

## Expressing Anger at Toshiba

When he came down the hall to close the coffee room door, I realized how loud I had become. When we are angry it is hard to notice our own facial expressions, body language and especially, our loudness. Well, I was justified....

Five work orders under warranty had been issued by Toshiba the previous year. Two of the work orders were for replacing my laptop's motherboard, but they actually replaced it three times. Once when they replaced the defective part, it did not work on start-up so the authorized repair depot had to wait for a month until a new part arrived. It was then that I learned Toshiba does not use new parts on their warranty work – they take defective parts and “refurbish” them.

My cursor began to act erratically about a month after I had picked up my machine from its last warranty work. At first, it would respond to the touchpad after I rebooted the computer. Later the touchpad would not work at all, but I could still use a mouse. Finally, neither the touchpad nor the mouse would work, and I telephoned Toshiba. The technician began by explaining to me that my warranty had expired; however he thought he could fix the problem if I just paid \$29.95. Once the money was paid, by credit card, he told me which key to press that would enable the system recovery disk to erase my hard drive and reinstall my operating system. This fix lasted about a day before the cursor began behaving erratically again.

The next Toshiba technician began by telling me that my warranty had expired. I successfully argued that I should be able to talk to her under the previous work order thus avoiding paying the company another \$29.95 for the privilege. I suggested that Toshiba had obviously not corrected all the problems while the computer was under warranty, and the company should cover this one. To my delight she agreed, and she directed me to the nearest authorized Toshiba repair company in Saskatoon and told me to give them the work order number I had quoted to her. I was in a nearby city facilitating a workshop at the time, so I was able to personally deliver the computer once the workshop was completed. The representative from the repair company said they had been “burned” by Toshiba before, and that in addition to the work order number I needed an authorization number. I called Toshiba again and talked to yet another technician who explained that my warranty had expired, and that no technician could authorize the needed repairs off-warranty. A supervisor would get back to me in 3 to 5 days. So I left my computer in Saskatoon while awaiting this call.

This supervisor happened to call while I was sitting in a community college coffee room and the last instructor was leaving for class, so I had the room to myself. The Toshiba representative began informing me that my warranty had expired. I offered to be responsible for the repair of the cursor problem if it was not a motherboard issue, but argued that if the problem was the motherboard, Toshiba should stand by its product and replace the part. She said she “had no choice,” and I, believing that she really did have the authority to make decisions, said her choice was between following responsible business practices and not.

After the college coordinator politely closed the coffee room door, I realized how irate I had become. I wondered why this “supervisor,” who was not prepared to negotiate, did not terminate the discussion. I then realized that she was not a true decision maker, but a “flak catcher” whose

job included listening to the flak of irate Toshiba customers until, presumably, they talked themselves out. At this point I decided that my time was probably more valuable than hers, and resuming a modicum of politeness, I ended the conversation.

Unlike electronics where feedback can be an annoying distorting sound, feedback in our personal lives can help us see our actions more clearly. We especially need this kind of feedback when we are angry, but it is when we feel justified in our anger that we are least likely to examine our actions. Anger is energizing and motivating, but it needs to be directed in productive ways.

The non-verbal feedback I received with the closing of that coffee room door allowed me to see what I was doing and how I might use my anger more productively. In capitalism, companies are like hookers who promise the moon but deliver the minimum. By working together, consumers can raise the minimum that companies must provide if they expect to make a profit. Instead of continuing to berate a functionary who was paid to take it, I wrote this article.

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*The Northerner* has only rejected two articles I have submitted during the past 10 years: The first challenged the notion that Christmas has something to do with Christ's birthday; this one challenged the practices of a major multinational corporation. I guess some practices are considered too sacred to be challenged.