

# From the Handbook for Business, the Bible

## # 43: A kind answer soothes angry feelings

There have been several corporate operational & cyber failures recently, leading to a media backlash and lots of customers feeling very angry! From a PR perspective one wonders what goes through the minds of the leaders of these businesses, based on what they say.

There was the phone network shutdown that impacted millions of users; also, huge data leaks at this and other big companies; even the MyGov website. Who could forget the disgraceful Bank Royal Commission findings; and the customer relations disasters at a certain airline.

Apologies from company leaders are generally weak, likely written by lawyers not marketers! They refer to 'your inconvenience' or 'we're working on a solution' or 'we've let you down' or 'we'll do better' but rarely admit to inadequate policies, procedures & internal controls allowing hackers in; or customers to be dramatically impacted. Full \$\$ compensation is rarely offered.

As these negative events unfold in the media, I wonder why managers think and speak the way they do? The answer of course, lies in the primary reason these corporations exist and that is to make money for shareholders, positioning their customers as simply a means to that end!

### What Bible principle can we apply to this situation?

**Proverbs 15:1**, "A kind answer soothes angry feelings, but harsh words stir them up" CEV

- \* Here, **kind** means, sensitive, gentle or soft and I would add, honest
- \* Words that are **harsh** can be seen as grievous, careless, unkind or causing offense

It seems as though big companies struggle with these concepts, leaving their customers aggrieved, feeling (very) angry and perplexed as to how such things can even occur! Hence the frequent public relations disasters that we see in the media, sometimes for days on end.

In the SME marketplace, that's us, we must be sensitive to any mistake that inconveniences customers, especially if it costs them money! And then do whatever it takes to fix the problem, at whatever cost. Here's an example that's close to home...

*...June 30 is a hectic time for accountants, especially in the days when cheques had to clear the bank as proof of payment. One year a client's super contribution cheque was still in our mail tray on July 1<sup>st</sup>. We had stuffed up meaning our clients did not get their planned tax deduction. Over a coffee I explained the situation, apologized and paid them \$13k in compensation.*

### What should business owners do if a potentially damaging incident does occur?

**To 'sooth' the situation, the key is how you respond...and how fast:**

- ...You must take responsibility with a promise to fix it, with a clear how and when
- ...If your supplier, your staff or systems fail, do not punish your customer, it's not their fault
- ...Excuses won't help either as the focus is on you rather than the aggrieved party & their need
- ...Your explanation, apology and resolution need to be fast, complete and honest
- ...You must endeavour to keep the customer up to date if it's an ongoing issue
- ...And it will invariably lead to a system upgrade and staff training to ensure no repeats.

**Counsel: When things go wrong don't be like those big company managers who seem unable to give a kind answer to soothe angry feelings! We in the small and medium segment, must give a kind answer, fix the problem ...and see the calm response and impact on customers!**