

Getting Mattress Religion: Sit ‘n Sleep

There have been way too many beds purchased during the course of my marriage. My husband and I have become mattress cynics, unwilling to believe claims and guarantees that never pan out. This mattress will last ten years, you say? We'll believe ten months. Maybe.

It was with a bite-me swagger, then, that we walked into the latest purveyor of sleep furnishings in Santa Monica, Sit 'n Sleep on Wilshire Boulevard.

If Kent Siria, the store manager, noticed the attitude, it didn't concern him. A salesman since the age of twelve, the big, bluff fellow had already brought the two-week-old store into the top ten in sales of the 22 Sit 'n Sleep stores in the Southland.

From where he was sitting, we were soon-to-be happy customers.

The fact that he ended up succeeding might seem attributable to some fun high-tech gimmicks, but probably rested on a more fundamental truth. Companies that are run with high standards and integrity create happy employees, who create happy customers.

But first came the gimmicks. Right after we walked in, Kent, smiling cheerfully, put us on the diagnostic bed. We were promised that if we let the bed take some mysterious measurements, and divulged our age, sex, and pain points to the computer, we could narrow our search down to only ten percent of the 108 different mattresses spread over the showroom.

"Sleep has been upgraded to one of the three basic human needs," Kent told us as we lay on the hum-

ming diagnostic bed. "Ahead of food," he added, with some awe. Kent's girth spoke to his own love of food.

All of this technology sounded very good, but when the computer spat out our results, it showed, unsurprisingly, that my husband would prefer a different type of bed from me. I was "green" and he was "blue."

But Kent didn't let our divergent results faze him. Seventy percent of his customers are couples, and often have contrasting needs when it comes to mattresses. Sit 'n Sleep could make up a mattress for us that was half and half, and it wouldn't cost a cent more. Or, if we preferred, we could try one of the mattresses coded both blue/green via easily-visible signs affixed to the end.

The number of correctly colored mattresses was still daunting, but Kent wouldn't give up, even with a first-class ditherer like myself. He was made of tougher stuff than that. Kent had started selling furniture as a moonlighting job - while serving in the Marines. To help me commit to one of the four mattresses my husband and I had chosen, he pointed out Sit 'n Sleep's return policy. If I'd tried the bed for 30 days and still didn't like it, I could return it, although there would be a 20 percent restocking fee.

My husband and I exchanged looks. Could we take that dive - again - after all? Lay down serious money for another possible disappointment?

At least we knew we'd be pay-



Inside Sit 'n Sleep. Photo by Alyssa Ganezer

ing the lowest possible price. We'd often heard the promise of Larry Miller, head of Sit 'n Sleep, on TV. "Sit n' Sleep will beat anyone's advertised price, or your matters is free-e-e-e-e!!"

It was my husband who broke. It's on his side of our present mattress that the whole thing is sunk. Besides, Kent was making it too easy to say yes.

"Let's do it," my husband said.

To Kent, of course, our decision had been a foregone conclusion from the beginning.

Not that he was done with us

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yet. No, he had more he could sell us. A mattress cover - top of the line. Sheets, with color and material samples from which to choose. Pillows. A box spring with a pull-out drawer. You name it, he had it. And we ended up buying it.

Happily.

Why?

Oh, sure the diagnostic bed had been fun, and the return and price promises were nice, but mostly it was because we were dealing with Kent Siria, and Kent was working for Sit 'n Sleep, listed as one of the 20 best places to work in California.

Kent heartily agrees with the statistics, declaring it's the best place he's ever worked. "It's not easy to get in," he explained. Senior management weeds out elements with character flaws. The result, Kent says, is that staff meetings are "like being in church."

That kind of atmosphere will inevitably translate from the employee to the customer.

"Larry takes care of us," Kent says, of the company's CEO and television ad personality. When cuts have to be made, Kent says Larry takes the hit himself before visiting any of the pain on his sales staff.

No wonder we two former mattress cynics had decided to trust in our bed future, after all.

The mattress gets delivered Tuesday. Together with the cover, sheets, pillows, and drawers.

We're ready to believe in it.

Find out more about Kent Siria on page 20!

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