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Scott Cytron • Feb. 20, 2010

Lately, the concept of “Great Service” has been on my mind.

Although the employment outlook seems to be improving, we are far from escaping the recession. When we are in a recessionary economy, I think our focus is even sharper on companies that provide great service. During a recession, we may find ourselves with the same options of where and with whom to spend our professional

and personal dollars, but we tend to patronize companies and organizations that seem to provide great service. And if a company isn't providing great service, we are a lot more likely during a recession to go elsewhere.

Great service is all about paying attention to the big picture and the details. It's the whole shebang! This is the time when companies ought to “sweat the small stuff,” to borrow an overused expression.

Think about the companies that pay more attention than others. I live in Dallas and am proud that Southwest Airlines' headquarters are here, but I'm even more pleased that every time I get on a Southwest flight, I get great service. Sure, planes have mechanical problems and weather causes tardiness, but Southwest seems to handle these problems just fine without skipping a beat.

It's an old wives' tale that anyone who receives bad service is about seven times more likely to tell others about that bad service, but how often do we tell others of great service? I recently had an instance of bad service at Chili's, the ubiquitous watering hole that is known for conformity. If you order the Quesadilla Explosion Salad in Biloxi, it will be the same salad ordered in Dayton.

With my wallet in mind, I fell under the spell of the 2 for \$20 promotion:

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save money. However, too many patrons figured it out. As a result, the restaurant will either change its portion size or do away with the promotion altogether. I was so incensed that I wrote the company an e-mail through its corporate feedback system, validating my visit with the receipt number and date of visit. I was surprised, then, when two \$10 gift certificates came in the mail, along with a letter encouraging me to give Chili's another try.

The result: Chili's made a valiant effort to remedy my opinions. What will I do? I'll use the certificates, but I will ask about portion size before ordering the 2 for \$20. As it turns out, I did the math. Patrons save about \$4 with the 2 for \$20 special, which is usually made right back in beverages ordered for the meal.

Here's the tie-in to accounting. I think accounting firms can learn quite a bit from this parable of life at Chili's:

- **Don't Decrease the Portion Size** — Firms shouldn't scale down their service lines in light of the recession or any other economic downturn. Further, now is the time to expand a firm's services to meet client needs and enable cross-selling of services.
- **Give Away Something Free** — Clients and prospects love it when firms provide advice off the clock. It doesn't always have to be running, and if you're going to offer something for nothing, be sure to tell the client that he or she won't be billed for the service. This instills a huge sense of trust and loyalty. Try it.
- **Pay Attention to the Details at the Time They Occur** — No client wants to walk away feeling as if his or her needs weren't met, no matter how small the need may be. Firms should, again, "sweat the small stuff." However, avoid being 100 percent tactical. There must

be room for the strategic accountant — the one who focuses on strategy

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Why should your firm be any different?

For more than 20 years, Scott H. Cytron, ABC, has worked with CPAs and accountants, providing public relations, marketing and communications services, and teaches firms how to use social media more effectively. Author of The CPA Technology Advisor's MarketingWorks column, he tweets, and is on Facebook and LinkedIn. Contact him at scottcytron@cpata.com.

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