

# The Triumph of Restless Dissatisfaction



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**I** moved to Houston in 1990. During the first weekend of being a new Houstonian, my soon-to-be-wife said we had to shop for the next week, so she was going to treat me to a true supermarket experience. We were going to shop at Houston's biggest and "bestest": a Randall's flagship store.

When the time came, I approached the entrance with great anticipation. I was about to experience an awe-inspiring Texas moment, one of my first as a new Texan. The doors quietly slid open, and we got a shopping cart and took about two steps inside. I looked around, then looked at my fiancée and said, "This is it? This is all you got? Darlin', you have not seen a phenomenal supermarket."

That is when supermarket withdrawal and the ongoing, sinking feeling of supermarket envy began for me. It's a nagging, gnawing place right in the pit of your stomach that immediately says "I am simply going to have to learn to settle for less than the best" in terms of supermarket wants, needs, and desires. That sense of withdrawal stayed with me for almost my first 20 years in this city.

Most of us in Texas fully appreciate all of the great aspects of this state and what it has to offer. Our level of supermarkets is certainly not one of them. For those of you who have the pleasure of shopping regularly at Dierbergs, Lunds, Byerly's, Stew Leonard's, Wegmans, Hy-Vee and a few others, count your blessings. You are very fortunate to have such an experience on a regular basis.

## Hope at Last!

I told my bride-to-be at that time that in upcoming trips I would make it a point to take her to real supermarkets, and she could then be the judge about what creates a true shopping experience. Over time she was able to shop at some of the names above, and she re-

alized she too had supermarket envy. In fact, she truly believed that we should convince Lund's to franchise so we could bring the brand and the experience to Houston. Needless to say, that was not going to happen.

And then, about a decade ago, a little regional grocer from San Antonio decided to make a push into southeast Texas. The Harold E. Butt Grocer Co. radically changed its operational format that had enjoyed such success and began bringing real Texas customer experience to Houston via the signature brands of H-E-B Central Market and H-E-B Marketplace. In our first visit to the Central Market (about 15 miles from our home), we realized that there was hope—maybe someday we'd have the H-E-B experience close to us.

About five years ago, that gnawing in my stomach ceased: H-E-B opened a Marketplace 6 miles from our house. Our shopping destination had just been created. Yep, we drive 6 miles one way to the supermarket, we pass three other stores on our way and we have three more within 2 miles of our house. It does not matter. It is a 6-mile journey to enjoy experience, selection, variety, service, unabashed freshness, customer attention and being able to check everything off the grocery list. I now do the majority of weekly shopping during over the weekend, and I can honestly tell you that store traffic on any

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Saturday or Sunday is nearly evenly split between single males (maybe with kids), single females (maybe with kids) and couples (probably with kids).

## Keeping It Simple

Recognizing how H-E-B changed one very important aspect of my required shopping, I was interested in a recent article about the company in one of the supermarket trade journals, titled "Restless Dissatisfaction." It was a short piece, including an interview with H-E-B's president, in the wake of the opening of the company's newest Marketplace location. The story focused on these simple points:

- > What could we do better next time?
- > What changes should we make moving forward?
- > Where did we not achieve our goals in this opening?
- > We must be able to constantly be able to define the difference between winners and losers. And never be a loser.
- > Always carry that inherent desire to always be better and create a better experience for our customers.

Pretty clear, not too demanding, keeping everything very simple: These guidelines provide direction to all of us when we are creating new facilities and bringing new businesses to the communities we serve. It is always a positive experience for our team when we are invited by a client company to do a store visit with company personnel to see where employees hit and missed the target. It is about calming that spirit of restless dissatisfaction while achieving that core sense of "We have provided something to the community that will serve it well." Good job.

Well, time for me to wrap this up. We have to make the grocery list. Tomorrow is Saturday, and one of my assigned errands is grocery shopping at "my H-E-B."