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*Christmas shoppers at Restoration Hardware
photo by Chris Fritchie*

career as a bartender. I wasn't paying much attention until the sound of a drill bit roared through our freshly painted ceiling in the hallway. He assured me that the company would send a repairman in 48 hours to patch the hole. (It took four weeks). After SIX hours and lots of calls to his supervisor, Kyle had failed to get the cable to work. (I knew I should have thrown that guy out after the first two hours when my blood pressure started to climb).

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I could go on about the Christmas cards I received that were not what I'd ordered; the frantic, new waiter at The Cotton Patch; or, the gift-wrap lady at Stonebriar Centre who lost my packages. But I'm sure you have your own horror stories. The haunting question is how do we follow the "Golden Rule" during the hectic holiday season? What would Jesus do in our place? I prayerfully asked myself these questions with each encounter. I couldn't fix the problems, but I tried to understand them.

BE A CARING CUSTOMER

Many people don't like their jobs. The turnover in some service industries is as high as 45 percent. According to the Employment Policy Foundation (www.epf.org), 87 percent of people quit their

What's a Consumer to Do?

By Pat Verbal

HELP! I'M DROWNING in a sea of incompetence - going under for the third time. Everywhere I turn for assistance I find myself wading through muddy waters. What's a consumer to do about the comedy of errors in today's customer service... especially during the holidays when we're trying to represent Christ to our community?

With the busiest season of the year approaching, my husband gave me a gift certificate to a posh salon. On my first visit Julie, the bubbly nail tech, talked me into "Extreme Nails" instead of acrylics. As she worked, Julie rattled on about her desire to start an on-line travel agency.

Five days later, seven nails fell off. On my second visit, she confessed that "Extreme Nails" were new to her and gave me the acrylics I wanted in the beginning. On visit number three, I learned Julie had quit, and her replacement took TWO hours to do my nails.

A few days later, I met Kyle, who arrived at my door to install our new HD television for the final televised regular season football game for the University of Texas. He looked competent in his monogrammed shirt and tool belt. So, I led him to the upstairs game room. While running between his truck and our attic, Kyle talked about his previous

*Finding a gift at
Anderson Guitar Gallery
photo by Chris Fritchie*

jobs as opposed to layoffs or firings. Maybe you've been there.

Julie didn't want to be a nail tech and it showed. As we talked, I discovered Julie was a Christian. I assured her that God had created her with unique talents and wanted her to be content, but true contentment comes from our relationship with Him.

Today's employees often lack proper training. Although companies spend millions of dollars on training, they can't keep up with employee turnover. Some opt for on-the-job internships like the cable company used with Kyle. Installing our cable was the first job he tried on his own. I'll admit he really tried my patience, but that caused me to silently pray for him. I discovered that his wife wanted him out of the bar business because they had a baby daughter. I told him how my husband's dad owned a tavern and as a result, my husband wanted no part of that lifestyle. Hoping to plant a seed in Kyle's heart, I said that with God's help my husband was a wonderful father to our two sons. And I've continued to pray that Kyle will come to know Jesus and...learn to install TV cables.

When God sent angels to declare, "Peace on earth, good will towards men," (Luke 2:13), did He know we would meet a lot of people like Julie and Kyle?

BE RESPECTFUL OF WORKERS

When I'm impatient, I remind myself that my work is no more important than anyone else's. In God's eyes all honest labor is to be commended: blue collar, white collar, high-paying or low. Whatever the vocation, our jobs are a means of using our gifts to serve others.

Paul charged the Thessalonian Christians (and us) to "Respect those who work hard among you...Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work," (1 Thessalonians 5:12,13).

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BE GRATEFUL FOR OPPORTUNITIES

When others mess up, we have an opportunity to show them the true meaning of Christmas - the forgiving nature of God. In a slow moving line at the Frisco Post Office or Target, God's love would not be rude or self-seeking,

and not easily angered (1 Corinthians 13:5). I'm learning to give myself plenty of time to run holiday errands and plan ways to use delays. A friend of mine keeps Bible memory cards in her purse to review when she's stuck in a store or in her car. It also helps to look for a clerk's nametag. There is something about knowing a person's name that calls for good manners. And those names might make a good Christmas prayer list for your family.

When faced with bungling service, we may feel like helpless victims, but we're not! We have options. We can complain, write letters to the management, or just walk away and at times that may be appropriate. Or we can strive to stay Christ-centered, check our attitudes and model His mercy in the marketplace. It's a tough job, but I'm learning that when I succeed, I'm a much happier consumer... especially in December.

Patricia Verbal is a speaker, author and ministry consultant with Ministry to Today's Child in Frisco.

