

October 17 2016**By Jim Mathis**

THE GREAT LEAF BLOWER INCIDENT

Some time ago my wife suggested I stop patching up my old leaf blower and buy a new one. So I bought one at a local home improvement store. After a few minutes of blowing off the patio, however, I realized I had come very close to cutting off my fingers because there was no guard on the machine's impeller.

I put it back in the box and returned it to the store. The clerk at the returns desk told me I needed to take it back to another store where she presumed I had bought it, since her store did not sell that brand. It did not take long to figure out someone had purchased a blower at the home improvement store, but then had put another, broken blower in the box and taken it back for a refund.

If the unknown customer's outright larceny was not bad enough, apparently no one at the home store had bothered to look in the box before they put it back on the shelf. In failing to do so, they could have faced a major lawsuit if I or someone else had been injured using it. It would have nice if the store had apologized for their error, instead of wrongfully accusing me of not paying attention to what I was buying. Ultimately they did give me a replacement blower. I did open the box to inspect the new one before I left the store.

It may be impossible to avoid the thieves and petty criminals that would return faulty or damaged merchandise to another store, but we can control what goes out the door to our customers.

When I ran a coffeehouse, I always told our staff that a drink wasn't a mistake until they handed it to a customer. "Double-check everything before you call their name," I instructed them. We all make bad food, poor pictures, or products that do not work. No one is perfect. The problem comes when we are not competent enough to recognize the problem and fix it before the customer has to deal with it.

Competence comes from experience. In my business as a professional photographer, I have learned to know a good photo when I see it, and make sure the clients only get the best. Nobody sees the bad ones I have produced but me.

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This principle applies to any business. We must strive to ensure the car is running right, the food is good, the software works, the tax return is correct, and that nobody gets fingers cutoff because of a missing safety guard. Wrong things happen because of incompetence or not caring about the client or customer.

Adhering to standards of excellence make good sense from a business perspective. When we serve our customers well, they are more likely to patronize us in the future. But there is an even higher reason for always doing our very best:

The Scriptures tell us, **“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17)**. If we perform shoddy work, can we in good conscience, “do it in the name of Jesus”? Later in the same chapter it states, **“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men” (Colossians 3:23)**. We should be proud to present our work – whatever it is – to God as a precious, even sacrificial gift.

We are also told, **“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works...” (Ephesians 2:10)**. The quality of our work might be the greatest evidence of the genuineness of our faith.

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever had a similar situation when you bought a defective product from a store? How did you respond? And how did the store respond when you returned it?

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2. Why is the quality of our work – and our care for our customers and clients – so important?
3. In your view, what does it mean to “work as for the Lord, not for men”? Is that practical, or even possible, when you work in an organization that does not encourage using biblical principles as a guide for everyday business practices? Explain your answer.
4. When you consider the Bible’s teaching, that “we are God’s workmanship” and we are created to do good works, what comes to mind? How do you respond to that?

If you would like to look at or discuss other portions of the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages:

Proverbs 10:4, 12:27, 22:21; Ecclesiastes 2:24-26; Ephesians 6:5-9; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

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