

Opinion



Perspective

By Jamie Buckingham

Pure Corn

One of the special people I have "met" through this column is Leonard Hicks, former chairman of the board of International Hotel Representatives and Management. Leonard has retired from Miami and is in the process of moving to Vero Beach. We're tuned in on the same wavelength. That means he's reading my books and I'm trying to convince him to take me out to dinner. And even though we've not met face to face, we both have a pretty good idea of what the other likes.

Recently Leonard sent me something he thought I'd like. He was right. It's an excellent article by C. DeWitt Coffman, president of The Coffman Corp. of Miami, consultants and troubleshooters for hotels and resorts. Coffman entitles his piece, "Corny Can Be Terrific."

Taking a roundhouse punch at computer-like salesmen and managers, he says: "Some of us have modernized to the point of almost being individually computerized. Many of us are losing or

have lost the direct personal contact with our guests. Too bad. Some even think greetings and handshakes and all that business are corny. The definition of the word corny in the dictionary is "tiresomely simple."

Then he goes ahead to give us some "cornys" to think about, starting with the need of hotel managers to put time in the lobby at busy times to shake hands with arriving and departing guests. Corny? Heck no. Good business.

He points out that it is still the personal touch which draws people back to a business — even more so than efficient service. Then he quotes something he read on a little hotel bulletin board in California a number of years ago. It holds true — not only in hotels, but grocery stores, department stores and even churches.

"A customer is the most important person in any business.

"A customer is not dependent on us. We are dependent on him.

"A customer is not an interruption of our work. He is the purpose of it.

"A customer does us a favor when he comes in. We aren't doing him a favor by waiting on him.

"A customer is part of our business — not an outsider.

"A customer is not just money in the cash register. He is a human being with feelings like our own.

"A customer is a person who comes to us with his needs and his wants. It is our job to fill them.

"A customer deserves the most courteous attention we can give him. He is the lifeblood of this and every business. He pays our salary. Without him we would have to close our doors. Don't ever forget it."

Thanks Leonard Hicks and DeWitt Coffman, for reminding us all of the importance of a handshake, a warm smile and an arm around the shoulder. Corny? Perhaps. But you wonder why folks like this are universally successful, don't you?