

The Value of Challenging Customers

A Weekly Sunday Newsletter from Stilson Video Services



As Jack White's song lyrics say, "We're Going to Be Friends"

We've been blessed to meet all kinds of customers throughout the years. Most people are genuinely kind and a pleasure to work with. But interestingly, when you look back and try to remember them, it's often the challenging ones that stand out.

I suppose that's true in other areas of life as well. What led me to write about this was thinking back on my college professors. I don't remember most of them, but there is one I remember quite clearly. I took a technical writing class my freshman year. I thought I was a decent writer, so I expected it to be a breeze.

I didn't like this professor from day one. She had a permanent scowl on her face and never smiled the entire semester. She tore apart everything I wrote. No matter how hard I tried, nothing was ever good enough. Somehow, I wound up with a decent grade, but I hoped to never cross paths with her again.

However, looking back, I now know she was simply challenging me—making me uncomfortable and forcing me to get better. We often need to experience some level of discomfort in order to push

through and improve. And sure enough, she had more of a positive impact on my writing than anyone else in my life.

Sometimes it's the same with customers. A challenging customer forces us to do better. Two types come to mind:

First, there are those who walk through the door ready for a fight. I actually enjoy these folks because I know I'll need to engage all my customer service skills to turn the situation around. Usually, the key is listening. If someone is that angry, there's usually a reason. My job is to understand why they expect the worst so I can create a positive experience and exceed their expectations.

It's really fun to see the transformation in their outlook by the end of a project. Often, they're more than happy to leave a glowing review.

The second type is the customer who actually knows more than you do. While some people only think they do, others truly have expertise in a given area. I don't pretend to know everything, and occasionally I can learn a great deal from customers like this.

For example, early on in this business, a professional video compression specialist walked into my office and started peppering me with questions about how I compress video for various types of content. He was with his girlfriend and clearly wanted to grandstand a bit. In the moment, it was uncomfortable and annoying. Video compression is only one small part of my job, while he did it all day, every day.

But that customer forced me to up my video compression game so I would never be caught off guard again. Today, I'm better for it.

I could go on, but you get the idea. Challenging or not, we truly enjoy serving all of our customers—and we all benefit from every experience.

Lives are important.

Our mission is to connect them to future generations the best way possible.

Finally, if you have a topic you'd like me to write about, let me know at stilson@stilson.com and I'll add it to the list.

— Bill Stilson
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