

By Bill Guertin

The 800-Pound Gorilla

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Customer Service... Gerber Gets It

Have you ever met someone that just “gets it”? Someone that understands what it takes to make people feel special as a customer?

Gerber is one of them.

Gerber is the first name of a young man who works at Chukka Cove Equestrian Center, located between Ocho Rios and Runaway Bay, Jamaica. It is one of the finest equestrian centers in the Caribbean, and plays host to many Jamaican polo matches throughout the year.

My family and I chose the Chukka Cove Beach Horseback Riding activity while on our recent cruise vacation. Our children had never been on horseback, and as often as my wife, Sherri, has been on horses, she had never ridden on a beach, so our entire family signed up for the adventure.

We arrived at the Equestrian Center right on time, and everyone was very polite, friendly, and accommodating. The facility was absolutely gorgeous, and the equestrian manager chose the horses that were best suited to the riders’ size. We climbed aboard, and our peaceful trail ride portion of the trip began.

After 30 minutes or so of trails that included dramatic rocky ocean coves with waves crashing, we stopped at a pavilion where we changed out of our jeans and into our swimsuits and “Jamaican sandals” (bare feet) to prepare for our ride in the ocean. As we pulled into the pavilion area, we heard a warm greeting in a thick Jamaican accent:

“Greetings, mon! Are your ready for the ride of your lives?” The young man was beaming, and sported large oversized sunglasses, a neat gray T-shirt, and creased shorts. “Welcome to the Chukka Cove pavilion. My name is Gerber, and this is the part you’ll remember about Jamaica forever... so there’s no worries, mon!”

In an engaging style, he told us what to expect during this part of the adventure; that we would be riding bareback through the water with our horses, and what we should do to control our individual horses through the experience.

“When you get back, you can have a soda or a Red Stripe beer and talk about your adventure, mon. Gerber is here to take good care of you.”

We had a little bit of a wait, so someone in our group asked him where the name Gerber had come from.

“It is not my given name. I am 25 years old, and in Jamaica, typically it is the older men that ask the younger women for a date. There is a beuuuutiful woman here on the island that I asked out, and she was 30 years old. She said that she would not date someone so young, and so she called

me Gerber, like the Gerber baby.” Everyone listening had a good laugh, including Gerber himself.

Throughout our brief time at the pavilion, Gerber happily engaged people one-on-one. He asked their names, where they were from, and seemed to know a little bit about every place that was mentioned.

“Have you been to the U.S. before?” one guest asked.

“Oh, yes. I’ve been all around the world. People come here from everywhere, they take my picture, and take me home with them... so I’m everywhere!” Everyone was laughing and enjoying Gerber’s enthusiasm for his work.

I asked Gerber how long he had been working at Chukka Cove. “Two months, mon,” he said, and it was then that I noticed the word “TRAINEE” across the back of his T-shirt.

“It’s not long, but I love my work. I was born and raised on Jamaica, and I love my homeland. Perhaps you might consider bringing your family back for a vacation for one, maybe two weeks soon?”

He wasn’t selling me on his equestrian center. He was selling me on his country.

What he understands is that Jamaica depends on its customers – tourists – to grow and thrive. He sees his job as something much larger than the equestrian center. He sees his job as an ambassador to his country. If Jamaican tourism grows, then he and all those around him can grow and prosper together.

Does your staff understand their role as business ambassadors like Gerber does?

When a customer comes in contact with your business, the way they are treated is a reflection of many things, including the character of the area in which we live. Were you treated badly? Nonchalant? Rude? That becomes a reflection of not only the business and everyone in it, but also of the community at large.

Why not empower all of your team members with the title of Community Ambassador? No, there’s not any extra pay in it. No shiny new name tags will be distributed. But if all of us understood how much we’re dependent on everyone else to create a positive image, perhaps we can be better as a community.

My wife did not originally want to go to Jamaica because of a bad experience her mother had on the island over 25 years ago. It was people like Gerber that have made me reconsider Jamaica as a place to bring my family on a future vacation.

How many Gerbers are working for you?

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