

THE RAILROADS MISSED IT

In the late 1800s, no business matched the financial and political dominance of the railroad.

Trains dominated the transportation industry of the United States, moving both people and goods throughout the country.

Then a new discovery came along – the car – and incredibly, the leaders of the railroad industry did not take advantage of their unique position to participate in this transportation development. The automotive revolution was happening all around them, and they did not use their industry dominance to take hold of the opportunity.

In his videotape, *The Search for Excellence*, Tom Peters points out the reason: The railroad barons didn't understand what business they were in. Peters observes that "they thought they were in the train business. But, they were in fact in the transportation business. Time passed them by, as did opportunity. They couldn't see what their real purpose was." They failed to ask themselves any of the foundational questions.

A foundational question is one that penetrates to the very essence of a person, business, or organization. For the railroad industry, foundational questions would have included "*What business are we in? What is the ultimate goal of all of our efforts?*"

In other words, Peters said, the railroad barons needed to get at the heart of what it was they were trying to do through the railroads. Answering such questions would have led them to realize that they were not really in the railroad business at all. They were in the transportation business. Their ultimate goal was not the preservation of a particular system of transportation, but transportation itself.

Ron Pohuda of the National Audiovisual Association provided a contemporary example of this same idea when he said, "If *Sports Illustrated* magazine understood it was in the sports information business, not the publishing business, we would have the Sports Illustrated Channel, not ESPN."

This is the power of a foundational question. It gets underneath momentary methods, tools and fads, keeping an organization focused on its most basic identity and objective.

For us in Life Care and Century Park, we are in the customer service business. That is the bedrock upon which our companies are built.

And we have chosen to serve through the professions of hospitality and health care.

At the heart of true customer service is defined by our Lord Himself: Love God and love others.

(more)

And He (Jesus) said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-39 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter

