessons you taught me even when I didn't realize it, and for the lessons you still teach me after you're gone.

> [Read more from Bob.](#)

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