

Customer-Centric Bears

by Kristin Todd Stires

WHILE customer service can take on many forms, Leon Gorman, chairman of the board at L.L. Bean, may have described it best as a "day-in, day-out, ongoing, never-ending, unremitting, persevering, compassionate type of activity." We caught up with Hankamer School of Business alumni who demonstrate an unwavering commitment to consumers through the retail, health care, telecom and entertainment industries.

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Jaren Shaw, BBA '85
Vice President, Customer Service, H-E-B
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bbr.baylor.edu/shaw

H-E-B

From Jaren Shaw's perspective, working in customer service is not something a person becomes interested in, rather, "it's just who you are." And having a servant's heart is part of the package.

Originally from Ardmore, Okla., Shaw broke the multi-generational family mold of being a University of Oklahoma Sooner by attending Baylor. "There was never a question of which college I would attend until my junior year in high school when I came home and told my parents I wanted to go to Baylor," she said. **"I truly believed, even at that young age, that Baylor's reputation, quality of education and smaller class size would be the best environment for me to grow personally and spiritually. Indeed it was!"** Upon graduating from Baylor, Shaw began her career with H-E-B, one of the nation's largest independently owned food retailers. However, H-E-B began as a small, family-owned grocery store, and ironically, Shaw shares a similar story. "I grew up in a small grocery store that my grandfather owned and spent much of my growing years 'working,'" she said. "What I did not realize at the time was that retail and people were my passion. Serving others inside and outside of our store was just what we did."

At H-E-B, Shaw started as a management trainee and spent nine years working in the stores, learning the business from the ground up and progressing in store leadership. She later held various roles in training and development, served as the director of sales and was then asked to join H-E-B's Customer Service efforts, which she has led since July 2000. "My official duties include providing the strategy and design for H-E-B's Customer Service and Central Checkout efforts," she said. **"I see myself as the advocate for all H-E-B customers and store partners."**

Shaw also takes pride in her unofficial duties: making someone else's day with an unexpected act of kindness, which she and H-E-B Partners refer to as "paying it forward."

"I once encountered a customer who seemed very unhappy, and I asked her what the problem was in an effort to help," she said. "The woman shared concerns not about our store but about some very troubling things occurring in her life, and I was touched. I handed her a beautiful flower arrangement and told her I felt like she needed a little sunshine. She started to cry, and I did too. It's a hard world, but if I can make it just a tiny bit better for one person, what a great day it has been."

Never facing a dull moment, Shaw also manages the challenges that come with catering service efforts to five generations of H-E-B customers and Partners in an increasingly technological world.

"I believe the definition of customer service is changing," she said. "How do we change with it in order to serve everyone? Today, customers have so many retail options. How do you differentiate your brand so your customers drive by the others to come see you based on the relationship you have built with them over time?"

Shaw's dedication to exceptional customer service is a true reflection of H-E-B's tagline: Here Everything's Better.™ Although her work is never done, Shaw strives each day to serve others using a mix of determination, ingenuity, sincerity and compassion.

"I truly believe I have the best job in the world because it is the right job for me," she said. "In H-E-B land, we serve over 7 million customers each week with 76,000 Partners; that's a lot of opportunity to serve! My true passion is serving our customers, Partners and communities. It's just who I am."