



No Worse Than The Competition...

Now that I am officially writing my first *Road Trips* segment, I feel like I am opening a new chapter for myself and LeadersWay. For so many years now I have been traveling North America, and very often I think, "I should write about this." But then I continue to miss the opportunity to share tidbits of information that may make sense to you. I expect to share serious things, fun/funny things, happy things and sad things so you will never know what to expect when you open another edition of "Road Trips." Here we go...

So often when working in organizations we talk about how we can separate ourselves from the competition. That is the goal right? Learning things, thinking things and doing things that move our organizations through what we at LeadersWay call **The Separation Zone**. Here's the challenge! Most organizations I see (mostly those I get to experience as a customer) are designed to be "No Worse Than The Competition." You know what I am talking about; these are the places you go to spend your hard earned money, and you walk out thinking, "That was okay."

Okay??? What the heck is okay with okay? What we absolutely have to understand (and share with all of our people) is that if our design is to be "No Worse Than The Competition," then we are giving our customers (remember those people with the money) no reason to come back.

That brings me to Easter brunch in Chapel Hill. After Sunday services, the family and I headed to a hotel that is supposed to be the finest hotel (The Sienna) in Chapel Hill. So you know, I don't like using real names, The Sienna, because what is most important are the lessons we learn from the experience. It's also important to note that last year we had Sunday brunch after Easter services at the same hotel, and it was pretty good. (Note I still did not say great)

This year was a different story! Last year they served complimentary champagne; this year they said it had gotten too expensive. Last year they had an amazing dessert table for kids (with lots of candy); this year they said it had gotten too expensive. (But they said they would be glad to go get some candy for the boys.)

And get this! I asked to see a wine list so I could order a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc for the table. The waitress came back with a special list from the holiday which

didn't list a Sauvignon Blanc. No problem, she'll go talk to the sommelier and be right back. We replied, "Why not just send the sommelier to our table? A little while later she came back to tell us that the sommelier had informed that two of the white wines on the special holiday list were "just like" a Sauvignon Blanc and she would prefer if we chose one from the list because they buy a lot of it.

I am not sure the sommelier (who never came to our table, likely too busy unloading her bulk wine purchases) wanted her to share that information. What do you think?

In the end the "real" wine list had several Sauvignon Blanc's listed (to our waitress' surprise), so we were able to finally get what we wanted. Gretchen did the honors of discussing our experience with management (see Kevin being incognito), and she said they listened with open ears. That was good. I don't, however, expect to hear from them again because that's the way their competition would handle it...pretend it didn't happen. The tragedy/lesson in all of this is we won't go back, and I would expect we weren't alone at Easter Sunday brunch at the Sienna. The cycle is predictable; they will keep cutting costs and losing customers until someone bold enough will stand up and stop the bleeding and begin the cycle all over again.

In this story there is a double-edged lesson for all of us in business. The first lesson is that so many businesses get up every day and operate with a purpose and a design to be "No Worse Than The Competition," and that's a design for business failure. I encourage you to look in your business mirror and make sure that's not the way you look. The second lesson is to illustrate just how easy it is to **Separate** yourself from your competitors, and I don't say that smugly... it IS easy! If you get up every morning with just a few simple questions on your mind you will have begun the **Separation** process. Here's what I will leave you with to think about; in fact, I encourage you to put these questions where every can see them:

1. What makes us different?
2. What things do we need to do to keep our customers/clients coming back year after year?
3. What things do we need to do to have all of our quality customers/clients sharing their great experience with us and all of their quality friends?

Until the next edition of *Road Trips*,

Life is good...

KW