



Amazing Things. Happen.

The Idiot Theory of Life – and Business

by Martin Grunstein © 2010



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systems

COLLECT
information

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workflow

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reports

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mobile

GROW
your business

Everybody has his/her own theory of life. Mine is called the 'idiot' theory of life, and it has become the central focus for all my teachings in customer service.

It goes like this.

When you are about twelve or thirteen (but at different ages for different people) you are sitting in your bedroom one day and dawns on you... that you're an *idiot!*

This probably happens as a result of making a goose of yourself with the opposite sex, and you think to yourself, "boy, am I an idiot? I hope nobody's noticed." But it's too late because everybody knows you're an idiot.

So, it becomes your mission, a teenager, to hide the fact that *you* know you're an idiot from everyone you come in contact with. You dress like the crowd and act like the crowd, and it's risky to ask the opposite sex out for fear of rejection, and that's how we live our adolescent years.

But, you never grow out of it!

As adults, it intensifies and it becomes your mission in life *forever* to hide the fact that you know you're an idiot from everyone you come in contact with as long as you live.

Eventually, you meet one person in the world who you fool completely, totally oblivious to your idiocy, so you *marry* that person! You meet another group of people who know you're an idiot and accept you. We call these people *friends*. And the third group of people is the most important for our purposes because they are the people who know you're an idiot, but they *don't* let you know that they know you're an idiot. And these are the people to whom we give our money in business! And I mean that most sincerely.

For example, I had to buy a computer for my business years ago. Now, I am an idiot when it comes to IT but I had to buy it from an IT retailer, so I try and hide the fact that I'm an idiot from the person serving me by saying all the things you are meant to say when buying a computer (even though I don't know what I'm talking about). Two seconds after I open my mouth the salesperson *knows I'm an idiot* from the way I speak, but if that person lets me know they know I'm an idiot, I'll run a mile because we don't give our money in business to people who humiliate us in the sales process.

After being humiliated on three separate occasions, I went to a friend of mine who was a trainer in the IT industry, and said to him, "I'll give you \$500 (plus the cost of the equipment) if you buy me all the things I need for my office and install them for me, and be available to answer any dumb questions I have. I just don't want to come in contact with an IT salesperson. They make me feel like an idiot."

My friend suggested \$500 was too much, as it would take him less than two hours to do everything I wanted. I said, "Keep the money", and to this day I felt it was worth every penny to not have to deal with IT people.

I wonder how many people feel the same.

About ten years ago I was playing golf with a senior executive who told me he was flying from Sydney to Brisbane to do an expensive IT course for people over 50 because he felt uncomfortable sitting in a room with people twenty or thirty years younger than him who picked up concepts quicker than him.

At a seminar a lady from rural N.S.W. said she drove over 100 kilometres to another town to buy a car because her local car dealer (for that brand) was patronising to her as a female and she wasn't prepared to put up with that, despite the massive inconvenience.

I have heard, on several occasions, stories of people giving the business to the only tradesperson who followed up the quote, or the person who turned up on time.

A client of mine was taking several important clients of his to a fancy seafood restaurant at Darling Harbour. While in the middle of entertaining and trying to impress the people at his table, the waiter informed him, loud enough for everybody at the table to hear, that he was eating his entrée with the wrong fork! Not only did that restaurant lose ten future customers, my client said he's told the story to hundreds of people naming the restaurant every time, and telling people never to go there.

There is an adage in customer service that says 'the customer is always right'. That is the greatest load of garbage I've ever heard!

The customer is *wrong* almost 100% of the time. In fact, most of the time the customer is an *idiot*, just like you and me.

But whether the customer is right or wrong is irrelevant to the success of your business.

The only thing that matters is whether the customer walks away from dealing with you *thinking* he/she is right. If you can get that across to your staff, there is a good chance you will increase the number of repeat customers.

I was working with a group of hairdressers a few years ago, and after discussing this concept in the seminar one of the hairdressers came up to me privately and told me that after thirty years in the business he'd worked out why he'd never had a very successful salon – it's because he told people the truth! And he said to me, "I realise now that people don't want to hear the truth".

YOU BET THEY DON'T WANT TO HEAR THE TRUTH!

Style is an interesting concept. Very few people have it but every person who enters a hairdressing salon thinks *they* are one of the few. When your customer wants to buy a dream don't sell them reality or they won't come back.

Does that mean we have to lie to customers?

Of course not, but it doesn't mean we always have to shove their inadequacies down their throat.

Would it hurt if the waiter didn't inform the customer he was using the wrong fork? Would it hurt if the regional car salesman didn't let the female customer know that he didn't feel women knew much when it came to cars? Would it hurt if the IT salespeople didn't embarrass me for not appreciating the full capabilities of the computer, when all I want to do is word process and get onto the internet?

The world wouldn't change at all but in those three cases those businesses would have gained customers that they lost by making them feel like idiots.

My goal when I go into a selling situation is to walk away making the person I've visited feel clever. If I do that there is a good chance I will have made the sale. If I walk away having displayed my knowledge, pointed out their mistakes and attempted to correct their behaviour, there is just as good a chance that my kids won't eat.

Martin Grunstein's outstanding results with over 500 Australasian companies have made him this country's most in-demand speaker on Outstanding Customer Service. He is contactable by phone on (02) 96623322 or by email at martin@martingrunstein.com.au



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