

# NEWS YOU CAN USE

## Service Training

By Eva Kaplan-Leiserson

I rarely ride the Washington, D.C. Metrorail but happened to one chilly morning. As I stepped onto the train, a cheerful voice boomed over the intercom system, “Gooooood morning, customers! You are on the blue line to Aaaaddison Road! Next stop, Van Dorn Street! The time iiiiiiss 8:15!” With all his spirit and enthusiasm, the unseen speaker could’ve been on

stage. People smiled and chuckled as they listened.

It would’ve been easy for the train operator to mumble halfheartedly the words he must speak every morning. Instead, he chose to come to work full of energy and enthusiasm.

Arriving at my stop, I tried unsuccessfully to add exit fare to my card. The machine wasn’t accepting my money, so I approached the station manager’s window and explained

the problem. “Of course, it doesn’t work,” the man berated me. “Look at your card.”

I admit that the card was a little beat up from being in my pocket. But what happened to “the customer is always right”? Feeling ashamed, I apologized. The station manager did something with my card on his computer and handed it back. “Do I need to put money on it?” I asked. “No, just go,” he replied grumpily.

A Metro ride offers lessons in customer care.

The difference between those two Metro employees was striking. The first obviously enjoys his job and interacting with customers. He was cheerful and friendly, going above and beyond his required tasks. The second was sullen, doing the minimum while still meeting the obligations of his job.

I wish I could say that my second customer service experience was the exception and that I run into far more people like the first man. Unfortunately, the opposite is true. And the problem goes beyond attitude. Over and over, I've had to call companies I give money to (the phone company, a car rental place, a doctor's office, the bank, and so on) to correct an error they've made in billing or other arrangements.

What's at the heart of my bad customer service experi-

ences? I believe that it's the sheer number of people who don't enjoy their jobs. They're there to bring home a paycheck, and that's it. So they do just barely what's expected of them and hurry through their tasks, not paying attention and not investing themselves.

The Herman Group cites research suggesting that up to 80 percent

of workers are in jobs that don't match their personalities and interests. That number is bad news for businesses that depend on their workers to present a friendly and helpful face to customers. Can customer service training really work if all people care about is getting paid? How can we ensure that people have the necessary skills to work in jobs they like, so that they look forward

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## Global360 Knowledge Networks

Did you make it to the Global Summit of Online Knowledge Networks in **Adelaide, Australia**? If you missed that March event, you can still read white papers from the conference's international experts. Go to [www.educationau.edu.au/globalsummit/papers.htm](http://www.educationau.edu.au/globalsummit/papers.htm) to browse the papers, which focus on online learning and the issues and trends that will affect the development and management of community and knowledge networks. Titles of the works include "Connecting, Learning, and Collaborating Globally," "Best Practice in Community Building and Information Discovery," and "Future Trends in E-Learning: Lessons From History." Also check out the site of the conference's sponsor, education.au limited, [www.educationau.edu.au](http://www.educationau.edu.au) a not-for-profit owned by Australia's education and training ministers.

# NewsFlash

Are you tearing your hair out trying to compare and select e-learning solutions? Read on to find out how Matt DeFeo of Black and Decker called in help from an unusual source—the University of Maryland.

Second-year students in Maryland's MBA program spent a semester consulting for Black and Decker, trading 600 hours of work for course credit. (Black and Decker also covered administrative costs.) **The students' mission: to evaluate**

## and select an e-learning solution for the company.

The team analyzed the market and created a scorecard to rate the strengths and weaknesses of each solution. That enabled them to rank the various options. They narrowed a long list of providers down to 12, saving Black and Decker the time of meeting with company after company. In the end, Black and Decker chose Vuepoint, which offers an LCMS, an LMS, and collaboration technology.

Would DeFeo use Maryland's MBA students again? "Absolutely," he says, citing cost savings (the project cost a tenth of what it would've had he used a big consulting firm) and the unbiased nature of the student consultants as advantages of the program.

To learn more about the University of Maryland's MBA consulting program, [rhsmith.umd.edu/mba.consulting/index.htm](http://rhsmith.umd.edu/mba.consulting/index.htm). Questions? Email program co-director Dorothy Gardner at [dgardner@rhsmith.umd.edu](mailto:dgardner@rhsmith.umd.edu).

to going to work and project a positive attitude?

Thoughts? Ideas? Email me at [ekaplan@astd.org](mailto:ekaplan@astd.org), and I'll run a compilation of comments and suggestions in an upcoming column.

## Never Too Late to Learn

If you're thinking of going back to school but worry that you're, well, too mature, take a lesson from Cecil Smith. At 94, he recently became the oldest known GED recipient. Smith dropped out of junior high school when both of his parents died and he needed to make a living. Eighty years later, he received his high school degree and a letter of congratulations from President Bush. What motivated him to get the degree after so much time? He wanted better writing skills, he says, and to be more knowledgeable. The most difficult part of the test? The essay in which he had to write what he'd learned since he left school—in 1922.

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## HOWTO Ethics 101

Some tips in this age of Enron:

**If it feels bad, don't do it.** Is it something you'd do to a close friend or family member? If not, *fuhgeddaboutit*.

**Don't push the envelope.** Trying to see how much you can get away with (for example, how high you can price a service or product) is opportunistic.

**Leave something on the table.** Always take other people's needs into consideration when negotiating. Don't be greedy.

**Walk the walk.** Lead by doing: Show your employees how you want them to treat customers.

**Offer the right kind of incentives.** To help workers stay on the straight and narrow, communicate that honest, responsible customer service is a requirement for job advancement.

**Don't plead ignorance.** The line between ethical and irresponsible behavior is most often distinct.

Says Craig Hall, author of *The Responsible Entrepreneur*, "If your ethics are of the highest quality, that will be the best investment that you can possibly make in your business."

## Policy News

A snapshot of U.S. federal legislation and policy affecting workforce development and the HRD profession.

### Bush Signs New Economic Security Law

President Bush signed the long-awaited economic stimulus bill (PL 107-147) on March 8, following months of debate and revisions in Congress. Originally introduced in October, the new law is a bipartisan compromise to stimulate the economy and provide assistance to dislocated workers. The law provides an additional 13 weeks of unemployment benefits, business tax relief, and accelerated depreciation for capital equipment. It also extends two employer tax credits: Work Opportunity Tax Credit and Welfare-to-Work.

### Bush Proposes Welfare Reform

President Bush outlined his priorities to revise the welfare law, Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF), which Congress will reauthorize next year. The centerpiece of the President's US\$16.6 billion annual block grant program is a requirement that states raise to 70 percent the proportion of welfare recipients who are working or in job training programs. The current requirement is 50 percent. The President also proposes increasing the required number of hours worked per week from the current 30 hours to 40 hours.