

# GBM Insiders

*Zero Defects is Our Goal*

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## Cutting & Clearing a New Path for GBM

DONOVAN WOLF, PRESIDENT



With the fast pace of technology advancements and the necessity to tighten our belts during a struggling economy, we have all felt the pressure to perform at higher levels of efficiency, productivity and fiscal awareness. It

can seem daunting to think about everything that's on our plates these days, but we aren't alone in those struggles!

Our customer base is certainly experiencing the same or greater challenges and we must be prepared to provide them assistance in the areas of vendor spend analysis and supplier rationalization. The prevailing trends in the marketplace are calling for a consolidation of vendors and/or services, in order to realize established cost saving and control objectives. Just as GBM is constantly evaluating every aspect of our daily operations for potential cost savings, our customers are evaluating procurement



strategies for realizing savings associated with vendor management, transaction processing, rate/spend control (volume discounts) and proposal evaluations.

In order to have a seat at the strategy table, we must first remain diligent in the delivery of "Zero Defects" service on a nightly basis. Without maintaining quality to the standards of our customers and ourselves, we run the risk of being rationalized right out of the discussion.

The next step in maintaining our standing as an invaluable service provider is to expand upon the services that we can offer to our clients. Consolidation strategies are not only focusing on reducing the number of vendors being utilized for a particular service category, but also searching for vendors with the capability to handle a wide range of service needs. While cleaning is and will always remain GBM's core competency, we must identify other areas in

*See Cutting & Clearing, page 6*

## The Wisdom I Learned From My Father

BY JOE RALABATE, ORLANDO GENERAL MANAGER



How the words "the customer is always right" rang in my ears from an early age. My dad, also named Joe, was a real "people person" and for a long time, the general manager for a major company in Buffalo, New York. I remember he used to tell me; "Son, the customer is always right." Then he would add, "treat people like you want to be treated: with respect and consideration, and you will never go wrong."

I really didn't appreciate those words until much later in my life. I recall when I would go with him to visit some of his friends or employees. He listened intently when someone spoke and looked them in the eye with a sincere smile or genuine concern. He would never interrupt when someone else was talking and answered respectfully when it was the right time to speak. Again, I never really appreciated those simple techniques until I grew up. My dad was right! The customer **IS** always right! He was an awesome people person and I learned much as I watched him deal with others. I used these simple, but powerful techniques in my own business and now, as an employee of GBM when I work with property managers, tenants, fellow employees and in everyday life.

Boy, I sure miss my dad. He died very young at the age of 52. He certainly left his mark with his family, friends, workmates and especially me, his only son. I hope I can be half of the people person he was. Thanks Dad. I love you!



*Joe Ralabate, Sr.*

# Correcting the Knee-Jerk Reaction

By TERRY COLLINS, ATLANTA GENERAL MANAGER



Let's face it, we have all had disagreements with customers in some manner or another. Exaggerations, false allegations and weak justifications are thrown our way in an effort to usually cover for what someone else did. Usually, we just grin and bear it because we are one of the two only guilty parties that exist (the other usually being the security team). But what do we do next?

First, we must set out to prove to **ourselves** that we were probably right (if only to make sure we don't have to worry about a worker that is a chronic problem maker in the future). Of course, this means investigating, asking questions and in general spending time to prove or disprove the original allegation. In truth, before it ever came to me this should have already been done but today's "hurry up and get this off my desk" won't always allow for this.

So, what about those times when the frequency of being in a customer's crosshairs crosses the line? When I find myself in a situation like that, I normally *will* try in a nice way to educate the party behind the allegation to the plausibility of alternative options, trying to explain fully about all the different ways of what they allege happened could have **legitimately** happened but in a totally different context. While instances like this happen and triggers are pulled far too quickly, does this approach really work?

If by admitting to me that some of my explanations are in fact "plausible," my work is almost done. From then on it is imperative to question and not stand your ground on ALL future occurrences. After all, by gaining their trust, customers now become more open to alternative solutions, ultimately meaning a softer landing

instead of a crash! Customers now have to think and do a little leg work of their own before calling, which is good. After all, people's reputations are on the line!

Challenging a customer has to be done most delicately, and outright wins are sometimes rare depending on the

circumstances. But it has to be done **not only when you know you are right**, but when you start to see trends or habits evolve that need changing before they can get totally out of control thereby tainting all you do with that account.

**"Customer service is just a day in, day out ongoing, never ending, unremitting, persevering, compassionate, type of activity."**

— Leon Gorman, CEO L.L.Bean

## Keeping Customer Service in Perspective

By BOBBY MOORE, MID-ATLANTIC REGIONAL MANAGER



"The customer is always right." We hear these words all of the time. But have we ever really taken the time to understand the meaning behind them?

Our thought process has to begin with the realization that we are in the service business. It is our responsibility to take care of our customers' needs. Our clients rely on us to know what needs to be done, how to do it, and get it done. There are times in our business when issues arise that are beyond our control and how we handle them can have either a very positive or very negative effect on our client relationships. If we approach these issues from a "service mentality," the results can be a net positive for GBM and really establish us as a true partner with our client.

As an example, let's say we have a relatively new account that still has construction going on in parts of the building. The client calls and says that the stairwells are in dire need of cleaning. We go inspect the stairwells and it is very obvious that the construction crew had done some work in them that day and left them in an utter state of disarray. There are large chunks of drywall everywhere, drywall mud is dried up and stuck to the stairs, and there is a layer of dust visible on all of the stair rails. Cleaning this up will easily add 2 hours to our nightly cleaning that night. How we respond to the client will either position us as a true partner to them or portray us as simply the cleaning company.

See *Customer Service in Perspective*, page 4

# Passing the Test of Good Customer Service

BY SUNNY K. PARK, CHIEF EXECUTIVE JANITOR



It was a freezing cold morning in 1986 when my home phone rang, waking me out of a deep sleep. I jumped out of bed like a spring was pushing my back, picked up the phone and answered in a half asleep but loud voice: "HELLO!"

"Sunny Park?" asked a familiar voice from the other end of the line.

"Is this Mr. Newell? GOOD MORNING!" I shouted.

"I need you to be here at the Bell South Building as soon as you can," he demanded.

"Is there anything wrong Mr. Newell?" I asked, so I could coordinate the task while I travelled to his building.

But he had already hung up the phone and was gone before I finished my question.

I pulled up my long johns and put on earmuffs while I put my shoes on, and rushed to the garage to crank up my minivan. It was a Saturday morning, and the digital clock on the dashboard was blinking 4:15 a.m. in green numbers. I put my foot on the gas pedal and drove on a frost covered quiet highway for about 15 minutes, then pulled my dark blue minivan to the front drive circle of the four-story grey building in North Lake Office Park in Tucker. I rushed to the front glass door and pulled the door handle but it was locked. I didn't have the keys to the building so I began knocking on the glass door. Unlike these

days, where we all have cell phones, I had no way to call the property manager, Clarence Newell. It was so quiet and dark in the front parking lot and I couldn't find him for a good 20 minutes.

All of sudden, a bright flashlight pointed at me from the rooftop. I looked up, and there he was, looking down at me and laughing so loudly the sound

*See Passion the Test, page 4*

**Many property managers in town credited GBM's quality and work ethic as we survived Mr. Newell's contracts for over ten years. If GBM was choosy or analyzed customers and tried to win over "unfair" customers, we could never have built the company that GBM is today.**

## The Keys to Providing Good Customer Service

BY TOM BOTTS, QUALITY CONTROL MANAGER, ATLANTA



Customer service plays an important role in an organization's ability to generate income and revenue. From that perspective, customer service should be included as part of an overall approach to systematic improvement. A customer service experience can change the entire perception a customer has of the organization. As a Quality Control Manager in the Atlanta Branch, I have become a customer service expert. The Wikipedia definition for customer service is "... a series of activities designed to enhance the level of customer satisfaction – that is, the feeling that a product or service has met the customer expectation."

How do you provide good customer service? It is simple. You need to become someone who can adjust themselves to the personality of the of the customer. Let the customer think you are like them, with the same thought process, the same emotions. Listen to their complaints with concern and try to feel the same as they do when they are telling you about the complaint.

*See Keys to Providing Good Service, page 8*

## Quick Response and Follow Up Is Half the Battle

BY DAVE HARPER, JACKSONVILLE GENERAL MANAGER



GBM Jacksonville project manager Connie Kim felt her Blackberry buzz at 5:02 p.m. recently. It was a work request from one of our property management companies. A tenant had more trash than usual due to a VIP luncheon and wanted the day porter to empty their kitchen trash by 3:00 p.m. Connie immediately called the requester, but it went to voice mail. She left a message explaining that for some reason she got the request late, the day porter went home at 4:30, but she would send her night supervisor over as soon as he got to the property. Connie then called the supervisor and instructed him to go the suite first and offer assistance, which he did. The following morning Connie called the requester again to follow up. The response was, "Thank you so much! Your supervisor took care of it. I forgot to call you back last night, but thank you for following up!"

A quick response and follow up shows that we care and is half the battle when it comes to customer service.

## Passing the Test

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split the silent winter morning sky.

"Sunny, you broke the record!" he said, but it was something I couldn't understand. I kept silent. He continued, "You took 31 minutes to get here from the minute I called you." He dangled his stopwatch covered in the back with stainless steel that looked icy cold.

"Is there a cleaning problem?" I asked him.

He smiled and said, "No! But I wanted to check how fast you would respond to my call. You beat all other contractors in my property management career, congratulations! I will buy you a breakfast, do you have time?"

I was speechless. Actually, I wanted to punch his nose and give up his accounts as I never wanted to work for this rude and disrespectful customer again. But I was surprised to realize that I was smiling at him and responded "Sure Mr. Newell, I have time for breakfast with you, thank you."

I now realize why other contractors wouldn't even respond when Mr. Newell put his service contracts up for bid. Historically, no contractors survived more than one year. Either Mr. Newell fired them or they walked away. I sat at a corner table at the Old Hickory House restaurant for two hours that day, listening to his life stories like how bad his ex-wife was and his heroic military career. I was really sleepy but I also felt obligated to listen to him because he is the customer, and customers help us pay the bills and the salaries of our employees.

This incident with Mr. Newell gave GBM the momentum to gain more service contracts in Atlanta. Many property managers in town credited GBM's quality and work ethic as we survived Mr. Newell's contracts for over ten years. If GBM was choosy or analyzed customers and tried to win over "unfair" customers, we could never have built the company that GBM is today.

## Customer Service in Perspective

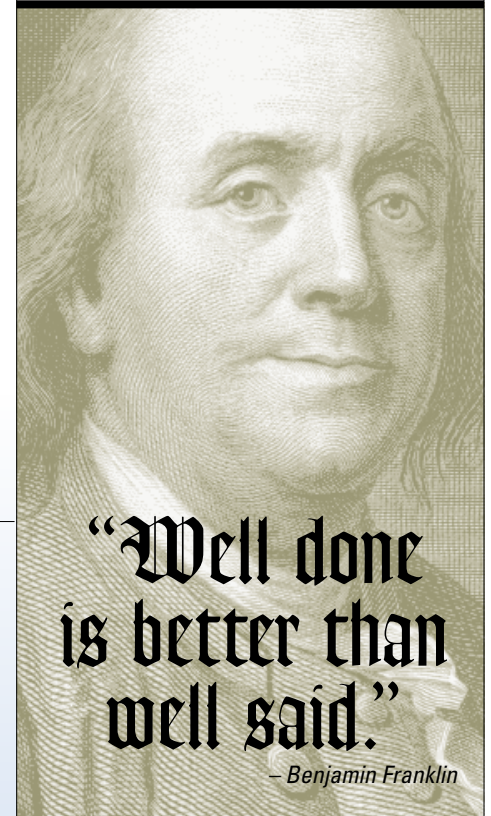
*continued from page 2*

So, let's say we call the client and simply inform them that this mess was created by the construction company and we just don't have enough time built into our budget to handle this. This response will do nothing to endear us to them. This is the same as saying my least favorite words: "It's not my job!" Imagine how much better the client would feel if our response is "I just inspected the stairwell and you are right, it is in complete disarray. We will jump right on that tonight and have it ready for you in the morning. By the way, this mess is obviously due to the construction company not cleaning up after itself. Should we bill the extra hours directly to them or can you pass it through to them?" This response does two things: It assures the client that we have their best interests first, and it also illustrates to them just how important their business is to GBM. The client may not have even thought about billing these extra charges to the construction crew. This paints GBM in a completely different light.

In closing, I think it is important to assess every situation before we respond. It is easy to get caught up in everything that we encounter each day and be stuck in our own mindset. It is important for us to really think about each situation and see it from other points of view. To understand our client's perspective will enable all of us to form a much better response to their requests and will result in a much deeper client relationship.



**Congratulations Tammy Scott, GBM controller, for 15 years of your tremendous dedication to GBM! Thank you Tammy!**



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*Erica Nolasco, above, has been a GBM Atlanta teammate for four years. She was born in Canada, raised in Guatemala and came to the U.S. ten years ago. She is happily married with three beautiful children.*



*Teammates at the Tallahassee Branch*



*Jacksonville Teammates who work the dayshift at Butler Plaza*

*Enisa Mujkic, left, a day porter at the Nemours facility in Jacksonville, was honored by Nemours employees as "honorary" employee of the quarter.*



*Thumbs Up to GBM's York Town Team!*



*GBM Excellent Teammates at the Miami Branch*

# GBM Flag Is Flying High!

CHRIS ISBELL, NASHVILLE GENERAL MANAGER



The old saying “you can lose the fight but still win the war” can be applied to all aspects of our lives. I want to share with you some instances where I have seen it proven to be true in business.

I had an account that I had been servicing for about three years until management decided to go with another company due to budget reasons. I decided that it would be a good idea to touch base with the manager every other month or so, since we had always had a good working relationship. One year later, he placed his account up for bid. We participated in the bidding process, but were not awarded the account. I persisted in keeping an open dialogue with the manager. Approximately a year later, I received a call from him asking that we come back to service the account at our original rate from two years ago. It was a very satisfying experience to know that the quality of our service, and not the lowest rate, was what counted in the end...we had won the war!

I currently have an account that we have had for over three years. They have a single, very high profile tenant with high expectations. Three different cleaning companies had been in the building in three years before we took over the account. While it may sometimes be challenging and feel like a “fight,” through our quality service and hard work, the GBM flag is flying high!

## Cutting & Clearing

*continued from page 1*

which we can provide assistance in meeting our customer’s objectives and secure a healthy future for GBM. After all, GBM is a service company and the more services we can provide to our clients, the more valuable a partner we become.

In 2010 and 2011, GBM met such a customer objective by expanding our service offerings to include landscaping and grounds maintenance. While entering a new service category presented many challenges that could have easily been viewed as insurmountable, we were able to achieve success through an unwavering commitment to meeting the objectives of our customer. As a result of our success in achieving customer satisfaction, GBM had opportunities to expand its service offerings to sites throughout Florida, Maryland, North Carolina, Texas and Virginia. Additional opportunities for expansion continue to present themselves and we look forward to cutting our way into new geographic markets.

As a result of the success in landscaping, GBM has been able to expand upon that service offering through a natural progression into snow removal. Although this winter season has not presented the amount of snowfall that we anticipated or desired, I’m still happy to report that we have been successful in clearing everything that Mother Nature has thrown our way in Virginia, West Virginia and Iowa. GBM also stands ready to clear a path for our customers in the Southern states, should we incur an unusual snow or ice event.

I would encourage each and every one of my GBM teammates to be engaged with our customers, to identify other possible service segments in which we can provide assistance and deliver the benefits sought through vendor consolidation. The GBM Team’s capabilities are limitless and we owe our valued customers the opportunity to consider our assistance in helping overcome the many challenges they are facing on a daily basis.

## British Street Cleaner Finds Treasure in Drain

It was an incredible discovery: Street cleaner Arron Large, of Essex, England, found a Rolex watch in a drain while doing his job. He was commended for his honesty when he took the watch, valued at over \$33,000, and handed it over to the police.

“A few people have said they wouldn’t have handed it in,” says Large, “but at the end of the day I thought it was the right thing to do.”

The story gets better. When he returned to the same spot with a local television news crew to explain his story, he was stunned to find three more expensive watches – another Rolex, an Omega and a Franck Muller.

“I told my colleague, ‘you’re not going to believe me but I’ve found another one.’ He said ‘shut up’, but when I took it out and

wiped it off I realized it really was another Rolex,” recalls Large. “Then I saw the other two. It’s quite amazing.”

If the owners do not come forward within 30 days, the father-of-two could pocket the value of all four watches – estimated to be around \$95,000. Police are investigating whether the watches are linked to any previous thefts.

PC Patrick Soontorn of Essex Police said, “To find one watch in a drain is one thing. To find three more within feet of one another is another, so that’s part of our investigation. It possibly could be a burglary or a robbery. Someone may have stashed it there and may have forgotten where they’ve thrown it.”

Source:  
The Daily Telegraph - <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/>



# The Ten Commandments of Great Customer Service

Customer service is an integral part of our job and should not be seen as an extension of it. A company's most vital asset is its customers. Without them, we would not and could not exist in business. When you satisfy our customers, they not only help us grow by continuing to do business with you, but recommend you to friends and associates.

## The Ten Commandments of Customer Service

**1. Know who is boss.** You are in business to service customer needs, and you can only do that if you know what it is your customers want. When you truly listen to your customers, they let you know what they want and how you can provide good service. Never forget that the customer pays our salary and makes your job possible.

**2. Be a good listener.** Take the time to identify customer needs by asking questions and concentrating on what the customer is really saying. Listen to their words, tone of voice, body language, and most importantly, how they feel. Beware of making assumptions - thinking you intuitively know what the customer wants. Do you know what three things are most important to your customer?

### 3. Identify and anticipate needs.

Customers don't buy products or services. They buy good feelings and solutions to problems. Most customer needs are emotional rather than logical. The more you know your customers, the better you become at anticipating their needs. Communicate regularly so that you are aware of problems or upcoming needs.

### 4. Make customers feel important and appreciated.

Treat them as individuals. Always use their name and find ways to compliment them, but be sincere. People value sincerity. It creates good feeling and trust. Think about ways to generate good feelings about doing business with you. Customers are very sensitive and know whether or not you really care about them. Thank them every time you get a chance.

**5. Help customers understand your systems.** Your organization may have the world's best systems for getting things done, but if customers don't understand them, they can get confused,

impatient and angry. Take time to explain how your systems work and how they simplify transactions. Be careful that your systems don't reduce the human element of your organization.

**6. Appreciate the power of "Yes."** Always look for ways to help your customers. When they have a request (as long as it is reasonable) tell them that you can do it. Figure out how afterwards. Look for ways to make doing business with you easy. Always do what you say you are going to do.

**7. Know how to apologize.** When something goes wrong, apologize. It's easy and customers like it. The customer may not always be right, but the customer must always win. Deal with problems immediately and let customers know what you have done. Make it simple for customers to complain. Value their complaints. As much as we dislike it, it gives us an opportunity to improve. Even if customers are having a bad day, go out of your way to make them feel comfortable.

**8. Give more than expected.** Since the future of all companies lies in keeping customers happy, think of ways to elevate yourself above the competition. Consider the following:

**9. Get regular feedback.** Encourage and welcome suggestions about how you could improve. Listen carefully to what they say and check back regularly to see how things are going.

**10. Treat employees well.** Employees are your internal customers and need a regular dose of appreciation. Thank them and find ways to let them know how important they are. Treat your employees with respect and chances are they will have a higher regard for customers. Appreciation stems from the top. Treating customers and employees well is equally important.





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## **Keys to Providing Good Customer Service**

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You don't always have to agree with everything. A lot of times the customer just needs to be educated on the cleaning process. Teach them how the cleaners go about their work when cleaning the facility, still trying to adjust yourself to the personality of the customer. Don't be arrogant or condescending. Don't take things personally. Try not to get upset, but stay calm at all times.

Sometimes nothing you say will make the customer happy. You might have to assure them that you will personally meet with the cleaners and re-train them to the customers' expectations. You need to make sure you follow through, especially if the issue hasn't been corrected

after several complaints. Taking the customer to lunch can also help the situation.

The next thing you have to do is work with the cleaners. They get tired of hearing complaints, especially when it is a difficult facility to clean, such as one that is 24/7. It is very hard to keep everything clean all the time. As soon as a restroom or a break room is cleaned, it is dirty again within 15 minutes. You also need to be able to adjust to the personality of the cleaner, too. You don't want them to get mad at you and the customer. You also don't want them to quit on you. Sometimes you may need to get other cleaners to clean for that facility, and that should do it to satisfy your

customer.

The customer pays our salaries and makes our jobs possible. Therefore it is vital to provide good customer service. Remember these things: Your customer is the most important thing. Customers buy good feeling and solutions to problems. Make customers feel important and appreciated. Educate them on how our system works. Apologize when warranted. Give more than expected. And treat your cleaners well. Remember, a good or bad customer service experience can change the entire perception a customer has of our organization. So let's try our best to give them a good experience at all times.