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I'D APPRECIATE A REFERRAL

I'm trying to build my newsletter business and I value your help.

Do you know of a company that could use my assistance with their existing newsletter, or a business or association you've worked with that has talked about doing a newsletter but hasn't done one?

I'm looking for companies, associations and non-profits that are seeking more effective ways to communicate with their employees, customers, members and donors.

I would not only appreciate your referral, but I will reward you handsomely if it turns into my customer.

Thanks for your help.

– Jeff Rubin



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The Write Stuff

A quarterly compendium of writing tips and other useful information

IT'S THE LITTLE THINGS

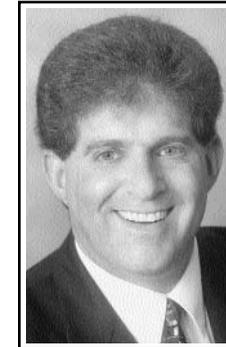
I was reading the paper a few weeks ago when a quote from the St. Mary's College men's basketball coach stopped me.

He was talking about one of his players, someone you never heard of, a kid who's not going to play past college.

"He's the guy who does everything right," Randy Bennett said. "Never late. Zero maintenance."

It was those last four words that got my attention. "Never late and zero maintenance" – they are characteristics every small business person would benefit from having.

My wife, whose professional career has been spent in the bureaucratic world of public health, will graduate with an MBA degree at the end of this year. She's going to establish a nar-



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rowly defined consulting practice, and I think she'll do very well.

She's got a social worker's heart, which is a high compliment, but after 17 years of working for CYA bosses, she needs to learn what characteristics her customers will value in her so that she can leapfrog the competition.

I've told her about the things I believe have made me successful and have allowed me to sustain an entrepreneurial newsletter publishing business for 24 years. Things like promptly returning phone calls, setting fair rates than enable me to not have to charge for every breath I take, meeting my deadlines, being a resource to my customers for other needs they may have, maintaining high standards of integrity and quality, being reliable and saying thank you.

When customers know they can count on you to meet your promised deadline (never late) and that you are a problem solver and not a problem creator (zero maintenance), you will have a leg up on the competition.

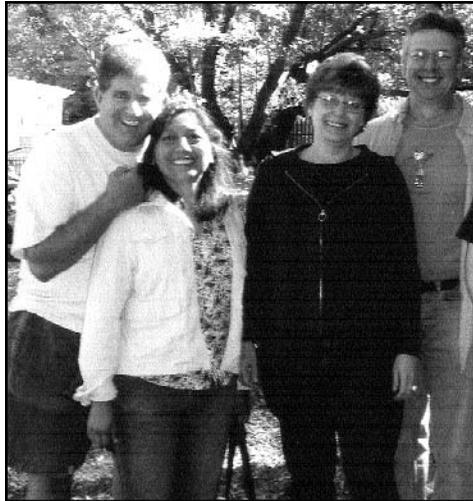
> Inside



 **PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER**

SPRING 2005

CUSTOMER SERVICE ATTITUDE, CLEVER MARKETING STRATEGIES HELP BUSINESSES SUCCEED



Jeff and Norma Rubin, with Janice and Paul Triplett at a barbecue.

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SCAN ART GRAPHICS,
(pre-press), Emeryville
510/595-2222 (Fred or Ron). ■

Sun Choi paused in mid interview to greet a customer approaching the front counter of her small restaurant.

The customer looked at Sun and said “breakfast.” Sun smiled and asked, “Linguisa?” He replied, “Yes, linguisa,” and took a seat at a nearby table as the cook started making his breakfast.

“I know most of my regular customers,” Sun said, “and I know what they like to eat.”

Paul Triplett has been a Realtor® for 35 years. His dad, Howard, is a Realtor®. His daughter, Elaine, has a real estate sales license and will join Paul in his business after she graduates from UC Santa Barbara this spring.

“I like working with people I like,” says Paul. “It makes it easier for them and makes it easier for me. I try to assist people with their real estate needs, answer all their questions — even if they don’t affect me at all. I try to develop a relationship with people as their expert in real estate, whether or not they come to me with a question that’s going to improve my bottom line.”

Sun and Paul don’t know each other, but they share a few significant business traits. They both care about customer relationships and they both have a flair for unusual marketing strategies that build customer community and loyalty.

Café McBryde is a small neighborhood restaurant on a

side street in a blue-collar community frequented by laborers, retirees, and folks who work in the neighborhood. Sun Choi opened it 15 years ago. There are only 10 tables. It’s not a destination for anyone who hasn’t already been there.

On one recent trip, I noticed Sun giving an oversized menu to an elderly patron, who made a point of telling her that he appreciated the larger type.

“I’m 54 and I cannot see the menu too well,” Sun says. “I have to wear my glasses. I saw other people holding the regular menu out in front of them to read it, so I thought I’d make a bigger menu for my older customers. They like it. They tell me it was a good idea.”

While the larger menu was a lovely consideration for her customers, that’s not the only reason people come back. Mitch Inouye and his wife, Ann, have been eating at Café McBryde five days a week for six years.

“Sun tries to accommodate all of her customers, no matter what they ask for, even if it’s not on the menu,” Mitch says. “Once we mentioned a brand of corned beef hash we liked and the next day she had it. Other places with a set menu won’t change it for anything.”

☆ ☆ ☆

Paul Triplett built and sustains his business by referrals. “I just try to stay in touch with clients and friends from the past and ask them to refer their family and friends,” he says.

And he also does some pretty unusual marketing activities that are fun for the participants and contribute to his bottom line.

In 2001, he began renting a movie theatre screen on a Saturday morning and inviting his friends and customers to see a family movie, before the theatre opened to the public. *Monsters, Inc.* and *The Cat in the Hat* were the first two. He serves doughnuts, coffee and juice, then shows the movie.

“I just thank people for supporting me with their business and referrals. It’s toward the end of the year, and it’s a way for us to celebrate together and for me to get face-to-face with my clients and friends.”

What intrigued me was the barbecue Paul threw for a



Sun Choi takes care of her older customers with an enlarged menu.

hundred or so people last summer.

“It’s just a different way of reaching some of our friends,” says Paul. “I’m looking at activities that are family oriented. It’s a way to get people to sit down, talk around some food and enjoy the fellowship.”

It’s all about staying in touch with people, and when the time comes, Paul might have a chance to do business with them, their families or friends.

“There have been transactions that have come from the movies and barbecues,” he says. “It’s just a way of elevating me in the mind of the client. I enjoy it, my clients enjoy it and my friends enjoy it. Why not have fun while you’re keeping in touch?”

Paul’s is a marketing strategy that few real estate sales people are willing to pursue.

“I don’t like being sold aggressively, and I don’t like selling that way,” he says. “It’s got to feel right. I like to sleep well at night.”

“I am always confident that things are going to work out. I don’t need the next transaction to determine how I live and what my next meal is going to be. My needs have always been taken care of.”

IT’S THE LITTLE THINGS

➤ From front page

I love writing about entrepreneurs whose unique marketing strategies attract new customers and retain the loyalty of current ones.

This issue profiles two business owners, one a longtime acquaintance of mine, and the other the proprietor of a small café at which I eat occasionally. They both have a lot of competition — Paul Triplett is a Realtor® and Sun Choi’s café is one of many eating spots in a commercial business district. Yet, both have had long, successful careers; largely by doing the little things that customers notice and make them feel appreciated.

Read on.

