

The Customer is Always Wrong: The Retail Chronicles

edited by Jeff Martin

reviewed by Dr. Jake Simons

Biography: Dr. Jacob V. Simons, Jr., is a professor of operations management in Georgia Southern University's College of Business Administration. He retired from the U.S. Air Force as a Lieutenant Colonel with experience in aircraft maintenance and software development. Dr. Simons teaches courses in operations and service management in the Department of Finance & Quantitative Analysis. He may be reached by email at jsimons@georgiasouthern.edu.

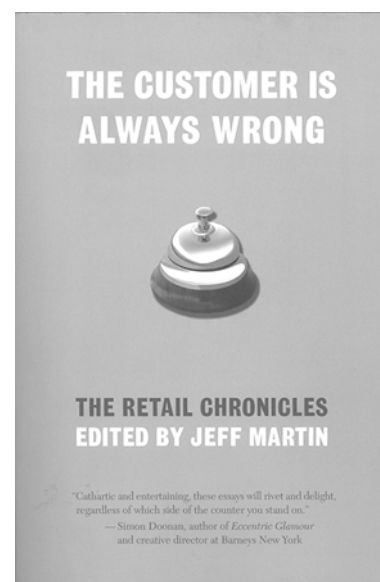
When my colleagues and I write reviews, we usually try to pique your interest and offer reasons you should read the book we're describing. Not this time.

Because there's so much customer contact in service businesses, managers spend a lot of time thinking about what it takes to understand and meet customer needs. And we know that sometimes customers may not know what their needs are or may have expectations that we consider unreasonable. I expected this book might offer new insights into the psychology of customer interactions. I was wrong.

The Customer is Always Wrong is a compilation of short pieces by several authors who've worked in a wide variety of retail jobs. But I quickly realized the authors aren't business managers, consultants, or educators. They're aspiring writers, musicians, and comedians, who are lamenting retail jobs they've had to take (but hated) while waiting for artistic success. Their tales consist largely of sarcastic, and often profane, put-downs of their supervisors and customers.

Thankfully, I did find a few interesting perspectives and most of the pieces are humorous. Often, I enjoyed a selection's opening line the most. Here are a few examples.

- "It's been my experience that people don't have the slightest idea what they want, and will stop at nothing to get it."
- "The first rule of retail is that everyone wants to check out at once."



- “When I graduated... with a bachelor’s degree in Radio & Television and a minor in Creative Writing, I had roughly the same job prospects as, say, a lump of coal or perhaps a dead pigeon.”
- “It wasn’t my fault. It was theirs. They never should have trusted me.”

Although the book was mildly entertaining, I didn’t find any large pearls of managerial wisdom. But I did learn something from reading it. Customer encounters, whether in retail or other service industries, consist of interaction between customers and our employees. As managers, we generally think that the success in these encounters lies in our ability to figure out the customer’s needs. But maybe we tend to overlook the employee side of the equation, relying too heavily on our hiring and training processes. *The Customer is Always Wrong* helped me remember that in service businesses with high labor turnover, we need to pay a little more attention to our employees. Although it may be a career for us, the business is just a temporary job for many of them. Their aptitudes and aspirations may lie elsewhere. If we ignore that or assume that our orientation program will make our business the center of their universe, we may be making a big mistake. So, if you haven’t done it lately, take a few minutes to find out why your employees come to work and what they consider important. You may be as shocked as I was when I read this book.

The Cover Story

Title: *The Customer is Always Wrong: The Retail Chronicles*
 Author: Various authors, edited by Jeff Martin
 Number of pages: 166
 Area(s) of business: Any level of management
 Readability: Easy
 Time needed to read: A few hours
 Why should I read this book? I *don’t* recommend reading it, unless you’re anxious to see how sad, seamy, or scary the business world looks to some employees. Otherwise, just read the review.
 Overall rating: 2 bulbs