

## 7-19-19 Customer Service

I suspect we have all experienced poor customer service. It is such a frustrating experience, isn't it? It was with those raw memories of aggravation that I recently called my credit card company with some questions and concerns. To my delight, my questions were answered, and that customer service person then contacted Amazon's customer service to resolve problems, while I was on the phone with both. I next had a question about the book reading service, Audible, also run through Amazon. Amazon's customer service could not address that, but "my" customer service person was willing to stay on the line and connect me to Audible's customer service. Everything was resolved and I was so thankful!

And that is how it should go. Professionalism and patience are what we expect and need during a time of concern. My board and Peggy, our administrative assistant, and I consider ourselves civil servants and we aim to offer the best customer service that we can. Of course, this does not mean we can make everyone happy. Sometimes people don't like what we have to say. In those cases, someone's complaint is (actually) with the laws we are enforcing. One man is pretty upset with me right now. I suggested he speak with my board and perhaps we could figure out a solution. He did not want to at first but finally agreed to it. Offering to speak to the board is the same as when someone asks you if you would like to speak to his or her supervisor. You agree to that offer in hopes of resolution. You are hoping the "team" works together toward solutions.

I have been so fortunate during my nineteen years as a health agent to have worked for an excellent board and with excellent administrative assistants. Well, there was that one admin who did not work out and left on her own in less than a month, but other than that one brief tortuous exception, I have been part of a great team! I know of many health agents who have moved around from one town to another because they lacked cooperation, guidance, appreciation and sometimes their board even lacked knowledge of or intent to follow the law! Others worked with administrative assistants who were playing around with the numbers and stealing from the town. When I hear these stories, I wonder how it happened. Don't they talk about what is going on and keep each other informed? We can't serve the town if we aren't informed.

Last week was keenly challenging to serve the town, with Peggy out on vacation all week! I did the best I could, but it was a whirlwind of a week. I

appreciate her all the more now and will tell her so on Monday! Some people would not appreciate the piles of bills and mail and correspondence that piled up in their absence, but Peggy arrives about an hour before me and I won't be surprised if it is all taken care of by the time I get there. I call her the Whirling Dervish as she spins that chair around at her U-shaped desk, filing and cataloguing and filing some more. I missed my Whirling Dervish during the whirlwind!

It is a week like that when we are reminded that sometimes it is true that absence makes the heart grow fonder. In this case, absence makes the appreciation grow and that is a nice feeling.

Last week's teamwork extended to the state level also when I needed to speak to the Department of Public Health's (DPH) "Epi on call" service. Epi is short for epidemiologist. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has the same definition I learned in school many years ago: *Epidemiologists are public health professionals who investigate patterns and causes of disease and injury in humans. They seek to reduce the risk and occurrence of negative health outcomes through research, community education, and health policy.*

When someone finds a bat under their toddler's highchair, you want the help of an expert trained the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). While I was able to provide customer service by packaging the deceased little brown bat and shipping it to the State Lab Institute, DPH provided the customer service of talking to the mother who heroically jumped into action and whacked the bat.

Once again, during a very busy week, I found myself full of appreciation for teamwork and professional customer service.

The Epi-on-call service is available to anyone 24/7. It is a main number where you briefly tell the person answering why you are calling and shortly after an epidemiologist will return the call to you. I have used the service many times over the years. Their number is 617 983 6800. They are a moving reminder of the importance of knowledgeable professional customer service.

Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for Halifax, MA. She can be reached at 781 293 6768 or [cathleen.drinan@halifax-ma.org](mailto:cathleen.drinan@halifax-ma.org)