

TOM

Wealth Flows from Health

ASACKER

“As you climb the ladder of success, check occasionally to make sure it’s leaning against the right wall.” — *Anonymous*

I was fortunate enough to celebrate another birthday a few weeks back. But my luck ran out when I brought my car in for its required annual state inspection. Being in a hurry, and frankly not expecting any problems, I simply pulled into the first approved inspection station I spotted. And then . . . it began. “Well sir, I’ve got some good . . .” “Hold on,” I said, rolling my eyes. “I know, you’ve got good news and bad news. Please, let’s just get this over with.” To make this chapter of a long and very expensive story short, my car passed all of the safety requirements but failed the emissions testing. To “get it to pass” would take hours of repairs, many costly parts, and a prayer.

The first thought to run through my mind when I was handed the inspection bill and the bad news was . . . you guessed it . . . “I wonder if I’m getting hosed here?” (No pun intended). Sure, the mechanic showed me some dark markings on some “bad” parts, but that gave me as much confidence as when my investment advisor recently showed me some cherry-picked stock market predictions. How was I supposed to feel good about a diagnosis and a decision that I had no experience with, and in which I wasn’t really interested in investing a lot of time? Google couldn’t help me with this one, so I decided to get a second, human opinion. And that’s when the story turned from bad to worse.

Since I no longer have a trusted relationship with an auto mechanic (sadly, that was lost with my father’s passing), I figured that my best bet was to make an appeal to the friendly person at the dealership who sold me the car. So I called, coolly explained my situation, felt a smidgen of empathy on the other end of the line, and was kindly transferred to the service department. “So,” I enquired to the friendly, albeit robotic service representative. “How much is it going to cost for *just* an emissions test and diagnosis.” (Remember, I had just paid for a full inspection earlier that same day). Pause. “That would be \$98.50,” was the matter-of-fact reply. “98.50?” I countered. “How can that be? How much is a *full* inspection; emissions *and* safety?” Pause. “That would be \$45.00, sir.” I told you the story got worse.

So back I go—with a temporary stop on hold—to my friendly salesperson. “Howie. There’s something strange going on with the quote I just received from your service department.” “Oh, she’s new,” he explained. “I’ll take care of it for you.” To make another long chapter of this tragic comedy short, I did end up having the car retested by the dealer. And it did fail again. But this time . . . surprise! . . . it would require *different* stuff at a *different* and higher price to “get it to pass.” In addition, and after waiting for over an hour, I was advised that I really should spend hundreds of additional dollars for even *more* stuff that I’d eventually need to replace anyway. And to top it all off, and despite my expressed displeasure, I was still charged the relationship-killing fee of \$98.50.

Intention Creates Reality

My story is certainly not unique; it’s played out on a countless number of marketplace stages each and every day. And, despite ones initial and natural assessment, my unfortunate experience had absolutely nothing to do with customer service training or the lack thereof. Instead, it all came down to intention. That dealership (I say “that” because it’s no longer “my” dealership) and its people do what they do each day *primarily* to create wealth for themselves, instead of creating health. And by health, I mean healthy, helpful relationships between and amongst its customers, owners, employees, suppliers and neighbors. And so, as my case certainly illustrates, their focus on creating wealth—that intention—eventually ends up creating their reality as well; a distrustful, adversarial, profit-eroding one.

Again, this is not limited to, nor directed at, auto dealers (although they do seem to be the poster children for how *not* to build trusting, long-term relationships). In fact, I know folks in my own profession, professional speakers and “relationship” advisors, who adamantly counsel companies, and other independent professionals, to *never* reduce their prices or give free advice. And why not? Because it will “devalue their brands,” of course. Perfect guidance for the “wealth” focused, but certainly not a “health” building approach. In fact it’s great advice for getting you to think of your brand as an image and a transaction, rather than as a means to creating more meaningful relationships with the people in your life.

I can remember, as a child, standing by my father’s side watching him break his back under his customers’ cars—sweat pouring from his brow, black grease permanently embedded under his nails and into the cracks of his hands—only to see him wipe them as clean as possible, rest one gently on a concerned customer’s shoulder, and, with a smile on his face, calmly assure him or her that everything was okay. It was just a loose bolt or something. “And please,” he’d say holding up his hands. “Put

your wallet away. It was no big deal.” You know what? It *was* a big deal. It was the biggest of deals. And it has taken me far too long to appreciate the lesson that he was trying to teach me; namely that transparent, honest, caring relationships bring meaning, happiness and growth to your business and to your life.

Health Creates Wealth

My dad’s garage ended up turning into a sort of sanctuary, where people from miles around would bring their cars, their problems, their favorite desserts, and their life stories. And my dad saw it as his mission to take care of them all; to be their advocate and trusted advisor. Whenever he thought he could use his connections and expertise to help save them time, money, or aggravation, he did it. He went deeper and deeper into his relationships, adding new products, sourcing new suppliers, doing anything that would add value to their lives. But alas, my dad never did become “rich” by today’s standards. However, by focusing on what mattered most, the *health* of his relationships, he achieved more *wealth* than any person I’ve met in my thirty plus years in business.

So stop and think about why you do what you do each day. Is it simply to grow your financial wealth, so that someday you can escape from people and relax with your grill and your pool, your gadgets and games? Or do you see each day for what it truly is; an opportunity to add a spark of meaning, caring and passion to life and to the lives of others? Are you simply tolerating today, so that you can eventually arrive at a better tomorrow? Or do you realize that today *is* your life, and that it’s the quality of your trip *with others* that really matters.

We all want peace of mind, this much is clear. And we believe that it comes from accumulating wealth, which it does. But it doesn’t come from the illusory kind, the kind that fluctuates with economic conditions and life’s circumstances. Rather, it comes from *real* wealth; the wealth of trusted friendships and caring relationships. The kind of wealth that flourishes and brings forth joy and comfort, in good times and in bad.

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Tom Asacker writes, teaches, and speaks about radically new practices and ideas for success in chaotic times. He is an independent brand adviser and author of critically acclaimed books including *A Clear Eye for Branding* and *Sandbox Wisdom*, and his latest, *A Little Less Conversation*. Visit www.acleareye.com to learn more.