

PART TWO

System Beaters: Their Stories

Part II consists of six chapters that tell the stories of people who beat a system. The stories explain what they did, how they did it, why they did it, what was experienced, and what was learned. All of the stories have at least one thing in common: in each an implicit assumption was denied or challenged. The denied assumptions are identified in the italicized lesson at the end of all the stories.

In chapter 3 we explained that when we think about trying to beat a system, our behavior and creativeness are often constrained by the different types of assumptions we make. These are mostly implicit assumptions. Human memory being what it is, and to make it convenient for you, we will restate and elaborate on these four assumptions.

Assumptions the System Makes about Us

(We are not what we appear to be, even to us.) Look for the implicit assumptions that a system makes about you. For example, most systems assume that we will not break the

CHAPTER FIVE

TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY

DO UNTO THE
SYSTEM AS IT WOULD
DO UNTO YOU

Systems are often insensitive or indifferent to the way they affect those they are supposed to be serving, for example, imposing on your time to sell you something over the phone and continuing to send bills that have already been paid. Many organizations hope and even expect that you will take the time to correct the mistakes they make; you may have to make numerous phone calls or make copies of documents and send them to the appropriate person. When you're faced with this type of frustration, turning the tables on these systems can be an effective method of raising their awareness, if not changing their behavior.

Turnabout is equivalent to holding a mirror up to a system so it can see itself as others see it. Unfortunately, most systems seldom look in mirrors. But doing unto them as they do unto you can cause them enough discomfort to lead to a satisfactory response. Making this strategy work usually requires persistence because insensitive systems

GETTING THEIR ATTENTION

David received an incorrect bill from a large credit card company. The error, of course, was in the company's favor. Thus began a series of letters to the company that went unanswered. David had written his initial letter explaining the error and requesting a correction. He received no answer, but another computerized bill was sent to him with the error intact. His second and third letters were accompanied by copies of the initial letter but to no avail.

Each month another computerized bill came with no acknowledgment of either the error or his letters. Finally, fully exasperated, David took the fourth bill in this series and placed about two dozen staples in the part of the bill to be returned and processed in the company's computer. He also wrote on the bill, "See my three previous letters." The computer wouldn't accept the stapled bill and kicked it out. This got the company's attention and resulted in a phone call from the company. An apology and a correction followed.

When David confirmed the correction, he canceled the credit card.

No organization can accurately assume that all possible responses to an annoyance it caused can be anticipated. A far better assumption is that customer loyalty can be maintained by paying attention to complaints and correcting the associated problems without hassle.

MORAL

Human intervention when a customer complains should be a staple of service.