

Rewarding the Paperboy for Poor Performance by Michael Weber

I have had the newspaper delivered to my home now for many years. All of this time, I have been dissatisfied with the delivery service and am not quite sure what to do about it. Very early each morning the paperboy rides his bike past my home and throws the paper toward the porch. It always ends up short, landing on the grass. Just before dawn, the sprinklers come on to water the grass, causing a perfectly good newspaper to become somewhat useless to anyone.

A long while ago, I stopped the lad one morning and asked him to provide better service. He informed me that his bike was old causing him to lose his balance when he threw. He explained that if he got a new bike, this would solve the problem. So, being compassionate, I purchased him a new bike expecting better results. Sure enough, for the next few weeks the paper was closer to the porch. Unfortunately, it was still short of my reasonable expectation and continued to be saturated by the sprinklers. Again I stopped him to inquire if my expectations were too unreasonable. He agreed that they were not. He explained that his route was getting bigger every day and he was being underpaid for the size of his route. I asked if he was paid per each house, and he concurred that indeed he was. I explained that since he had more houses and was getting paid for each, he was already getting more money. He scoffed at this, claiming that he needed an increase in his fees in order to reach the porch. I reluctantly consented.

I arose the next morning only to find yet another saturated blob of goo slowly recycling itself into the lawn.

Again I confronted the delivery boy with my needs. He claimed that delivering papers was very complicated. He explained that when the paper is thrown, it is affected by all sorts of complicating matters - arm velocity, bike movement, humidity, target distance, wind speed, visibility, local dogs, etc. So I invested in getting him better training. I even bought him a computer to calculate all of the variables. And you guessed it; he still came up short.

Being very patient, I awaited improvement over the next few weeks. Improvement never came. Again I confronted the young man about my

need for him to improve his service. Again he explained that he needed an increase in his pay to meet my expectations. I was beginning to lose my patience.

Somewhat miffed, I called his boss to complain. His boss explained that since the boy had done his job for several years now, he had tenure and could not be fired. The boss also added that if I agreed to pay the lad a bit more, improvement would be forthcoming. Again I reluctantly consented, and again I was thoroughly disappointed.

Over the next few months, I tried everything. I bought him a new coat for cold days. I bought him a raincoat for rainy days. I bought him a warm breakfast before he started his route so he would have the strength to reach the porch. I finally even hired him an assistant so that he would not have to work so hard. By now, I was spending half of my income trying to get the lad to meet my simple need. Every day he came up short. Completely exasperated, I begged the young man to let me know what he needed in order to get the paper all the way to the mark. This time he finally came clean. He simply responded, "More."

Would you put up with this type of behavior? To be frank, yes you would. You tolerate this behavior every single day. You see, the school system has convinced us that if they simply have more, then they will get closer to the mark. In every instance, they come up short. If we have higher pay, new schools, new books, better training, and new computers we can do better. We are now paying almost half of the budget of the state to education expecting better results. Are we getting what we expect from such a large investment? No. When we ask how much it will take to hit the mark, what do we hear? "More."

*It has been said that repeating an action over and over and over and over again while expecting different results is a sign of insanity. If the paperboy failed to hit the porch for more than a couple of days, we would refuse to pay for the service. What a novel concept! **Maybe we ought to stop the insanity of rewarding the paperboy for poor performance!***