



By Richard D. Czerniawski

THE END OF A LOVE AFFAIR

*You just slip out the back, Jack
Make a new plan, Stan
You don't need to be coy, Roy
Just get yourself free
Hop on the bus, Gus
You don't need to discuss much
Just drop off the key, Lee
And get yourself free*

Paul Simon – 50 Ways to Leave Your Lover

We'd been going together since the mid-1980s—some 35-years ago or so. In the beginning, we were always in each other's company. While we didn't live together, we met weekly, two or more times per week. We were devoted to each other. And the more we were together, the more I grew to appreciate and depend upon her. We became inseparable.

How inseparable? Well, we traveled the world together. I gave her my loyalty, and she tended to my needs. Whenever I called, she was immediately there for me with a heartfelt greeting and her full attention. Often, I was on the receiving end of calls, texts, and emails that she initiated to help make my day and life better for it. She Had my back. She made me feel secure, appreciated. She made me feel like I was the most important person in the world.

However, about three years ago, she stopped caring for me as she once had. It began when I cut back on being with her. It wasn't that I had lost interest in her or was being disloyal. I made a change in lifestyle and work. As a consequence, her enthusiasm and attention to our relationship and me waned. Gone was the warm greeting and individual attention. While I wanted to be loved just as deeply, she became reserved and distant. It became clear to me that our relationship was dissolving.

Now, I no longer hear from her unless I call, and I certainly do not receive the same allegiance when I do as I did in bygone days when our heads were in the clouds. I'm afraid I don't mean as much to her any longer. I'm in her past. I'm in her rearview mirror. She's moved on to others who pay her more attention.

No, I'm not talking about my wife. We recently celebrated our 50th-wedding anniversary and look

forward to as many years together as the Creator grants us on this earth. Instead, I'm lamenting my relationship with American Airlines (AA).

You might be asking what happened? Well, at one time, I was an American Airlines ConciergeKey member—a VIP! I was there from the start and a member for several straight years. AA reserves ConciergeKey status for their most frequent travelers. During that period, AA couldn't have done more to serve me—free upgrades to first class, first to board the aircraft, priority seating, special lounge area, double booking, dedicated call-in center, among other amenities. Then three years ago, I purposefully cut back my travel to be home more with my wife and enjoy the fruits of my many years of globetrotting. My air travel that year dropped to 158-thousand miles and my airline expenditures to only 36-thousand dollars for the year. Consequently, AA informed me in an email that I "didn't quite fly enough" to warrant the most elite status, which had been difficult on me to come by, but easy for them to release me.

I was dropped to Executive Platinum, which, admittedly, is more than serviceable. It provides many perks that help make air travel easier. This year, however, I was dropped further to Platinum, which I will hold for my life based on the millions of miles I've flown with them. Perhaps, the past counts for something.

Now you might be thinking that Platinum status is not so bad. However, while it was at one time the most elite status, American Airlines has since added Platinum Pro and Executive Platinum between Platinum and ConciergeKey. I'm far from special. For example, when I called recently to ensure my Advantage number was recorded on a flight to London, I had to wait for an agent. I put in for a callback that AA made but was placed on hold for more than 10-minutes before I had to pick-up on another call. When I called back, I waited for over 40-minutes for an agent before I gave up. C'est le vie!

OK, I'm a big boy, and I can handle the reduction in status and service. I had ConciergeKey status and assistance when I needed it the most. It served to extend my ability to travel extensively to service my clients. Instead, this is about how my feelings for AA have changed due to the poor way I believe they've since treated and handled me and my situation. Candidly, I feel like I've thrown to the curb, abandoned despite traveling multi-millions of miles with them. I've compiled an average of more than 200,000—miles (EQM) per year! If I presided over AA, I think I would have granted travelers like me Executive Platinum for life.

This article is also about how to treat a loyal customer. I feel AA slinked out of informing me of the most recent change in our relationship. They did not communicate my new status with them. In past years, they informed me of my status via email in January or February. Not this year. AA quietly lowered down into Platinum. No email to thank me for my years of flying with them and, as a result, that AA is gifting me with Platinum status for life and the perks that it entails. No, they just let it drop.

Well, as with any affair, the party who feels hurt needs to move on. Actually, it frees-up one to new possibilities. I now choose flights from other airlines based on convenience—time schedules, number of legs, layover times, etc., and consider their many advantages versus blindly sticking with American Airlines. I've since discovered other airlines fly more modern and comfortable aircraft internationally that contribute to my getting more rest and arriving more refreshed. They provide lounges that are more hospitable to their customers in design, treatment, and amenities. I've also received consistently better treatment by flight attendants with other carriers as contrasted to the indifference I felt on long-haul flights with AA.

This musing is also about how to handle customers. When we take things away from customers or make them feel they are no longer special and valuable, we loosen the bond that unites our brand with them. We open them to exploring competitive options. Why? The whole product isn't the same. The exceptional service isn't there. Like in any relationship, being jilted leads to new, more suitable, and promising options. Loyalty goes both ways. Perhaps, in this case, the past should count for something more.

COMING SOON – Be on the lookout for a new marketing book by Richard Czerniawski, **AVOIDING CRITICAL MARKETING ERRORS: How to Go from Dumb to Smart Marketing.** Regardless of our current level of marketing, we can make our marketing matter more.

Richard Czerniawski



Richard D. Czerniawski

1812 Yates Avenue

Pensacola, Florida 32503

847-312-8822

richardcz@bdn-intl.com

richardcz@me.com

www.bdn-intl.com