

Dear Customer,

I'm not a patient man. I walk too fast, drive with a lead foot, and hate to wait in line. Even when I'm on vacation, I'd rather hit the slopes than the sangría, and I'd sooner bet on the outcome of my own tennis game than park myself at a baccarat table all afternoon.

This restlessness comes from my father, Bernard. Thirty-four years ago, as president of a 200-employee packaging manufacturing facility, he found himself unable to pursue his own vision. So he did what any impatient, ambitious guy in his shoes would do—he opened his own plant. As much a family man as an entrepreneur, he named the new outfit Billie-Ann Plastics after his son and daughter. "Work hard," he told me, "and don't wait for things to come to you. Go out and make them happen."

So just as my father did more than three decades ago, I bring my impatience to my work. I'm impatient with those who say "We can't" when they mean "We won't." Slipshod customer service makes me hot under the collar. Most of all, I have no time for those who declare it can't be done before they even try. I prefer to run my business differently—the way Bernie did.

Now and then, his words echo in my mind—or, more often, across my desk. "Go back to basics," he says. "Listen to your customers, invest in new equipment, and turn out quality products." His advice always reminds me how I felt one summer day in 1978, as I watched a batch of truffle boxes come off the line. Having slogged through four years of college as a psych major, it was so satisfying to *make* something. That evening I tore up my NYU grad-school application and traded in my sheepskin for a spot on the factory floor.

Bernie is in his eighties now, but he still clocks in at the plant when he's not entertaining his three grandchildren, playing Tetris on his home computer, or commandeering a golf cart. Sometimes he asks me to join him out on his patio for a leisurely game of gin rummy. "Frankly, Dad," I tell him, "I just don't have the patience for it."

[Electronic signature]

William Rubinstein

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