

THE
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LIQUOR STORE

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE
MINNESOTA MUNICIPAL BEVERAGE ASSOCIATION

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Volume 68, Number 5, 2009



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Official publication of the Minnesota Municipal Beverage Association. Published six times annually: September/October, November/December, January/February, March/April, May/June, July/August. For advertising and editorial inquiry contact Paul Kaspszak, Editor, Box 32966, Fridley, MN 55432. Phone 763-572-0222 or 866-938-3925. Advertising rates available upon request. Change of address: List both old and new address.

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On The Cover

Most people don't realize that it's possible to get very ill from contaminated ice. Even though ice is a "frozen food" it can still contain harmful bacteria or viruses. Salmonella, E. coli, and Shigella can all survive on ice cubes even when the ice is mixed with a cola drink, scotch and water, or even 85 proof tequila.

Arctic Glacier Ice follows all IPIA guidelines and GMP standards and understands that ice is a food and therefore treats it as such in every step of its manufacture, storage and distribution to customers.

For more on ice safety, see page 10.

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MMBA President's Message



Tom Agnes
President

The holidays are a very busy time of year for all of us. But what about after they are done?

Typically the first quarter of every year tends to be the slowest in sales. So let's consider some of the things we need to get done during the down time of our operations.

- It is a great time to look at moving items out that are slow in sales. Run some sort of close out sale. Dutch auctions or 2 for 1's are always good programs. For those of you running perpetual inventories, (which should be most of you) once the item is gone you must delete and purge out of your system after records retention says it's okay. If you don't have a database that can track sales of an individual item a good system is to go thru and red dot a category like the beer cooler on the first of the month. Put a little red sticker dot on the item at the front of the cooler door and if this item is still there at the end of the month it needs to go away. Also look at vendors who you no longer have in your system as well and delete them out and all their products.
- While much of your planning may be done for next year, look at what you will do for individual months with sale items. Try to look over the past year and what programs worked out well and which ones failed. Try to identify what made them successful and

what made them fail and how you would change things for next year.

- It's a good time to do those deep cleaning tasks you may have been putting off. Have your ice vendor come out when stock is low and de thaw your ice chest. Clean and organize that junk drawer we all know we have. And probably most disgusting of all, underneath the beer cooler racking.
- Get a good plan in place for the upcoming year, including staffing. Plan out any advertising so when those last minute guys come along you don't break your budget. Have an idea of any budget cuts you may need to make to help your city in this

time of LGA and unallotment challenges. With the state predicting a \$1.2 billion dollar deficit for 2010 & 2011 we will continually need to look at more ways to help out and bring more funds into our cities. Every little bit we can do helps. And make sure to promote that you are helping the city in this fashion.

Many ideas concerning these issues are addressed at our annual boot camp, conference, email newsletter, magazine, regional meetings and more.

Please contact MMBA if you have any questions and cheer on the Vikings to continue to heat up our cold winter.

Tom Agnes
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Ten Years of Successful Wine Tasting

By Lori Ehde,
Rock County Star Herald

Over the past 10 years, residents in Luverne and southwest Minnesota have been learning about wine, one sip at a time.

The Blue Mound Liquor Store hosted its first wine tasting in 1999. That event, staged in the Coffey Haus, attracted 19 people.

Since then, the annual event has grown to include more than 130 interested wine tasters.

Rich DeSchepper and Christy Hess of the Blue Mound Liquor store hosted a 10th anniversary wine tasting Thursday night, Nov. 19, in the Blue Mound Banquet and Meeting Center in Luverne.

"I'm so honored we have everyone here tonight to join us for our 10th anniversary," Hess told the crowd.

She recognized a few charter members, such as Luverne's Brenda Johnson, who now helps with the event, when needed.

Dave Evenson and Scott Faust of Johnson Brothers Liquor Company, St. Paul, have been supplying wine for the local club since it started.

Faust led a toast to DeSchepper and Hess for 10 years of successful wine club organization.

"A toast to you guys for making this one of the most successful wine clubs in southern Minnesota," he said.

Evenson toasted the local wine club members as well.

"You guys are truly interested in wine," he said. "You show up and ask



Brenda Johnson (left) Christy Hess and Rich DeSchepper check the guest list at their recent wine tasting event.

good questions. You truly have an interest in wine."

Dr. Paul and Jan Rud are among the faithful sippers. When asked why he comes every year, Paul points across the table at his wife and says, "Because she drags me along."

He laughs, though, and admits he enjoys the night out with friends.

Jan was a bit more specific. "We love to try new wines, and we've learned so much," she said. "We didn't know anything about wines when we started coming."

Now, she said, they've narrowed their favorites to a few white wines and some Malbecs.

The Ruds, like many other local wine club members, also come for the experience and to meet with other wine club regulars.

"They do it so nicely," Jan said about the wine tasting events in Luverne. "We've talked to people in the Twin Cities about this, and they can't believe how big it is."

Paul said, "It's amazing to look around the room tonight and see all the

people."

DeSchepper said wine tasting in Luverne started after he'd been to a Minnesota Municipal Beverage Association Meeting in Montevideo in 1999.

He said a liquor store manager from Herman had shared that a wine tasting event there had been good for business.

"When I got back, I said to Christy, 'I'm going to send you on a road trip so you can see what they did there.' And when she came back, she organized it, and we hosted our first wine tasting here," DeSchepper said.

"She's done a wonderful job spearheading this."

Thursday's wine selection included Turning Leaf Riesling, which was on the list 10 years ago for the first wine tasting in Luverne.

The wine is served with meat, cheese, crackers, bread and grapes.

The event wrapped up with a Madria sangria, a dessert wine that was paired with fruit tart squares, topped with fresh fruit and drizzled with chocolate.

Victoria Stearns, Luverne, prepares the food and desserts for the Blue Mound Liquor Store's wine tasting events.

"Wine has become a very large thing in Luverne," DeSchepper said following Thursday's event. "We're very happy with the success we've seen."

(MMBA Editor's Note: Rich sent the following to the MMBA office, "What has wine clubs done for our wine sales? In 1999 we were doing \$52 thousand dollars worth of wine sales. This year we will exceed \$155 thousand dollars worth of sales.")

SEASONS CHANGE. TASTES DON'T.

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In Pennsylvania, Re-Thinking the Government-Run Liquor Store

How one state learned to run its booze bureaucracy like a business – politics permitting

By David Raskin | October 2009

Most Pennsylvanians over the age of 40 can remember when buying wine or liquor in their state meant walking into one of several hundred state-owned stores with featureless façades and institutional fluorescent lights, finding a product number from a list and then relaying that number to a window clerk who would fetch the bottle from a stock room. It was the alcoholic-beverage retail equivalent of the post office.

The unpleasantness was intentional. As the “noble experiment” of Prohibition came to a close in 1933, the thinking in Pennsylvania was that alcohol consumption would be tolerated but ought not be encouraged. Governor Gifford Pinchot’s solution, designed just before repeal took effect, was to create the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board as the state’s sole wholesaler and retailer of wine and spirits. The LCB stores would be staffed by certified civil servants. The board would

regulate all licensing of alcohol-serving establishments. There would be no advertising, no window displays and no Sunday sales. Dozens of states followed suit.

Seventy-five years on, Pennsylvania still runs perhaps the most restrictive of the 18 remaining state alcohol-control regimes. While most states got out of the booze business entirely, or at least licensed out their retail operations, privatization never happened in Pennsylvania and won’t happen anytime soon. That’s because even with all the red tape, alcohol sales return nearly \$500 million annually to the state treasury. It’s also because the clerks’ union, which is dead set against privatization, is a powerful force.

Recently, however, new leaders at the LCB have begun responding to the complaints, jokes and political cartoons about how difficult Pennsylvania makes it to buy wine and spirits. The state stores have begun stocking

shelves with better selections. They’re trying to make the stores themselves less dreadful, and perhaps even pleasant, places to shop. The story of their efforts to turn a public lemon into limoncello is a study in how even the most maligned government agency can be made to cater to citizens. But it also demonstrates the limits to how far a retail attitude can go within a public-sector context. “We try to run it like a private business,” CEO Joe Conti told me in the board’s conference room, its wood-paneled walls garnished with paintings of martini glasses and a Cubist rendering of wine and cheese. “Until we’re told we have to do something bureaucratically.”

The PLCB’s lurch toward customer-friendliness began in 2002. That’s when Governor Mark Schweiker appointed Jonathan Newman as chairman of the three-member board. The post typically had been a patronage appointment, a sideline for people who sometimes knew nothing at all about

OOPS!!!

In the last issue, we mistakenly mixed up the photos of 2009 MMBA Scholarship winners Shawna Itzen and Gina Vetsch. Here is how it should have looked.....



Shawna Itzen



Gina Vetsch

the alcohol business. Newman, by contrast, was a lawyer with a passion for fine wines who had dropped his legal practice to spend three years on the board learning the ropes of the industry. He also understood that an increasingly demanding drinking public had developed a taste for more sophisticated wines and liquors—and he wanted to cultivate Pennsylvanians’ palates even further.

Newman’s signature move was to create a line of Premium Collection stores, complete with temperature-controlled rooms, to sell more top-shelf products. To stock those top shelves, he created the Chairman’s Selection program. Newman used Pennsylvania’s leverage as the second-largest wine purchaser in the world (only Ontario’s liquor control board buys more) to negotiate good deals on underpublicized vintages. For example, the PLCB was able to sell the Landmark Damaris Reserve Chardonnay 2000, a \$40 bottle, for \$20. These moves earned Newman Wine Enthusiast magazine’s Man of the Year title in 2003. But Newman also wanted to improve the shopping experience for customers who buy a less upscale product.

In 2007, Newman abruptly left the board. Governor Ed Rendell had recommended the creation of a CEO, and the other two board members appointed Conti, a former state senator, to the job at \$150,000-a-year—more than twice the chairman’s salary. Newman resigned in protest of what he saw as the LCB swinging back to a political mindset, rather than an entrepreneurial one.

But Conti has surprised many of his critics. His biggest push has been in continuing to update the state-store image. To soften the perception of the surly liquor clerk, he stepped up customer-service training for front-line employees. He signed a \$3.7 million deal with a national marketing firm to update the interior design and image of the stores themselves. The effort also is expected to include a vastly expanded Web site and online ordering system.

Conti doesn’t quite share Newman’s enthusiasm for vintage wines. But he’s tried to build on what Newman created with the Chairman’s Selection program. To guide the choice of which wines to include, the board has assembled a Wine Advisory Council made up of a handful of sommeliers and renowned restaurateurs across the state. And Conti has uncorked plans to open a line of boutique stores in swanky neighborhoods. These shops—to be collaborations with gourmet grocers—will specialize in selling wine alongside cheeses, breads and prepared meats.

“Let’s be honest,” Conti says. “We’re known as a government commissary fulfillment organization. We really want to be known as a specialty retailer. The success of our stores is predicated upon it.”

For all the progress the PLCB has made in recent years, the reality of a state government running a 619-outlet retail operation (that’s more stores than the Cracker Barrel or Toys “R” Us chains can boast) remains a bit strange. Real estate decisions are particularly tricky. On the one hand, the control system allows Pennsylvania to minimize the number of liquor outlets in distressed areas, as well as prohibit sales of fortified wines. So poor parts of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh don’t need to confront the problems associated with having a liquor store on every corner. But the system also demands that the state serve all legal citizens. So there are stores in sparsely populated rural areas and stores in high-rent downtown locations that make only marginal profits.

The PLCB often can’t resist responding to local pressure. As P.J. Stapleton, the current board chairman, explains, there are situations in town centers where main streets are decimated by closing businesses and the state liquor store is the last retail operation standing. “The mayor, city council, governor, and state senator all want us to stay there because they’re pumping millions of dollars into these downtowns to preserve them,” Stapleton says. “The last thing

they want us to do is leave and create another hole.”

The PLCB also runs into resistance when it tries branching out into new retail models. The plan for boutique stores, for instance, has come under fire from the Pennsylvania Restaurant Association. Restaurant owners such as Jon Myerow, of Philadelphia’s Tria, a wine, beer and cheese café, don’t think that state government should be competing against them. Wine bars, which have to mark up prices substantially to survive, fear that cafés selling wine at state-store prices will put them out of business. This summer, the state House passed a bill backed by the restaurateurs that would partially stifle the PLCB plan by specifying that the leased boutiques could not share an internal passage with the cafés. The bill is still awaiting Senate debate.

Conti chalks up the restaurant opposition to NIMBYism. “There’s 25,000 restaurants in the state,” he scoffs. “We’ve been directed by the board to investigate eight to 12 locations.” Still, the episode demonstrates the idiosyncratic constraints Conti has to navigate as the CEO of a company whose shareholders are the taxpayers. It’s no longer temperance and ambivalence about alcohol that get in the way of state stores acting like a true retail enterprise. Rather, it’s politics and the public scrutiny that follows any government enterprise that turns a profit.

Despite all this, the PLCB has been succeeding by the one measure that matters most to any business. From 2003 to 2008, revenues grew at an annualized rate of nearly 7 percent, outpacing national trends for both distilled spirits and wine. You might argue that it would be difficult for anyone with a monopoly on booze to fail to turn a profit. And state stores have a long way to go to shake the Soviet-era image seared into the minds of many customers. But just in the attempts it is making to improve, Pennsylvania’s booze bureaucracy is proving to be its own noble experiment.

Is Your Ice Safe?

By Arctic Glacier Ice

Ice is a food: In every food code in the U.S. ice is defined as a “food”. Since ice is defined as a food, the water that is used to produce ice must come from a safe source and any company or entity making ice for distribution to the public must follow good manufacturing practices not only for the manufacture of ice but for the bagging, storage and distribution of the ice as well. In other words, actions must be taken at every step to ensure a safe and sanitary product that is fit for consumption and does not pose a health risk. We at Arctic Glacier not only understand this, but as members of the IPIA (International Packaged Ice Association) we also adhere to strict guidelines for the manufacture, storage and distribution of our Packaged Ice as one of many things we do to ensure we are producing and delivering a safe, sanitary “food” product to our customers.

Ice can make you sick! Most people don’t realize that it’s possible to get very ill from contaminated ice. Even though ice is a “frozen food” it can still contain harmful bacteria or viruses. Salmonella, E. coli, and Shigella can all survive on ice cubes even when the ice is mixed with a cola drink, scotch and water, or even 85 proof tequila. And viruses survive just as well, meaning the whole family of noroviruses, the leader in foodborne illness, could be living in contaminated ice.

Is your ice safe? It’s estimated that over half of the bagged ice sold in the U.S. is produced by convenience stores, liquor stores, grocery stores and other retail locations, and this doesn’t include all of the ice consumed in restaurants, convenience stores, motels, etc. Many of these locations receive little or no oversight from local health officials, and even those that are inspected receive only cursory inspections. Many of those machines

that are inspected have been found to contain mold and slime build up inside them which gives bacteria a perfect place to breed and grow. Couple that with mishandling of the ice by uninformed or uncaring employees and you have a perfect recipe for contaminated ice and foodborne illness.

Is your ice machine a lawsuit waiting to happen? The answer to that question can be found in the steps you take to ensure your ice machine is not a breeding ground for bacteria and also in the steps your employees take to avoid contaminating the ice. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that the type of ice machines normally found in retail locations be cleaned and sanitized weekly. Here are a few other steps that need to be taken.

- Just as you would with any other food, wash your hands prior to handling ice. This includes a 20 second hand wash with soap and water after using the restroom, sneezing or coughing, handling other foods, doing cleaning tasks, handling money, or contaminating hands in any way.
- Ice machines must be delimed and cleaned a few times a year. Filtering the makeup water for contaminants is also recommended, just because the makeup water is from a potable source doesn’t mean it can’t be contaminated (at Arctic Glacier we use ultraviolet light as our final filter of the makeup water to kill any bacteria that may have gotten past other filters).
- At the ice machine, store large ice scoops in a sanitary receptacle on the outside of the machine. Ice scoops should be made of metal or plastic and ideally should be cleaned before each use after being stored for any period of time.

- At the dispensing ice bin, clean and sanitize the ice bin daily and store the ice scoop on a clean, dry surface. Shut the cover on the bin while not in use.
- Ice is a “ready-to-eat” food, so in addition, food workers should not handle ice with bare hands, but must always use a sanitary ice scoop, tongs, or gloves to eliminate any contact with bare hands.

There is another way! Obviously anyone with an icemaker that is producing ice for consumption by the public needs to be following all of these guidelines plus many others in order to ensure a safe, clean, sanitary product and by doing so limiting their exposure to health department sanctions, as well as lawsuits, but if you are not already following all of these steps there’s an easy way to start. Call Arctic Glacier Premium Ice at 800-562-1990 and ask us about getting regularly scheduled deliveries of packaged ice. We follow all IPIA guidelines and GMP standards and we also understand that ice is a food and treat it as such in every step of its manufacture, storage and distribution to our customers. Make a smart business decision today to get rid of a continuing headache and virtually eliminate one more possible lawsuit waiting to happen; surely you have more profitable things to do than cleaning, sanitizing and delimiting your ice machine all the time.

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Jon Chance from Miller Coors, a sponsor of the event; Carole Carlson from the Salvation Army; Brian Hachey from the MMBA; Vicki Wick, Two harbors liquor store manager; Anne Davies, liquor store employee; and, seated, Lori Carlson, a liquor store employee.

Miltona



Jon Chance, Miller Coors; Ron Domschot, Alexandria Food Shelf; Mark Larson, Miltona Liquor manager and Bob Leslie, MMBA Director



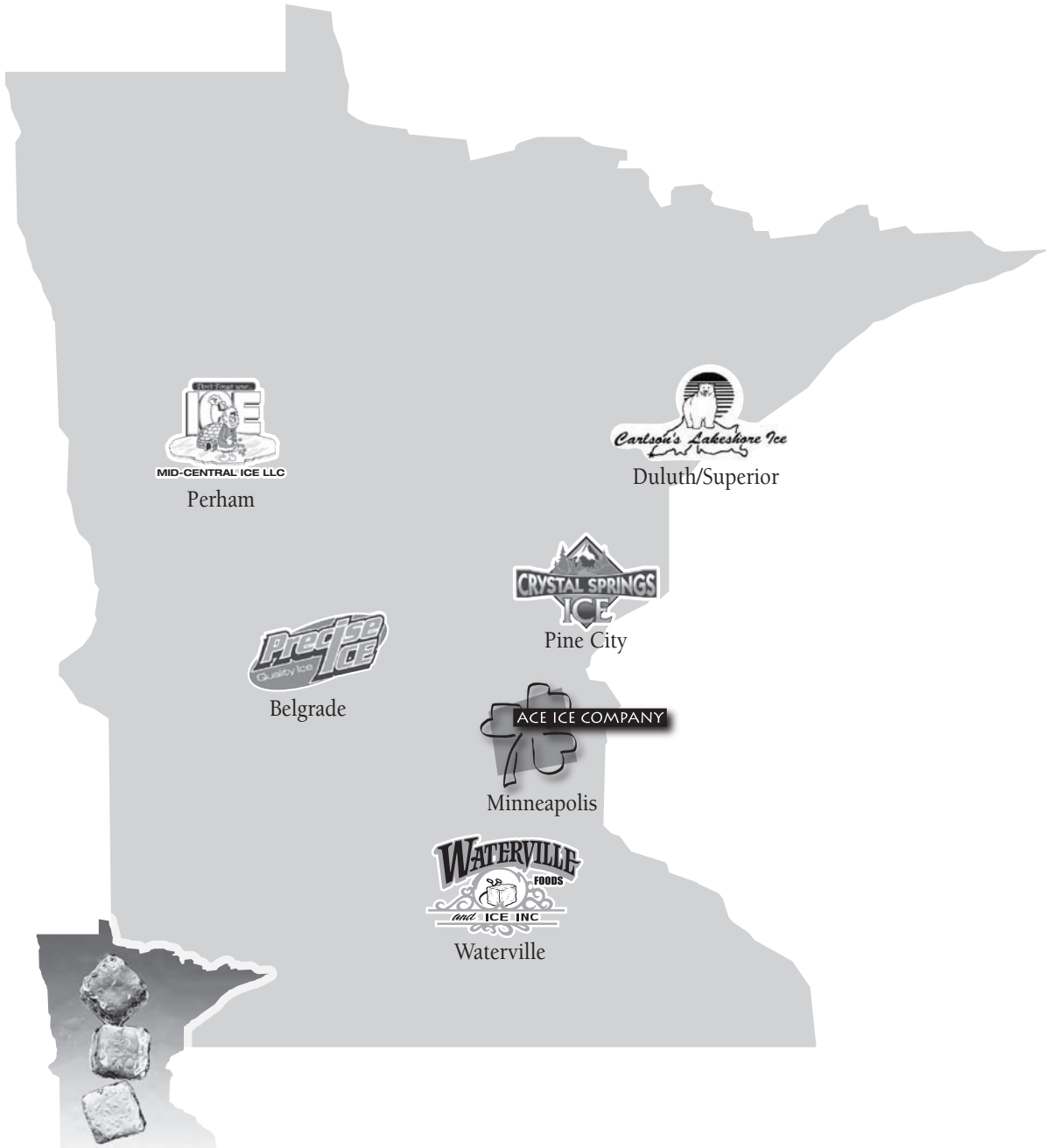
(l to r) Bob Leslie, MMBA Director; Mark Johnson, Miltona Liquor manager, Tanya Olson, Parkers Prairie Food Shelf, Jon Chance, MillerCoors

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When the Customer is Flat Out Wrong

By Joanna L. Krotz

Worn out trying to please an impossible client? Blame it on Harry Gordon Selfridge.

In 1906, Selfridge purchased a site in London, upon which he built the famous store that bears his name and thrives today. Selfridges opened doors in 1909, when women were beginning to enjoy the fruits of emancipation by wandering unescorted around the city of London.

A canny marketer, Selfridge promoted the radical notion of shopping for pleasure rather than necessity. His fashion-forward shop adopted the slogan now heard round the globe: "The customer is always right."

That century-old wisdom flourishes today, even while businesses run on real-time sales forecasts, preferred-customer databases, time-management applications and activity-based costing software — all of which can calculate to the penny how much each transaction costs you.

Is every customer always right? Oh yeah. Except when they cross a line that you need to draw.

Drawing the line

In any season, jettisoning customers is a last resort and a tough call.

"There's an insane obsession with customer service," says Alan Weiss at Summit Consulting, near Providence, Rhode Island. "If businesses stopped focusing only on layoffs and customer service and took a tight, disciplined look, they'd improve performance and profits."

Weiss sees three categories of customers who often deserve a walk:

- 1.) The no-brainers: customers who expect the illegal or unethical. "If anyone asks you for a receipt in excess of what he paid, say 'Adios.'" "
- 2.) More trouble than they're worth: "Casinos throw out card counters because they make casino operations dysfunctional."
- 3.) Toxic customers: someone you just don't like. "Not for prejudice or bias, but someone who forces you into your own worst behavior."

Here's how a range of businesses called it quits with customers:

No excuses

Café in the Park is tucked into a corner of the building that houses the Museum of Photographic Arts in San Diego's Balboa Park. Owner Susan Gilbert says, "I teach a strong customer service ethic."

One day, remembers Gilbert, a woman

customer "was first verbally abusive and then began to reach over the counter." The café is only accessible from a hallway; there's no exit or street entrance. So Sara, the manager, had no escape. As Sara politely attempted to calm the customer, she became enraged. "She reached across and tugged at Sara's hair to such a degree that she lifted Sara off the ground," Gilbert says. At that point, another employee called a guard and the scuffle died down, "leaving Sara shaken and in need of chiropractic adjustments," says Gilbert.

Bottom line? Café in the Park has new rules. The staff gets to exercise judgment and refuse service.

"Management shouldn't force employees to take abuse," says John Connor, president of Quality Assessment Mystery Shoppers, an Austin, Texas-based firm that performs incognito customer service evaluations for

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businesses. Such encounters can't just be chalked up to human nature. It's also a lesson to management.

Consistently creating unreasonable expectations for customers and demands on employees will leave staff frustrated and open to abusive complaints. That goes for lawyers or waiters. The advice is twofold: When a customer is irate or upset, says Connor, "Empathize with him. Allow your staff to say, 'I'm not a punching bag. I'm trying to help and you're being abusive.'"

On the other hand, don't set unreasonable service policies. Give employees the authority to make the call with customers.

Firing the customer

Laura Michaud at The Michaud Group, a Chicago-area consultant, urges owners to create customer snapshots. "Pull apart expenses and find out how promptly they pay, how much customers are costing in support services, complaints, favors or returns, training or special compensation," she says. "Invest in the things that bring you customers and loyalty. When the investment turns into costs so high that it eats revenues, let go."

Michaud, formerly vice president of sales and marketing for Beltone Electronics, a medical device manufacturer, learned from experience that quantifying customer relations is the smart route to growth. At Beltone, Michaud says, one Florida hearing aid retailer slipped into financial trouble and had scant cash flow.

"Their receivables went way up," she says. "It was a sizable customer so we tried to help them stay alive." For instance, Beltone's regional manager lent a hand by visiting the shop to introduce products, to run seminars and to try to gain more market share. Increasingly untrained, employees were causing customer complaints for the manufacturer, yet the supplier kept helping. "We tried everything we could for a year," Michaud says. "We suggested changes, and helped draft a strategic plan."

Eventually, Beltone exercised its contract's 30-day exit clause. "Six months later, the retailer went bankrupt," Michaud says.

So take care when you extend credit to a customer who might turn round. Generally, says Michaud, if the customer is costing 10% more than his revenue, move on. But they may be bringing in more revenue.

Consider:

- Does the customer refer other business? How much?
- Does the customer confer prestige or contacts that offer you opportunities?
- Are you planning to expand into an area or niche that will boost revenues from that customer?

Second-guessing syndrome

Most service firms have met the type: the client who hires your expertise only to keep questioning it. Motivational speaker Jim Cathcart, author of "Relationship Selling: The Key to Getting and Keeping Customers," tells of an industrial manufacturer who hired him to address its sales convention. Typically, Cathcart says, he researches 10 to 28 hours to tailor speeches to client industries and needs.

Soon after the assignment, the client turned nervous, requesting several

phone conferences to preview the speech, a written copy and time to edit and approve it, among other requirements.

"I give 60 speeches a year and I've never written down a speech word for word in advance," says Cathcart, who became bemused as well as exasperated. After trying to assuage the client's nerves to no avail, Cathcart backed off. "I said, 'If you need such reassurance that I'll do a good job, I'm not your guy.'"

He suggested raising the fee to compensate for the extra work or referring the client to another speaker. At once, like magic, says Cathcart, the process reversed and objections dropped away.

"You often need to teach people how to buy from you," he says. "The client deserves the benefit of the doubt. Where the transaction is everything, relationships don't matter. Yet it's the relationship that's the valuable asset."

However counterintuitive it may seem, firing customers can actually boost profits. Pruning your client base of low-margin, high-demand and time-consuming customers lets sales and service staff totally focus on customers who matter — loyal, repeat buyers, worthy new customers and lucrative acquisition.

Mark Your Calendar

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