

## THE LEADERSHIP LENS Newsletter

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*A monthly resource providing insight, opinion & practical information on life balance, creativity & perspective*

### A Reference Point

I was confused, frustrated and had to go to the bathroom. This added to my being more and more irrational as the evening progressed. I started to sweat in spite of the car windows being open and the temperature hovering around 60 degrees Fahrenheit. I had headed out from La Jolla, California at about 7PM and should have found the Whole Foods Market near the University of San Diego in less than 10 minutes. However, it was nearly an hour later and I was driving up one street turning around when I got paranoid and down the same street. I would repeat this behavior at the next street thinking that the market was just around the corner. At one point I asked for directions in a gas station. I must have been whiter than a sheet and shaking from a lack of food, the attendant looking me over like I was a crazed lunatic! I hadn't had more than a half of a sandwich for lunch and a small energy bar before my unexpected Yoga class earlier in the evening.

The Yoga definitely came at the right time, but my energy level was so low after the workout that I wasn't thinking clearly. More importantly, I had started out from La Jolla to the Whole Foods without directions. I didn't have a reference point. I finally called my wife in a panic to have her to look up the area on a map. She helped me navigate to my destination where I rushed to the prepared foods section. I took my time with my meal and got supplies for the next few days that included plenty of water, granola, yogurt, fresh fruit and other healthy snacks that would not have to be refrigerated. I finally pulled in to my hotel at 11:35PM and was looking forward to collapsing in bed. The front desk attendant looked at me and said, "We've been waiting for you." I took that as a good sign. In the next breath, she said, "We've given your room away and we're sold out for the night." I couldn't believe it. I had prepaid the room for two nights. I was tired, still a bit dazed from my joy ride in the neighborhoods of La Jolla, and desperately needed to sleep before my two-day speaking assignment that started early the next day.

The front desk clerk said that since I hadn't arrived by 11:30PM, she could give my room away. I told her that I had never heard of such a policy and that prepaid, meant, well prepaid! She said, "Had I been a no-show, then it would have been a lot of paperwork for her to fill out in order to get reimbursed." I was too tired to argue and was wondering how comfortable the couch in the lobby was going to be. She made a half-dozen phone calls that resulted in an available hotel room 20 minutes away. This front desk clerk only had a partial reference point that revolved around her comfort and not the customer (me). On the way to the next hotel, I was on the phone with customer service at Hotels.com. The supervisor claimed to not know how my room could have been given away. He said that they would credit me back the money I had spent for the room at the first hotel plus give me \$80 in vouchers for my next purchase. I curtly informed him that they should be paying for the new hotel room since they were the ones that caused me to lose the first room. He said he couldn't do anything else for me. This brief conversation was all that it took for me to question ever using his company again. He didn't have a very good reference point with customer service.

When Anne Mulcahy took over as head of Xerox in 2000, the company was headed for bankruptcy. It was \$19Billion in debt with almost no cash. According to *USA Today*, "Mulcahy steadied the company, cut one-third of the workforce and invested in new technologies, all while embracing rather than dismantling Xerox's long-standing corporate culture. Xerox is growing again, and the stock price has quadrupled on her watch." When asked about her secrets to success she talked about the need to identify the people who really knew how to get things done and learn from them. She puts her family first and her work second. She said, "the prioritization (of what to focus on) has to come around listening to your people and your customers as to what they think is wrong and what you have to do." She took this simple step of listening and has turned around the company so much so that *Forbes* named her the fifth-most-powerful woman in the world. Anne's reference point was the relationships with her employees and customers.

The United Airlines clerk must have taken a lesson from Anne at Xerox. I was convinced that my flight to San Diego was leaving at 8:40am even when I heard the recorded message on my voice mail and saw an e-mail notifying me of a change of flight. By the time I got to the airport, I had to wait in line and the first United customer service representative said that my flight was leaving in 15, not 45 minutes. I was told to go to the front of 'special services' to see if I could still get to San Diego. I smiled at the lady behind the counter. I informed her of my mistake and laid down my United credit card. Her supervisor told her that I needed to go back in line. She said, "Anybody that comes to me will never have to wait in another line again." She then added, "with a credit card like yours, this tells me that I need to do my best to help you." She creatively rebooked my flight and exemplified what great customer service is all about! She had a great reference point and confirmed why I enjoy flying United.

In photography, a great reference point is white balance. In spite of mixed lighting sources, when a digital camera is programmed as to what is 100% white, it allows for a reference point or a constant. If a photograph is slightly off color, then comparing it to the 100% white constant will bring it back to proper color balance. Color photographs that have a proper balance are more vibrant and usually elicit the 'wow' effect. This 'wow' effect should also be coming from the people that are helped by customer service representatives with a proper reference point. Having an internal point of reference point means knowing when to ask for help, understanding what's important and realizing it's not just one customer interaction, but a lifetime of interactions. Getting a reference point got me to the Whole Foods, it enabled Anne Mulchay at Xerox to turn around her company and it will ensure that I continue to fly United. What are the reference points or constants in your life?

### About Mark Sincevich:

Mark Sincevich works with individuals and organizations to increase their communication power so that they gain a fresh perspective, generate new ideas, sharpen the focus and create more business. He uses a unique photography angle in his creative keynotes, meeting facilitation and powerful presentation skills programs. Mark is the Founder and Chief Perspective Officer of Staash Press, a member of the National Speakers Association and the Executive Director of the Digital Photography Institute. In between assignments, Mark can be found spending time with his family or writing in cafés with character. He can be contacted at 301-654-3010 or [www.staashpress.com](http://www.staashpress.com).

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