

Column: “The Age of Sensibility”



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I am not so particular about most products, but I like to use one specific ballpoint pen that is my very favorite to write with. I started using it more than five years ago after one of my friends recommended it to me, telling me how much he liked it. Since then I have never bought any other type of ballpoint pen!

The most attractive feature of this pen lies in the feeling of writing with it. It requires hardly any pressure, and the perfect amount of ink comes out for writing clear, strong strokes and letters. No matter how long you keep writing, your hand never becomes tired. The pen's design is smart, and its name, “Jetstream™,” evokes a nostalgic feeling in me because it is the name of the midnight radio show that I used to listen to in my youth. Until I came across this ballpoint pen, I didn't care which kind I used—but now nothing else satisfies me. I often check how much ink remains in mine, and when I go to a convenience store and find that they do not have this ballpoint pen, I think the store is worthless.

It is said that there are more than 100 different kinds of ballpoint pens in Japan. And even though there may be others that are even more comfortable to write with, still, I like this one best. The composition of the ink of this ballpoint pen is patented. The design and name are protected by IP rights. But these are not the reasons that I buy this product. I buy it because I like it.

What is the most important factor when people choose something? For example, what do people take into account before buying a mobile phone? The purchase price, the monthly payments, the number of usable applications, the number of camera pixels, the battery life, the feeling of holding the device in their hand, the design, the brand, or still something else? In fact, although there are likely many other factors, I am quite sure that consumers' final decision must be based simply upon whether they like a particular phone or not.

What will people buy with their incidental income? What will they eat for lunch? Where will they go on a trip with their friends? Most of these decisions are, I believe, made based upon simple personal likes and dislikes. That is: not *reason* but *sense*.

What, then, should be the most important to those who offer products and services? It is important for them to consider how they can incorporate ‘enjoyment’, ‘fun’, and ‘comfortableness’ within their products and services, since these are all factors that are desired by users. We are, in my view, now living in the “age of sensibility.”

In his book, *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future*, Daniel H. Pink says that after the “information age” will come the “conceptual age” of high concepts and high touch. He lists six senses that will generate things of high value in the coming age, which are as follows: 1) ‘design’ over function; 2) ‘story’ over argument; 3) ‘symphony’ over focus; 4) em-

pathy' over logic; 5) 'play' over seriousness; and 6) 'meaning' over accumulation—all characteristics that precisely describe those companies that have recently become increasingly competitive.

I know of one Japanese company that was committed to manufacturing high-quality products and engaged in serious discussions about product development, yet it only focused on improving product function. As a result, valuable company secrets were leaked to its competitors. This company failed to make use of its technological superiority, and its competitors were able to access its innovative ideas. Consequently, it is now lagging behind the rest in design and sales activities, and has ultimately lost its competitiveness.

I also know a service-providing company that depends too much on its service manual to face the customers and pay attention to their needs. As a result, it has lost business. I once had an uncomfortable experience at a restaurant. When I was about to go out of the front door after eating breakfast, I heard a voice saying to me, "Have a nice day!" I thought it was very sweet of the employee to say this to me as I made my way to work. When I glanced back to see her face, however, she was looking in another direction instead of at me. While the restaurant's service manual may tell staff to say "Have a nice day" to customers after they pay their bill in the morning, no words can convey the employees' gratitude if they do not look at the customer. At that moment I decided I would never return to that restaurant again.

In the age of 'sensibility' a business heavily reliant on its manual will not achieve success. Even without any manual customers will become loyal as long as a business offers attentive and inspiring services that appropriately identify and respond to individual needs. Moreover, this is not limited to the business world. Now, more than ever, I think that we need "sensibility" in our daily personal relationships.

People should be considerate of others, accept others as they are without either affirming or denying them, think from the others' perspective about what needs to be done to make them feel pleasant and comfortable, and then do whatever they can in this regard. This kind of consideration seems to be the key to building good personal relationships.

Different people live in different environments and have different backgrounds. Therefore, they have different ways of thinking and hold different values. No service manual can give you a clue to how to respond to the needs of every diverse individual. We should respond to people individually.

The age of 'sensibility' may be synonymous with the time to respect every individual.



"Jetstream™"

