

The Long Arm of the Outlaw

A Cowboy Story

by Colin Jardine

After much deliberation and some introspection, I once again put fingers to keypad and share with you the extent of corruption and its extrapolation ramifications. (Some of my grammatical construction is staccato and intended so).

In any given business and on any day there are challenges and risks that one undertakes as a business and as participant in our marketplace. Most are calculated, and even in the absence of real research, are relatively predictable and manageable..... And then there is the smoking gun and the trail.

It started with a call from a long standing customer of some 5 years, to inform us that they were audited by a Health Dept. Official, (here in the Western Cape), and under threat of prosecution or fine, they had to effect certain changes to their pest management actions... Also that the current incumbent (that's us), was clearly incompetent and that they should change service suppliers in order to prevent further action..... ("That put paid to that one .. didn't it" !).

No amount of contact nor talking could change the customers mind and somewhat incensed we let go... (Soos hulle sê in Afrikaans.. Die koël was deur die Kerk).

In my capacity as an office bearer of SAPCA, I get to hear of another company that gets the same treatment and with similar traumatic results.

My second encounter with the same official is of much larger proportion and chaos erupts as a result of an audit on a large retail store, with the same documented recommendations and of course the "obligatory threat of fine or prosecution"..... (Meetings, reaction, investigation, confusion, erosion of customer confidence, accusations of extortion and overcharging, dishonesty, not meeting service agreement expectations and a number of other "isms" sprout from the confrontation, and the end result is the contract is cancelled and the outstanding debtors book is elbowed from the table... "Revenue for the rest of the period-gone, Debtors book...??? It gets legal from here, so "nuff-said").

Meetings with City Health Executive, with a view to a request from the industry to work with health officials in order to best benefit everyone's customer base and enhance a working partnership.... "This wasn't the forum to air incidents or individual misgivings or concerns, but to further relationships on behalf of the Industry". (Good meeting and very encouraged, also made the point that in our respective roles, we as an industry..... can advise.... they have the law of regulation and can insist and levy fines or closure or prosecution or all of the above..) "A fine balance methinks....with all the weight on the one side".

A few weeks pass, and an Independent company (Sole Proprietor and not a SAPCA member), calls me and relates the same "Modus Operandi" I advise the gentleman of our meeting with City Health and the positive intentions and refer him to our contact within the Dept. in order to formally register a complaint..... (So done... the wheels start to roll).

Another incident with the same severity befalls one of our SAPCA members here in the Western Cape, and the investigation gains momentum and I personally take the opportunity to lodge my own incidents and supply documentation to the investigations department.

"I wish to digress for a moment, and state categorically that the Investigations dept. of City Health did a sterling job, and quickly, and our thanks go to them"... "There are concerned and professional persons in that organisation and we should support them whenever and wherever possible".

The investigations justify a formal disciplinary, and all concerned parties are invited to attend in order to confirm the hearing.

Many irregularities are uncovered during the investigation.. ("Nuff-said") ("We're all ready to go")..... but.....The official under notification of disciplinary, elects to exercise his resignation.... And that's the end of that. And now to the extension of the "Arm of the Outlaw"

- Nepotism is a word which springs to mind.
- The industry is now saddled with a person of dubious intent running around with a valid P-Registration, and arguably touting previous "official" status as a marketing persuasion.
- Four ethical and properly registered companies have had contracts cancelled and/or customer confidence severely eroded and affected by said "officials'" actions.
- There is (in my own case) mounting debt as a result of an outstanding debtors book which remains unpaid which includes hardware items, and arguably as a result of lost confidence and customer erosion others in this debacle have suffered the same consequences.
- Revenues budgeted and allocated for the rest of the contractual period have to be negated.
- Tax clearance certificates (PAYE and VAT), have been compromised as a result of losses incurred and as a result, parties had to withdraw from responding to tenders which require letters of good standing.
 - o Anything that required any sort of Tax clearance is jeopardised and it goes without saying that outstanding interest accrues at the proverbial "Midnight Hour"
- The cascade effects are numerous and of course costly.

And so to the conclusion of this Cowboy tale:

If your customer gets visited or audited by the Health Dept., or any Dept. for that matter,.... and there isn't a call for everyone to sit down and plan mutual actions to better the situation for the benefit of the customer and,, Dare I say"there is but the slightest hint of erosion of customer confidence, or persuasion to change service supplier... then.... Register your exception to the situation and report it to a higher authority within that Dept. as a matter of extreme urgency, and don't let go until you're satisfied that everything is legit.

What the effects of said "official" will inflict on our industry.... Only time will tell. Sadly we will sit with not a little apprehension when anything related to "Officialdom" crosses our paths, and I trust you will be a little wiser as a result of this horseback ride.