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Tenth Annual Services Marketing Consortium
Washington DC
October 22-23, 2003

COMMENTS TO *SERVICES MARKETING SELF-PORTRAITS*

I am sorry I can't be with you for a discussion related to the book *Services Marketing Self-Portraits*. I would have liked to, because the book raised crucial questions about the past and the future of service research. The great strength of the book is that it does not give a single authorized version of how it was and how it is going to be, but allowed ten very personal and committed accounts.

I would still like to make a few brief comments however:

1. Reading through what I said in the book, I find each of the issues equally important today. A benign explanation is that the issues are indeed of basic character and resistant to fads and fashion or hypes, but also that they are not easy to come to grips with. (A less benign is that I got stuck with "my darlings" and cannot liberate myself from them).

2. One of the issues I raised concerned "green services". This issue has not been much in vogue in service research. Today I would like to broaden it to the general issue of social responsibility and corporate citizenship. We have seen scandals surface during the past few years with the huge and global CPA firm Arthur Andersen not being able to perform as accountants having supported the Enron fraud. We have seen how the whole of the financial sector, including market leaders such as Chase and Merrill Lynch, offered outright lies to customers. And even worse: they found it only natural to do so. Similar events have occurred in Europe. Skandia, a Swedish headquartered global financial and insurance group is now being sued and is the object of fraud investigations. Skandia used to be a role model of progressive thinking, advocating the balanced scorecard and intellectual capital, and offering new financial instruments and rapid global growth. We have the debate on the fattening of the Western world (and increasingly so in Asia and Africa, too) involving the restaurant sector, especially the aggressive marketing of fast food. In its wake follows ill health affecting society in general and specifically putting a strain on health care services. I could go on with this list.

In just a few days, on October the 27th, there will be a one-day business seminar in Stockholm, Sweden, where the speakers are Philip Kotler, Don Peppers, Christian Grönroos and Evert Gummesson. The theme is Good Corporate Citizenship. About 400 business people have registered.

3. Another issue I want to stress even more than in the book is the electronic issue and the need for high tech/high touch balance. My conclusion is that service companies (as well as researchers) believe that more technology and bigger systems are the solution to everything. They are the fix, even if not always the quick fix. There has been some waking up but it is far from sufficient. My conclusion is: technology and systems have taken over; they do not perform as our servants but as our masters.

4. And finally, I do not think more customer satisfaction studies with increasingly sophisticated statistical formulas and computer support are the answer to anything of importance in service research.