

Literature and Insights Editorial

1932

Are you being served?

There was a TV series on British television many years ago called *Are You Being Served?* Whatever its merits, it reminded me that we should hope for appropriate customer service on whichever side of the counter we stand. Service comes in many forms, and we have all had moments; we would prefer not to have experienced.

These days, there are ready ways to spread the word about poor service, or what is perceived to be so. We can rate providers online and comment on what we do not like. Without naming names, I have had several recent instances that I thought said something about system failures – and I am trying to put my dispassionate if a bit old and tattered systems auditor hat on as I consider each.

First, I incurred a parking infringement interstate in an unfamiliar city when invited to feature at a literary event. My companion's medical condition meant we had to park suddenly and seek attention for her. I stopped in a loading zone, we got lost and the ticket was there on the windscreen on our return.

When I tried to sort things out through the indicated phone numbers, there was lots of buck-passing and no sense. I then wrote seeking clemency and produced a letter from my friend's doctor as explanation for our unexpected stop. The interstate office responsible for traffic infringements rejected the request, saying I should have dropped her off and driven around until she phoned me to collect her. That ignored the urgency of the situation and the fact she need my help when outside the car, so I appealed.

Then they said that the doctor's letter referred to her possibly needing to park urgently if she encountered medical issues when driving and denied the second request because I was the one driving and not her. I tried again, pointing out that it made no difference who was driving. I was thinking about how we should have swapped seats just before leaving the car in order to put her behind the wheel to become the driver but that seemed weird.

I persisted. In the end, I had the complaints manager, the head of the department, the office of the head of government, the deputy head of government's office and the attorney general all involved. Finally, the light bulb moment came. The folly of the situation and the waste of everyone's time were realised. The fine was dropped.

Actually, I'm going to stop there. It's tiring, isn't it? Yes, there was also a mess made of booking a medical appointment that had me turn up for nothing. And there was completely avoidable confusion regarding a car repair I did not turn up for since I'd been told previously there was no booking when I rang earlier for confirmation. There is also a story about a government department that sent me a warning letter for accessing information that they were responsible for sending me in the first place. On and on.

In all of these, we can look at issues of communication, system design, customer service standards, simple good manners, training, and so on. When you get shouty on the phone or at the counter, service quality is likely to slide. I was grateful for having a learning background (and maybe a natural propensity) that encouraged weighing up each situation calmly, trying to see what factors could be at work and how to reach a better outcome. That aspect of gratitude is what I want to finish with.

So, lest you think that the world of this editor is all complaint, here is the positive note. The world serves me pretty well. The kinds of issues I outlined above are petty compared to what many people face. Each morning when I wake, and at random points during the day,



I deliberately stop and think of what makes me grateful. The first thing is often the sounds of birds, usually magpies with their beautiful songs – as now at 5:30 a.m. At other times of the day, it can be reflecting on living without hunger, or a smile from someone in the street, sharing a laugh, and so on.

While we all deal with difficulties, and I have some big ones to wrestle with, there is always room for gratitude. If that sounds like pontificating, let me direct this statement at one more aspect. I am conscious that this editorship allows me to consider and write about a life in study and work, especially one involved with accounting, but more essentially in relation to critical thinking around how we humans operate – especially regarding ethical behaviour. To me, that is what management accounting is about and why I am happy to be engaged with it.

We have quite a variety of creative work with this issue, and I want to thank all who send their material for consideration. You will find Md Shoaib Ahmed with his “Who cares? These are (not) my problems!” that skewers the passivity and helplessness we might all sometimes feel when faced with significant global problems. Garry Carnegie’s “The blind accountant in *Blindness* by José Saramago and accountant stereotypes” obviously contemplates stereotypes, as the title makes clear, but the impact of a pandemic is a key element too. Thus, we have two pieces looking at broad and confronting situations. On a more personal level, we have Nathalie Clavijo’s “Silenced Bodies in Academics” Lives’ where the grief of losing a student strikes particularly hard. Much to think about.

I hope your coming year is a rewarding one.

Your own creative contributions can be submitted via ScholarOne (see below), and your email correspondence is always welcome, of course, at: .

Literary editor

Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal (AAAJ) welcomes submissions of both research papers and creative writing. Creative writing in the form of poetry and short prose pieces is edited for the literature and insights section only and does not undergo the refereeing procedures required for all research papers published in the main body of *AAAJ*.

Author guidelines for contributions to this section of the journal can be found at: http://www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/products/journals/author_guidelines.htm?id=aaaj

Steve Evans

School of Humanities and Creative Arts, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia