

Follow thru = goal achieved

Life is full of different experiences. Like everyone else I have had my share of bad ones and I have also had my share of good ones. Some of the most memorable and rewarding experiences I have had occurred when I could work with and help other operators, managers and administrative staff in their local city or rural water district. We all shared the common goal: 1) improve life for the customers and 2) get the job done. Day in and day out local utility staff members strive to make life better. I am honored to once

again be able to assist cities and RWDs in their efforts to serve their customers. I am pleased to again be an employee of the Kansas Rural Water Association. I was previously employed by KRWA from 1999 to February 2001. I thoroughly enjoyed the work as a Technical Assistant where I mainly provided help to surface water treatment plant operations. But I also felt a responsibility to serve the public in my hometown of Baxter Springs.

to come. One of the things that needed attention was the city's water treatment facility. Originally constructed in 1972 with a capacity of 2.5 million gallons per day, the plant was still meeting day to day needs and meeting compliance criteria. Reliability of the plant however was fast becoming an issue due to age and deterioration. With numerous new regulations looming on the horizon it pushed the improvement project to the forefront even more. About \$3 million and a year and a half later that job was completed. As Utility Superintendent at Baxter, I also was involved in working on improvements to the sanitary sewer as well as a cable television job being in the

A larger stumbling block?

The fact is that it takes years to complete any substantial project. Governing bodies are often like sands in the desert in that they are always susceptible to shifting to whichever way the political winds are blowing at the time. To say that it is critically important to be able to convey to newly elected members the importance of following through on planned improvements is probably an understatement. Everyone who is elected had to campaign on something and a common

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works. That job helped me reflect on the larger picture. Often improvements are needed. It takes good operators to operate and manage them - and it takes a caring governing body to see the projects through.

Boards/councils need information

Once a city or rural water district decides to consider what its needs are, it becomes apparent real fast that it is going to take a lot of years and a lot more dollars to move from the planning stages to project completion. The dollar side of

election mantra is to save money by not spending it. It is often a daunting challenge for employees that members of the governing body must be informed and educated as to what is needed for a system to have a viable future. Boards and councils have resources to help them achieve that goal. One often downplayed is the knowledge and understanding that their own staff members can provide. With preparation and sometimes compromise, common ground can be reached.

Helping out back home

There was an urgency to fulfill several needs in that small southeast Kansas community. These needs would have an impact on the future of the population as a whole for years

Inescapable customer relations

Another demanding aspect of public service work is dealing with the customers. Customers generally have a couple of personality traits to watch out for and try to avoid. That is "mad" and "madder." Typical customers never call to chat about the weather or how the fish are biting. Instead they call because they have an issue that they want taken care of.

Ole Joe calls in

Let's say ole Joe just got home from work to find water spewing forth from the laundry room and the washer floating around in the kitchen. Naturally he is going to be upset. He is not upset at the water utility operator or the city – he's just completely bent out of shape because of the circumstances.

Joe then calls city hall to have his water shut off because it's getting deeper than his new chest waders. He waits on help to arrive. After half an hour, he calls again. It is around this

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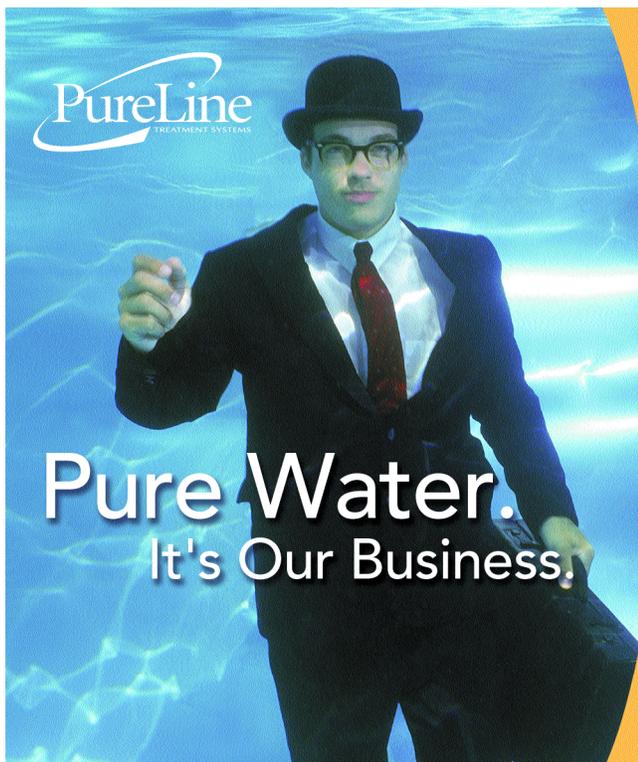
point in time that Joe is officially "madder." While there is no way a system can predict problems like this and save Joe the high blood pressure episode, systems need to be responsive to customer concerns.

Miss Manners rules

Prompt and courteous attention will help head off what can otherwise develop into a major confrontation. I have found that most people, when they have a high stress event in their normal routines, tend to be a bit abrasive. Simple courtesy and prompt response go a long way towards settling the rift. Some circumstances are unavoidable due to workload, manpower or any number of other reasons but effort does go a long way in customer service.

As an employee for your Association, I want to again

mention that it is an honor and a privilege to be able to assist systems and the people who work day and night to keep their local utilities operating. I look forward to seeing the familiar faces and meeting the many new operators as well as boards/councils. I am excited to share my years of experience to help you make the best decisions possible. I will be working generally in southeast Kansas. There are hundreds of systems in this part of the state. Give KRWA a call and I'll be on my way to help or attend your board/council meeting.



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