

# Kennedy: 'Transparency' by grocery stores builds shopper trust

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Opinion

Today's consumers also want to know more about what goes into selling product

THE DAILY GAZETTE



The produce section in the Niskayuna Co-Op.

Photographer: MARC SCHULTZ

Four years ago, after Husband had unexpected heart-bypass surgery, I banished anything with added sugar, salt and unrecognizable ingredients from cupboard, pantry, refrigerator and freezer.

Then Daughter No. 2 and I spent a solid couple of hours at the supermarket reading product labels to figure out how to restock the kitchen with suitable substitutes: Heat-and-eat jarred spaghetti sauce was out, for instance, but no-added-salt canned tomatoes could be the base on which to build a sauce.

It was an exhausting, frustrating experience.

I was reminded of the trip during a recent food-industry webinar in which a respondent to a shopper survey was quoted as summing up what I needed then: "areas [in stores] where I know I can go into a certain section and

everything is going to be healthy.”

The survey was part of the research behind the [2017 U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends](#) report from the Food Marketing Institute and The Hartman Group; the webinar focused on findings about transparency in the food supply.

“Transparency” isn’t a word in most shoppers’ vocabularies, noted David Feit, a vice president at Seattle-based Hartman, a consumer-research firm. Instead, they talk in terms of expecting “openness” and “honesty” from retailers.

Product labels provide a level of transparency about what’s inside. But today’s consumers also want to know more about what goes into selling the product — whether the store has a reputation for high-quality goods, whether it treats workers well, whether it demands excellence from suppliers.

“Retailers’ efforts to inform, connect and be open about business practices build shopper trust and loyalty,” according to Feit. “Shoppers experience ‘transparency’ through a range of retailer behaviors and benefits that help convey authentic values, caring and a willingness to ‘do good.’”

He said aiding consumers’ health and wellness decisions — which change over time as family needs evolve — is another way retailers can build credibility in transparency.

That can be as simple as “removing temptation or making it easier to make ‘good’ choices,” or as complex as orienting the store around health and wellness needs “to make the shopping experience conducive to learning about new products and behaviors” — which certainly would have helped me as I restocked my kitchen.

“It’s very clear that transparency practices build trust between shoppers and their stores because open and honest communication humanizes a company — it turns the transactional exchange into a brand relationship,” Feit said.

Consumers recognize that retailers are in business to make money and don’t “begrudge” that motive. But retailers need to be aware that shoppers will scrutinize how they run their stores, “making judgments about their values, priorities and competencies from a range of implicit and explicit cues,” according to Feit.

It’s no accident, then, that “the leaders in transparency are also the types of stores that get above-average overall scores for meeting their shoppers’ overall needs,” he said.

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## Residents should keep Nisky board honest

Answers are needed from town board

The Sept. 26 Gazette article regarding Niskayuna residents’ dissent about a proposed apartment complex on Balltown Road was a breath of fresh air. A number of neighboring residents voiced their concerns to the Niskayuna Town Board in resounding form against this concept and the precedent it will set.

Who keeps the town in check if not for the voices of its residents? Some interesting comments surfaced when residents began delving into this project and found it difficult to get documents and responses from the town without some probing.

It has been my experience that it is common practice for the town to keep their cards close to their chest when

questioned on their plans and actions. With election season quickly approaching, there are some pointed questions that need to be raised as decisions are made with little information going to the taxpayers, including information about this proposed apartment complex.

Niskayuna residents need to know:

- 1) Why are the Town Board minutes brief and don't include the contents of the many resolutions passed each meeting? Example: Aug. 22, 2017, minutes list Resolution 2017-252 to "Appoint persons to the Planning Board and Zoning Commission." Who are they? The stewardship of taxpayers' dollars is serious business and deserves full disclosure.
- 2) Who are BR Holdings Co LLC and Windsor Co.? Are there any conflicts of interest with the Town Board?
- 3) Does anyone find it disconcerting that the town supervisor is a retained lawyer for Schenectady County? This situation raises many red flags for conflict of interest, especially for the other towns in Schenectady that are not privy to the contacts and information in a fair, transparent manner.
- 4) It's my understanding that here have been many resignations of key administrative and professional personnel in the last year or so. Was there one in the Planning Department? This list is by no means complete, but does deserve answers.

Residents of Niskayuna, continue to probe, speak your opinions, don't assume that all is well in Mayberry, and protect this town where we love to call home.

Clare Strom

Niskayuna

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