

## DETAILS

**131. The Case of the Two-cent Candy** Years ago, I wrote about a retail store in the Palo Alto environs, a good one, which had a box of two-cent candies at the checkout. I remembered that "little" parting gesture of the two-cent candy as a symbol of all that is Excellent at that store. Dozens upon dozens of people—from retailers to *bankers* to plumbing supply house owners—who have attended seminars of mine have come up to remind me, sometimes 15 or 20 years later, of "the two-cent candy story," and to tell me how it had a sizeable impact on how they did business, metaphorically and in fact, how they had become "fanatic 2-centers."

Translation: Ask yourself ... NOW: What is my (personal, department, project, restaurant, law firm) "Two-cent Candy" score? Does every part of the process of working with us/me include two-cent candies? Do we, as a group, "think two-cent candies"?

Operationalizing: Make "two-centing it" part and parcel of "the way we do business around here." Don't go light on the so-called "substance"—but *do* remember that ... perception *is* reality ... and perception is shaped by two-cent candies as much as by that so-called "hard substance." (This is a particularly Brilliant Idea for a recession. You doubtless don't maximize "Two-cent Opportunities"—and what opportunities they are. And they only, in effect, cost 2-cents!)

**132. If The Envelope Doesn't Fit, Forget It!** Stanford, beloved (and I mean it) Stanford, sent me a snail-mail questionnaire in prep for my MBA reunion. I took some pains to fill it out. When I got ready to mail it, I discovered that it didn't fit into the envelope they'd enclosed—I tore the questionnaire up and tossed it in the recycle bin. (Ever wonder what's wrong with MBA programs? Lack of attention to envelopes!) (Ever wonder why so many small businesses fail? Lack of attention to envelopes!)

**133. It's All About the Mud** It's "mud season" in Vermont as I write and as we all too appropriately call it. Cars, and trucks in particular, look like flying mud balls. While on a (muddy!) speed walk, I passed through the parking lot of the Equinox Hotel, which was in the midst of a massive renovation. The primary contractor was Bread Loaf Construction, out of Middlebury. Bread Loaf folks must not be as smart as I think; that is, they apparently didn't know it's mud season. Every contractor's truck in the parking lot—and the FedEx and UPS trucks, too—confirmed the "mud ball" image I just suggested. Except for Bread Loaf's. There were two BL pickups in the lot. Both, in BL tradition, painted fire engine red. And neither—and I do not exaggerate—had the tiniest apparent trace of dirt or mud or even dust.

Later in the afternoon, I was having a long interview with a top dog at the ad agency TBWA/Chiat/Day, and, not surprisingly, the topic turned to branding. Out of my mouth, startling me, popped, "*Branding is a squeaky-sparkly clean bright red contractor's truck in mud season in Vermont.*" We nattered on about the fact that branding is about, well ... Everything. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is irrelevant to individual branding—or the branding of a construction company in VT, or Susan Axelrod Accountants, or Megacorp, Inc. So, right now:

Check the reception desk.  
Check the reception area.  
Check the bathroom.  
Check your last Client email.  
Check 10 "little things."  
Right now.

Is each one Excellent?

Does each one confirm & extend & broadcast your "brand promise"?

(Remember, a very BIG thing: You *are* in absolute control here! There are things you *cannot* make happen, to be sure; but you, no matter how "junior," or no matter what the state of the economy, *can* project Brand Excellence via a thousand "atmospherics" that in the end overwhelmingly determine Client-Employee perception.)

**134. Think Billboard Sign. "We Care." "We Don't Care."** I was walking through a giant mall—visiting a renowned retailer's space. Usually, they're one of the best, poster practitioners of "experience" design & marketing.

But ... THE PLACE WAS A MESS. To me the space ... SCREAMED ... "We Don't Care." There's a lot to Great Retailing, or great whatever. But very near or at the head of the line is: "WE CARE!" And it starts with "look and feel." (To be fair, in the case under discussion, it was a Saturday two or three weeks before Christmas. DOESN'T MATTER! In fact, the greater the confusion, the more the attention to "I care" matters-and stands out.)

We care.

We don't care.

(Take your pick.)

(No in-between.)

(Really ... no in between. Think about it.)

This document is #37 in a series of 48 highlights from Tom Peters' *The Little BIG Things: 163 Ways to Pursue Excellence* (HarperStudio, 2010). For more information, visit [tompeters.com](http://tompeters.com).

