

POGO WAS RIGHT

Many of us worry about the 900 pound gorilla that is China. While some buying decisions are made primarily on price, the vast majority of commercial transactions include service as a significant factor. Most of us have to be price competitive, but can gain market by delivering consistently outstanding service, by reliably doing what we say we will. That's a fairly low hurdle to jump. Yet I see business after business fail at that.

Each of you could undoubtedly contribute your own story of personally receiving ridiculously bad service. Many of you can no doubt name a company that has frustrated you so much that you commit to never buying from them again. The passion we feel in the transaction is too often met by indifference.

On-time and quality statistics can be too impersonal to bring compassionate service. Policies designed to control internal decision-making can preclude effective problem resolution. Whether you create your own version of retail's mystery shopper or find another way to actually feel what dealing with your business is like, regularly look for the enemy right under your nose.

CONGRATULATIONS

...to Chris Smerglia, Gary Vaccaro, and Del Duncan on the grand opening of Ohio Commerce Bank, headquartered in Beachwood, OH. I had the pleasure of working with Gary, Del's father and Ohio Commerce Bank Board Member Lou Amoroso when I was an economist for Cleveland Trust (since morphed into KeyBank) in the late 1970's. Ohio Commerce is a small bank with great versatility to support the needs of small businesses. Their ingenuity is impressive.

NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

For those of you who will write resolutions and intend to keep them, a 1997 University of Washington study of New Years Resolutions suggested three keys to success:

- a strong commitment to change
- a strategy for handling the inevitable moments of weakness or backsliding
- know how you're doing by regular monitoring and feedback

Sounds pretty applicable for making changes in your business as well.