

Jehovah on the Verizon

A young man in a suit walked into my shop last week, tablet and file in hand – the sho'nuff signal that he was going to try to sell me something. Or rather *save me* - hundreds of dollars, that is. Verizon salespeople are the Jehovah's Witnesses of Main Street.

For several years I have rebuffed similar clones, citing our company's horrible experience with Verizon and its god-awful customer service. However, this earnest young man was different. He *believed*. Three more visits ensued where he assured me that Verizon had undergone a thorough corporate criticism/self-criticism (that is, hired outside consultants for a staggering sum) to repair their customer service. Monopolies always have a bit of a problem with this: "You don't like the service? Just go sign up with ... Well, there is no one else is there?" Verizon's particular culture of fuck-you customer service seemed to be more intractable than others with their history of market dominance.

Anyway, I admit: I broke weak. True dat: I am paying way too much for my phone and internet service. Cablevision knows that its customers are scared of Verizon's legendary customer service history and will be too scared to jump. But like an abused lover, I thought to myself, "Maybe Verizon has changed. They have FIOS (whatever that is...) They've cleaned up their logo. I'll give it one more chance."

Now on its best corporate behavior, Verizon was now reliable, and they were going to save me a bundle. I didn't even have to give a definitive, "Yes." They would just schedule an appointment, and I could still change my weak mind later. They just needed me to speak over the phone with an independent verification firm.

I am put on the salesperson's cell phone (he had AT&T, not Verizon...) and I start to hear the scripted legal-speak of a bored 20-something male speed-mumbling the name of his company and segueing seamlessly into his instructions that I answer clearly with only "Yes" or "No" answers. He then informed me that for quality control and verification purposes that they would record the conversation. "Do you agree?" I muttered something like, "I guess so; it's not like I have a choice here, do I?"

Wrong. You will be punished.

Twenty-something retreated back into his first speech, taking it from the top, word for word, but with a practiced, patronizing tone that indicated that he would much rather be piloting a drone from his cubicle and targeting a playground in Afghanistan.

I was lit up.

I could still hear him repeating his question to the ether as I handed the phone back to Verizon Guy. He was momentarily struck dumb. I'm betting they hadn't counted on people like me when the company issued its sales kit for Verizon streetwalkers.

“What happened?” asks Verizon Guy.

“I’m not talking to that jerk. He’s an asshole.” I resumed working on an arrangement for a delivery.

Verizon Guy starts into a controlled, but fever-tinged monologue of apology and explanation that ends with pleading: “Let’s try again. I have someone on the line, and she sounds much nicer.”

So the “much nicer” young woman’s voice on the other end recapitulates the identical monologue. They are clearly under strict orders not to veer from the script by one word or else, I expect, the deviation from corporate legalese will become a colorable issue in a court of law. After her self-introduction and the legal disclaimer about recording, I asked her if she was, in fact, not a robot. A momentary silence ensued. She took it from the top. One more time. Without feeling.

I like my drones piloted by women – it’s a more human touch, I think.

I handed the phone back to Verizon Guy again. I admired his patience with me. I am now clearly going to be the frontrunner in the dickhead-customer-of-the-month discussion in their next sales meeting. I told him, “I’m sorry. I can’t do this. I don’t speak binary.”

Verizon Guy is determined to complete his sale. I am his 5-lb. bass on the line – hooked but hiding in deep water under a log with the line wrapped around some brush. He is on edge, but knows he must use patience to land me.

He calls the verification firm one more time. I get a new Nicer Person 2.0 who sounded an awful lot like the last one. We go through the script again. I am determined to get through this and not be a jerk.

Then, after the long litany of yes-no questions, Nicer 2.0 asks, “Can I please have your date of birth to confirm your identity?”

I have been well-trained: “Yes,” I answered.

Long pause.

Nicer 2.0: “Can I please have your date of birth to confirm your identity?”

“Yes.” One droid deserves another.

Longer pause.

Nicer 2.0: “Mr. Blunk, can I please have your date of birth to confirm your identity?”

You see where this is going. I am a bit ashamed to say that I played this out for a while before handing the phone back to Verizon Guy.

“She told me I could only answer, ‘Yes’ or ‘No’. That’s what I did. She changed the rules. Not me.”

“I can’t finish this order without going through the verification...” My guy is squirming. He can see the big bass below, but he can’t get the line untangled from the brush.

I try to make it easier on him, swimming up to the surface: “Aren’t there some forms I can fill out instead? They must have something like that for deaf people... You know, people who don’t have to deal with these Sims from the verification company.”

“I don’t know. I guess I could ask my supervisor. I never had anything like this happen before.”

A customer saved me. She wanted a balloon bouquet which I would never have done under any other circumstances. But today, I was grateful for the chance to tie off a Mickey Mouse birthday ensemble.

Verizon Guy left, promising he would be in touch soon with an answer from his supervisor. The fisherman always remembers where the big ones broke him off.