

# Customer service complaints now highest since 2009

The UK Institute of Customer Service corroborates what I have been saying for months...

Summer is gone. Typical!

When we were all cooped up by Covid the weather was awesome.

Unfortunately we all cooked in the heat at home, unable to go out. Then as soon as Boris announces Freedom Day, the weather turns rubbish, so you don't want to go out. And all too soon Autumn is in prospect.

On one of the few recent occasions me and the missus did decide to venture forth, I found myself being dragged around the shops. I still find that whole dutifully shared retail experience a bit puzzling.

I get dragged around the shops because Mrs C professes that, "I like to know your opinion on things." Hmm. Who knew that I was such a fashionista... and of women's clothing! But as any man will tell you, any suggestion as to what might constitute a desirable garment or footwear is immediately dismissed with a disapproving "Oh no!" or "You're not serious!" Which is strange, because that doesn't sound to me like something you'd say in response to receiving a valued opinion!

Having been married for some time now, I have realised that the wisest course of action is to wait until I am asked for an opinion and then to say the words "That looks nice." Wisest, because meekly approving everything is the path of least resistance. However, you can't just rely on the words. It is how they are said that makes all the difference and takes practice. Too enthusiastic and I am given the 'stink eye' and accused of "being silly." Not enthusiastic enough and frustratingly I am "not paying attention."

Tricky though it is to master the delivery, it is worth practicing. These 'three little words' have got me out of no end of scrapes. And in particular they allow me to go shopping with me wife and chat with her whilst she shops... and mentally I do something else!

On the way back to the car, we walk past a kitchen showroom. Foolishly I allow me self to get talked into entering "just for a look around." Schoolboy error! Pretty soon we are viewing all kinds of mind-bending kitchen appliances. And all have mind-bending prices to go with them.

Now my wife is actually a pretty good cook. By which I mean she can knock up a great roast beef and yorkies for a Sunday lunch without the assistance of Messrs Bisto, Birds Eye or Findus. But even so, during the week when time is short, we are often defrosting or reheating. And, to be honest, I can't see anything wrong with the kitchen and appliances we have now.

I mean If we bought a steam oven would we really get the full benefit of its ability to help crisp home baked bread and pizza bases? This given that, to the best of my knowledge, my wife has never made bread in her life. Although I am assured that if we had such an oven then she would "all the time!" Madness!

As we walk around, Mrs C becomes ever more enthusiastic about a new look kitchen and I become ever more wary of the nose-bleedingly high cost. "I don't know what is wrong with you," she admonished. "You know it's all very well saving money, but you can't take it with you!" "Really dear," I replied. "So how come that same principle does not apply to your vast shoe collection, most of which you never wear?"

Well, you know when you have said the wrong thing. She turns on her heels and we leave. The stony silence is deafening.

In an effort to try and redeem myself I suggest lunch. We go to the food hall in the mall. It is rammed! People are queuing at the concessions. Every face is the same. So we join the queue for Zizzi's and wait our turn.

As we are waiting, I overhear what the people at the head of the queue, who have probably waited 25

minutes to get there, are being told. Apparently the restaurant is short staffed "because of Covid," so it may take 40 minutes to be served. Forty minutes!

You would think they would tell you that when you joined the queue not after you got to the head of it. Although I suppose they calculate that you have invested so much time waiting to be told that you need to wait even longer, that you'll just accept it. Well not me!

Customers are fed up with being told they are getting poor service "because of Covid." I have been banging on about this for weeks, but now it is official. New research by the UK Institute of Customer Service says businesses are being accused of using the pandemic as an excuse for long waits and late deliveries.

The number of complaints about poor service in the last six months was at its highest level since 2009, according to the institute's survey of 10,000 people.

First Direct, John Lewis and Amazon topped the institute's table for customer satisfaction. Interestingly they were the only brands in the top 10 which featured in the same survey a year ago.

Jo Causon, the institute's Chief Exec, commented that retailers needed to be honest with customers when they start looking at a particular product about any potential delays, so they are aware of how long they might have to wait... to inform their decision about what to buy. Amen to that.

I'm not waiting an hour to be served me lunch. My first thought is for something quick. We'll go to McDonalds. Ah, but they've got no milkshakes. I know... Nando's. But they've got no chicken!

"Come on. Let's go home..."

"Did you say that the steam in the oven actually makes the bread crust crispy, not soggy?"

"That sounds nice..."

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