



# I Was Going to Recycle, but ...

By Yasser Jabbari

**Y**OU ARE LATE FOR WORK. You are carrying the breakfast that you somehow did not spill on yourself navigating through morning traffic. As you speed-walk through the parking lot, you come to a set of trash and recycling cans that have words on the front of them that you never really have time to read. What you do notice is that the trash cans have swinging doors on them, which means one of the hands being used to eat your breakfast is going to have to touch that door before you can throw away some of the trash from your car. Instead of doing that, you leave the trash on top of the container and never think about it again.

What was just described might be happening right now in any number of parking lots around the world. How do we convince our customers to act responsibly with the trash they bring into the parking lot? On the other end of it, are we giving customers the right opportunities in the right places to complete a sustainable act? A lack of trash cans or the wrong type of cans will negate any conscious effort to do the right thing.

## Offering the Right Stuff

Disneyland has trash receptacles every 30 feet in any direction. They have figured out that people are only willing to walk 30 feet to throw out trash. They also have only two receptacles at any location: one for trash and one for glass and plastic bottles. The user's choice becomes very simple at this point.

If you come across five different trash receptacles, are you going to stop and look at every single one to figure out which gets your half-eaten bagel and which gets your coffee cup, or are you just going to throw it in the trash and make peace with the compromise that it did not end up on the ground? The small impediments we as operators

put in front of our customers will make or break whether a person makes the right choice.

The example given above was actual feedback our department received from customers in our parking lots. When it came time to replace the garbage can lids, the new ones were selected because they had open lids that made it easy to just drop the trash in—no touching with one's hands.

## Education

Along with accessibility and ease of use, sustainability needs to be driven with education, ideally before a customer even arrives at the parking facility. Operators can take advantage of the recycling and trash norms most people adhere to that dictate how to discard refuse in the right way. But do we know what happens to that trash after it leaves our facilities?

What was once recyclable is no longer recyclable, and a well-meaning customer in a parking lot who thinks he or she is doing the right thing may not actually be at all. We need to make sure that the customer has the proper information so he or she really does the

right thing. This goes hand-in-hand with easily accessible facilities that make the proper choices possible.

Consider pizza boxes. A pizza box is made from cardboard; cardboard can be recycled, so that goes into the blue recycling container. In actuality, because of the grease in the pizza, that box actually can't be recycled and is now a contaminant in the recycling can. The same goes for paper cups or plates, which sometimes have plastic or petroleum lining to make them last longer. Contrary to first glance, these items are not recyclable and should be disposed of in a landfill bin.

In the end, the interaction between a customer and a trash can or recycling bin is very short and one-directional. To effect any kind of change, people must be educated before they ever come near a trash or recycling can so they can make the right choice.

While I applaud any organization that can effectively compost from a parking lot, most users of our facilities just want to be able to make a simple choice—the right choice—and move on with their day. Can we achieve that with a simple trash can and recycling bin and clear labeling? I believe that most people will use the receptacles as long as we don't get in their way. **P**



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