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PARKING TODAY

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***PT* Wishes
Everyone
ALL THE
BEST!!!**

**Chad Gamble
of Lansing, MI
Looking Forward
to PIE in Sunny
San Diego**

What's with These Shoeshine Guys?



JEFF PINYOT

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I've written about Larry the shoeshine guy at Midway Airport in Chicago, and Gerald, from the Phoenix Airport. I can't imagine the untapped resources that industry has for Salt-of-the-Earth wisdom. I'm never disappointed after a shine.

Don't get me wrong, I've had shoes nearly ruined from some, but the conversations are worth the cost of a new pair of Cole Haans. You can tell a lot about a person by their shoes. Jeff Sparrow (Marcy's better half) of Park Assist and I both wear the same style of Cole Haans, clearly a sign of brilliance.

**We need to keep
people, real people, in our
businesses and treasure
them.**

Tony is one of the family members that own Cento Shoes in downtown Indianapolis. Cento Shoes is part of the history of Indy. Many businessmen would get a shine at Cento Shoes before heading to get a shrimp cocktail, a Manhattan and a steak at St. Elmo's. Tony and his brother care for the store that his mother still influences. On-line commerce is seriously threatening small, brick and mortar (and sweat) stores like Cento Shoes. Nothing replaces a handshake and tradition from my point of view. Plus, you can't get a good shoeshine online.

Tony has had any number of personalities do the shining for him in front of his double-wide throne covered with worn, soft black leather, adjacent to a huge picture window looking out over Meridian Street. The shadow of a parking garage makes its way across the sidewalk in front of Cento Shoes.

After hearing that I sold the lights in the garage next door and seeing them burn while looking through the windows on the adjacent wall of this corner lot, Tony immediately asks if I know Perry Griffith. I smile and comment that Perry is one of our industry's best people. It's no surprise that Perry would frequent Cento Shoes and take care of Tony. It's what people from the parking world do. We are a human touch business and we are part of life's experience.

Tony was taken back by my confidence and

my passion. I could see that he believed in his product just as much as I believed in mine. As I stated, times have not always been good for Tony and the same goes for me, as well. The longer Tony and I talked, the more I saw how alike we were.

I asked about the last guy that shined my shoes who used a blow torch in the process. He said, like the others, when you come in late, you lose your job and when you pee into a cup and it turns the wrong color, you are out. That certainly explains why Tony was doing the shining this day. We talked sports, politics and mostly about work ethic, putting a hard day of work in for a good night's sleep.

Many great people fail. If Tony's business fails, it won't be because he isn't working hard and doing many of the right things. It will be because culture has changed the shoe business and adaptation is a requirement today to survive in business. Case in point, Blockbuster.

My youngest goes through soccer cleats like mad. He buys them on-line from a soccer specialty site. We still buy some stuff from Soccer Village and the last time I was there, I asked one of the guys about how their shoe sales were going. He shared that most kids today buy their cleats on-line.

I suggested this. Charge the kids \$5 for trying shoes on, and \$10 off the purchase if they actually buy them from him. His jaw dropped. I said, listen, I send so many shoes back that don't fit. If my son could pay you \$5 to try on the actual shoes, it would save me a huge hassle. Plus, he'll walk out with new shin pads and a jersey he saw on sale. Get the kids into the store is what I told him, find any way possible.

Tony gets it. I watched a nice-looking middle-aged man walk in the store and try on some shoes. We both discussed the benefits of a good pair of shoes. After a short discussion that he and Tony had, I watched an old-fashioned transaction take place. The price dropped quickly from \$225 to a negotiated \$180, a fair price for a pair of Johnson Murphy's.

I guess the words that followed were the sign of a healthy customer-focused business. The guy said, "I'll see you next week, Tony." Tony provides a raw, safe, comfortable, step back into simpler times shopping experience,

“
Leaders do
hard things.
Leaders
don't look
back.”

complete with old fashioned memories perfectly seasoned with human touch.

I hate that people in our industry are being replaced by pay-on-foot stations. I understand why and I don't have a problem with it, progress is important. I don't like losing the personal touch. I guess that's why Parking Operators embrace Parker Technology. Parker Technology brings a personal transaction into a cashless parking experience. They have found a way to keep people in parking. Brian Wolff, President and CEO is a people person and an excellent storyteller. Not sure how good of a golfer he is, but he does like to try.

Let's all learn a lesson from Tony. We need to keep people, real people, in our businesses and treasure them. I was pleased to have an opportunity to hear Mahesh Ramanujam, President and CEO of the U.S. Green Building Council speak this week. In discussing AI, Artificial Intelligence and the theory that AI will replace people, he made it evidently clear that man still has his hands on the plug.

Last night, when Alexa decided to provide an unscheduled non-stop LED light show on my nightstand, I simply added my personal human interaction and pulled the plug.

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