

Revenge Is Best Not Served at All

Take the anger and turn it into positive energy.

I recently happened across an article touting the top 10 best-revenge stories in sports.

There was the story of LeBron James besting the Golden State Warriors to bring an NBA title to Cleveland in 2016 after the Warriors ruined the same opportunity the year before.

Also included was Tom Brady's NFL Super Bowl victory in the year he sat out four games due to the deflated-football scandal now known affectionately as Deflategate.

The revenge story of Green Bay Packers Hall of Fame quarterback Brett Favre was the one that stung most for me. I have vivid memories of Favre's un-retirement and ultimate inclusion on the roster of Green Bay's division rival, the Minnesota Vikings. Favre returned to Lambeau Field four games into the 2009 season and threw for three touchdowns on his way to a win over my beloved Packers. As much as I loved Favre during his time as a Packer, I wasn't sure I would ever forgive him for that.

Revenge can be so sweet, such a great motivator, and lead to such amazing outcomes—except when it doesn't.

Consider the owner of a contract finishing operation who learns that his best customer, a high-profile one he was proud to serve, has decided to move its business to a competitor. Once the nausea subsides and the finisher gathers his senses, anger rises in his veins. The thought of his arch-nemesis celebrating the spoils of victory is almost unbearable.

"I'll show them," he resolves, and throws significant energy into stealing one of his competitor's key customers. Eventually he succeeds. Never mind that he had to slash his standard margin to win the business or that the resulting financial impact on his company is almost breakeven. He has exacted his revenge. That will teach them.

A powder supplier learns that a key employee has jumped ship to a competitive company. In her exit interview, the departing employee explains that she didn't foresee enough upward mobility in her current position and that the company's culture had become somewhat toxic over the last year. The employer, disappointed at first, smiles to himself. Clearly the employee has forgotten about the non-compete agreement she signed when she came on board. The ensuing lawsuit against that former employee and her new employer distracts the former employer from growing his business for well over a year. Ultimately, he succeeds in winning a small judgement. Sweet revenge?

For years, a contract plating company has had an understanding with another shop in an adjacent state: You stay out of our backyard and we'll stay out of yours.

But the other company's next generation of leadership doesn't see it that way, and suddenly several jobs are lost to them. When a potential customer in that adjacent state calls and asks for a competitive bid, the opportunity for revenge presents itself. Forget that the new customer requires parts to be delivered at no charge, and requires special packaging and handling not expected of its current supplier, and all at a lower price that it currently incurs. The new competitor must be taught a lesson, and the opportunity to do so is now.

Stay in business long enough, and eventually we all will feel wronged. By a departing employee, a buyer trying to earn a bonus by moving the work we currently do for his company or a competitor who steals a customer. The vast majority of the time I have seen a business leader seek vengeance—and, admittedly, the times I have attempted to exact revenge myself—it rarely ends well. The price paid in return—in lower margins and the distraction that costs us other opportunities—is generally higher than the benefit.

Instead of retaliating, take the anger, the hurt and the resentment and turn it into positive energy. Focus on improving service to customers, building a welcoming culture and driving down cost. When you do, customers and employees will want to stay. And isn't that the sweetest revenge of all?

What's more, time has a way of easing the need for retribution. Over a quarter century, I've experienced my share of anger and rage over business situations, all of which were eventually swallowed up and smoothed over with time.

Heck, when the Green Bay Packers retired Favre's number in 2015, I cheered with just about every other Packer fan. ■■



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