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A Pause to Reflect – How do We Keep the Soul Of PE without Being Lazy

I am wary. December does that to a working person. I just can't talk work this month, and I'm sure you'll understand.

And so we pause instead to look back on our first year back in the Friendly City. As an old PE boy, I have soaked in much of what was familiar 25 years ago, and much of this is a pleasure, even an honour, (the schools are even better than they were, the beachfront looks as though it means something at last, the restaurants have burgeoned, and I have even been able to get my hands on Sushi, Fiveways is still Fiveways, but now it's not as far as I remember as a child, Something Good is still here?!, somebody took Marist Brothers away and replaced it with a shopping centre, my old friends still remember me, the city is still laid back and unconditional).

Nevertheless, I have seen much that we must be careful not to ascribe simplistically to being laid-back.

There is a fine line between being laid-back and uncaring. We struggled for six months to find a new set of friends and acquaintances. Many of our closest neighbours have not so much as popped in to say hallo, and welcome. If you want a friend in this city, best you go out and find one yourself. This is not what I remember, not what I have boasted about to my Gauteng colleagues all these years.

And heaven help you attempt to get hold of an item out of stock. I recently attempted to purchase a new remote control for my TV and was told it would take six weeks to get from their depot in Johannesburg. I phoned the depot directly and received it by speedmail within a week! I paid the postage, and have written a letter to the MD requesting an explanation of the lack of energy or will in the PE Branch, and an indication of what he intends doing about it.

The results of our lethargy are showing. Service in our city is central to our reputation, and not enough of our citizens seem to care!

2010 is fiendishly close, and we will not be able to secure our reputation in 2009. We must start now to demonstrate we have the capability and the will to delight our clients, customers and guests.

Business owners and Managers carry the brunt of this obligation. If your people inside your business don't understand or are not measured on how they are keeping the customer (inside and outside the business) happy, and the extent to which they are going

the extra mile to bring the customer back, what will happen when there are more choices – and there will be?

We look at the incompetence and lack of energy of the service agent / sales assistant / call centre agent – the operator, but we fail to recognise that poor service at the sharp end is directly attributable to lack of care or arrogance of the managers or owners. If they are not being uncompromisingly hard on service standards, if they are not managing the service performance of the operational people, and removing those who cannot or will not raise the bar, Port Elizabeth will struggle to retain its reputation as a city of Friends and unconditional acceptance. When somebody cannot or will not serve me with energy and enthusiasm, I cannot but assume he or she simply does not care, and by extrapolation, the business concerned does not care.

So to all those who read between Christmas and New Year, vote with your pen. Let the managers and owners know when you have been let down by your fellow citizen of Port Elizabeth, and demand explanation. We have much to do, and there is not much time.

I am hoping to get at least my postage paid back to me by the aberrant purveyor of remote controls, but more importantly, I want to know he put himself on an airplane and came down to do some training and performance management.

And to those who are providing the fantastic service I expect (and there are many) keep it up, and may 2007 be filled with customers!

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