

It All Started When They Took My Sign

I started the store twelve years ago with some savings and borrowed money. It took a lot of my time, but the business grew and it seemed worth the effort. Up to a couple of years ago you could even say that business was good. Of course, spending most of my time in the store I didn't pay much attention to politics and things like that - I just worked hard, paid all my taxes, obeyed the law, and figured that somebody else could handle the big jobs like running the city.

Then one day I got a letter from the town - seems a law was passed which was supposed to beautify the city ... but as far as I could find out, all the law really said was that in one year my sign would have to come down. Now, my sign was nothing special but when I got notice that I would have to have it taken down, I kind of got disturbed. (If I would have only known how much it really meant to me, I would have gotten even more disturbed.)

Anyway, I spoke to the other merchants on the block and even though they were disturbed too, nobody wanted to rock the boat, as they say, and start a fuss with the politicians who had passed the law, especially since it seemed awfully hard to come out against a law beautifying the town. We all just dropped the issue and hoped, like so many other silly things, it would go away.

The sign guys raised a bit of a fuss, but when they went to City Hall, the town planner said they were only out for themselves and not the beauty of the town, so that ended that! I can see now that the sign guys had some good arguments, but without our support, the politicians just laughed them off.

Well, since I didn't have any choice, when the time came I paid my sign man and had him take my sign down and junk it. All the other businesses on the block did the same, and just like the city planner said, the clutter was gone. Just when we began to figure the city planner and the politicians knew what they were talking about - it happened.

It started first with the stores that stayed open at night. These guys noticed a pretty serious decrease in business as soon as all the lighted signs were taken down. I guess the customers were scared to come out in the dark, or maybe they just thought the stores were closed because there was so little light outside.

I didn't stay open at night so this didn't bother me much but I did notice business gradually start to fall off. All my old customers kept coming because they already knew me, but the trouble was that I wasn't getting any new ones. Now anybody who's in business knows that you have to keep getting new customers to survive. That's 'cause even though your old customers may be loyal, some of them move away, or pass on, or just can't get around as easy as time goes by.

Well, as I know now, without a sign to show people that I was in business, I couldn't attract any new customers. Most people, as a matter of fact probably passed right by and thought the store was closed. Or worse, if they knew I was open, they might have figured I was ashamed of my business and didn't want to display my name out front!

Since I no longer had my sign, I thought I would try to attract people by putting ads in the newspaper so that at least everybody would know I was in business just like before. I never realized how expensive it was to advertise in the newspaper, but by this time I

had to try something. Well, to be honest, it plain didn't work. I spent a lot of money just telling people I was in business and when some of them came looking for me, many of them couldn't find the store. Besides, most of the newspaper circulation was to people who were too far on the other side of town to come to the store- even if they could have found it.

I guess even though things got worse and worse, I just refused to let myself believe it all happened because of that @#*@#*!! sign I had to take down. Like I said before, my sign wasn't anything special and it didn't cost much so it just seemed hard to accept the fact that it could be so valuable to me.

The whole block is closed now- mine was one of the last stores to go - I guess 'cause I'm so stubborn. One thing I will admit, though, except for the broken windows and trash that seems to accumulate around the closed places, there is a lot less clutter when you look down the street!

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