

Trust

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Last Sunday was a gloriously beautiful day in Vermont so my wife and I decided to go out for a drive in the country. We ended up in the northern reaches of the state in an area known as the “Northeast Kingdom” – the most rural area of Vermont (which is really saying something).

Vermont is an intriguing place. The entire state has about 600,000 people, which is less than the population of the city of San Francisco (from which we moved to Vermont in 1991). We only have one freeway to speak of, and we still have a law on the books that requires that anyone driving a vehicle after dark must have someone walking in front of the vehicle carrying a lantern – which is something of a problem on the highway. Rush hour consists of two cars and a cow, sometimes a moose. This is a small state. In fact, I work quite a bit in Los Angeles, where one of the major streets is Vermont Avenue. More people live on Vermont Avenue than live in Vermont. Are you with me?

So off we went my wife and I, ending up in the bustling metropolis of Hardwick, population 3,174. As we drove through the town we passed a farm stand that was open, so we pulled in.



The first thing we noticed was that the roof of the place was alive – as in, there were all kinds of plants growing out of it, and all of them edible: thyme, oregano, mint, dill, rosemary. And while there were several cars parked in front of the place there wasn't a soul in it – except for customers. No clerk, no farmer, nobody – just heaps of fruits and vegetables, farm-fresh milk, eggs,

cheeses, and meats in coolers, and a cash drawer sitting on the counter in plain sight with a hand-drawn sign next to it. The cash drawer had more than \$200 in it, and the sign, which you can see in the photo below (that's my wife bagging up produce) says,

Welcome!
Please serve yourself
Write amount owed along with items purchased on the note pad
Make your change in the register
Have a nice day!



People often ask me why I live in Vermont. *This* is why. Where else can I find this kind of trust? Where else could I live where people simply wouldn't think about taking something that isn't theirs, or about cheating a hard-working farm family out of a few dollars? Those places are few and far between, so I find it heartwarming when I run across one of them.

As we left to continue our journey I couldn't help but reflect on the experience in the context of business. Isn't this the kind of relationship we want to have with our customers? Don't we want people to do business with us because they know that we

wouldn't think about taking advantage of them? After all, isn't a relationship based on trust and mutual respect, and a desire to ensure that both parties come out winners in the end, the basis for all long-term relationships? After all, here I am talking about a remarkable business encounter that I had with someone I've never met – and with someone whom I would go out of my way to do business with again (and believe me, to do business with this guy I would have to go waaaaay out of my way). Isn't this the basis of being a Trusted Advisor?

Thanks for reading.