

By Bill Guertin

The 800-Pound Gorilla

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The Bloated Dirty Diaper

It was around 7:25 am when I pulled into the small parking lot. The HR director of the company was scheduled to meet me at the front door to let me in at around 7:30, so I was the first one to arrive. I decided to organize my materials for the day, and needed my briefcase from the trunk.

As I stepped out of the car, I noticed something white on the pavement in the vacant space next to me on the driver's side. I looked closer to see what it was, and instantly recognized it as something I didn't want to touch.

It was a folded, soiled, and thoroughly soaked disposable diaper.

It had rained all night, and so the diaper was bloated with water to the point of exploding. The tape on the sides was about to let go, and there was gel beginning to ooze out of one of the bundled corners. It was disgusting, and definitely not something I wanted to come into contact with.

Part of the customer service training I do involves making sure that others realize that each employee is an unofficial custodian of their company. One of the things I emphasize is that everyone ought to pick up the trash they see in the parking lot on their way into the building from their cars each day.

I wanted to practice what I preached. But a dirty, water-filled diaper? I couldn't possibly get rid of it gracefully. How would I pick it up? What would I put it in? Where was the nearest trash can? Would it drip on me and cause a stain on my clothes for the rest of the day? Would I smell bad? Would I need decontamination?

I had a million excuses not to touch that awful thing. But then I remembered that I had a plastic grocery-type bag in the back seat of my car. I looked around, and noticed an outside trash can not far away.

I was stuck. I had no excuse now. There were too many resources at hand.

I grabbed the plastic bag and inverted it, so that it fit onto my hand like a glove. I squatted down next to the blob and used the "gloved" hand to put the squeeze on it. I quickly lifted it up and swished the bag right side-out, so that the diaper was now inside the bag.

It felt like it weighed ten pounds. It didn't explode, and miraculously, it all stayed inside the bag. It was disgusting, but at least it was contained. I tied it up tight, quickly walked over to the trash can, and dumped it in.

Just then, I heard a tap-tap-tapping of metal against glass. I looked up at the front door, and it was the president of the company motioning me to come inside. I hadn't even noticed his car coming into the parking lot.

Come to find out, he had been watching me the whole time. There was a separate parking lot for employees, and he had come a little early too, but because he was in a separate lot, he had not seen the nasty diaper.

He was so impressed by my act of "heroism", he decided to use the example of the diaper all day as he introduced me to the several different groups of people I was training. "He doesn't even work here, but he did this because he understands how important it is for us to have a positive image for our customers. If he can do it, so can each of us."

How far would you go to do something that would benefit your company's appearance? How often do you walk right past things right now that you could pick up, fix, or make straight with a little bit of effort?

It's everyone's responsibility to take pride in their workplace by keeping it clean. From the employee break rooms and kitchen to heavily-traveled customer areas, if something needs to be picked up, everyone needs to be involved on an ongoing basis. It only takes a few moments, but it can mean everything to a customer.

Dirty environments are a reflection of everyone in the company. Clean, inviting environments are also a reflection of the company.

Is it possible that a customer might have seen that diaper in the parking lot and have been grossed out enough to shop somewhere else? Of course. What are you doing to help avoid a situation like that from happening at your business?

Don't walk past something that could be taken care of quickly. Take a moment to improve your company's image by keeping it tidy whenever and wherever you have an opportunity.

You never know who might be watching.

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