

Working with conscience

Our repair person refused to try to fix our fridge. He wanted to be able to sleep at night.

by [Peter W. Marty](#) in the [August 2024](#) issue

Published on July 26, 2024



(Photo: JaysonPhotography / iStock / Getty)

“You need to list any structural damage, malfunctioning systems, or nonworking appliances that you have knowledge of.” That was our real estate agent walking us through the seller’s disclosure form required for listing a house. As my wife and I breezed through the pages, happily checking the “no” box beside each paragraph, we suddenly remembered the fridge. The door-mounted water and ice dispenser

hasn't worked for years. In the early months we'd futilely push the buttons, as if we were waiting impatiently for an elevator. The water never flowed and the ice never dispensed.

Susan and I remembered the phone call she made six or seven years earlier to our appliance repair person. Gary answered the phone and told us we might be able to save the cost of a house call by simply replacing the refrigerator's air and water filters on our own. "Sometimes that triggers a reset," he said. "Let me know if it works for you." We ordered the two filters online and installed them as soon as they arrived. With great expectation, we pushed the water button. Nothing happened. We pushed it repeatedly—think elevator button. Nothing. We waited five hours and pushed the button for ice. Nothing. All we had to show for our hopes were two new filters buried deep inside the unit.

Susan called Gary back to report the disappointing results and request a service call. What happened next was fascinating. After a brief silence and a few sighs, Gary spoke apologetically. "I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to regretfully decline your request for a service call. These things are notoriously difficult to fix. You can try and try and just not get anything to work. I've been there. I don't have access to the latest tricks that the manufacturer would know. I'm not sure anything I do would work. That would really bother my conscience."

Susan listened as he continued in his earnest way. "I know how important customer service is," said Gary. "That's how I've built my business. I just know that I couldn't assure you that you'd be a satisfied customer when all was said and done. I wouldn't be able to sleep with that kind of disappointment."

Later that day, Susan remarked how thoroughly this guy seemed to understand his work as a calling. He had drawn her into the moral struggles of his conscience. Gary isn't waiting to find out what his true purpose in life is; he seems to know. He measures life by the satisfaction that his labors produce and by outcomes that can be valued by others. If there are too many in this world who define themselves by what they do, Gary reminds all of us to instead do what we are.

In a 1942 essay, Dorothy Sayers speaks of work as a way of life that ought to bring glory to God. "Work is not primarily a thing one does to live," she writes, "but the thing one lives to do. . . . We should clamor to be engaged in work that [is] worth doing, and in which we [can] take pride." If every task we engage allows for a choice

between doing it poorly and doing it well, Sayers admonishes us to “do well a thing that is well worth doing.”

We sold our house. With full disclosure to the buyer, there's a nonfunctioning water and ice dispenser included. What the buyer doesn't know is that Gary is able to sleep at night, which is its own good thing.