

# **Delight Your Customers**

## **Your Personal Power to Make a Difference**

### **Introduction**

Okay, so the world is not always a nice place. Like you, I'm mad as hell at the disgraceful ineffectiveness of our politicians. I hate it that people, and especially children are dying of hunger around the world, driven by the greed of wealthy nations and manipulative global businesses. I'm outraged by the doomed attempts of our Machiavellian leaders – political, business, religious, sporting, and even within the “impartial” media - to lie and “spin” and show complete disregard and disrespect for who we are. It drives me crazy that people like you and I are held hostage to our fears by a small percentage of the world's population, and that we feel helpless to fight back. I despair that we cannot even plan a simple little annual holiday without worrying about which entity will go on strike next, or how expensive it will be by the time we get there.

Yes, the world is not always a nice place, but together you and I have been given a magical opportunity to make a difference, to spread a little bit of warmth and happiness around. No matter where you look in all the world's religions, philosophies, value systems, and anything that describes how we need to treat each other, the message is always the same: “Love one another.”

I don't blame you if you think that I just emerged from a time machine that last visited the hippy movement in the 1960's. But the fact of the matter is there is still some hope for the world if those of us who deal with customers just bring a little bit of surprise, humour and joy to them. You and I have the power to bring some magic every day, and we don't do it because we are going to capture bigger market share, or get a bigger salary increase. We do it because we sleep better at night.

### **So, Who is *Really* Important?**

Think about the answers to these questions

1. Who are the five wealthiest people in the world, or in South Africa?
2. Name the last five rugby or soccer or cricket captains.
3. Who are the last five winners of the Miss South Africa?
4. Name ten people who have won any Nobel Prize.
5. Who are the last half dozen Academy Award winners for best actor and actress?
6. Can you name five finalists in Idols or Pop Stars or Big Brother?
7. Who are the Chief Executives of South Africa's top ten companies?
8. Can you name at least six of the twelve people who walked on the moon from 1969 to 1971?

### **How did you do? Not too well, I bet. But now try these questions:**

1. List five teachers who aided your journey through school.
2. Name five people who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.
4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special.
5. Think of five people who make you laugh and that you enjoy spending time with.

Was that a bit easier? You bet it was! The point is: none of us remember the headliners of yesterday, or even of today. These are no second-rate achievers. They are the best in their fields. But the applause dies. Awards tarnish. Achievements are forgotten. Accolades and certificates are buried with their owners.

But the people who make a difference in your life are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. They are the ones that **care**. They are those who reach out and help, who do special favours, who share something special with you. They are the ones who help you when you are confused, who are warm when there is indifference, who notice little things that nobody else does.

And this is where you can make a big difference to your customers. People who work with customers all day have got a magic opportunity to do something special for others. What knowledge do you have that you can share with your customers to make their lives a little easier? What can you do to pay a compliment, or make them feel a little special – even if for just a few seconds? How can you ease some of the problems and headaches in their lives, and relieve them of the countless burdensome irritations that bug them? Is there something you can do to make them laugh or giggle, or to help them feel a little bit better about life?

I bet you can answer “Yes” to all of these questions quite easily. The people I remember most are those who instinctively know what it is to be human. Like the waiter at a hotel in Port Elizabeth that insisted on introducing me to the table with the other single diners who were on business trips like me. (One of them suggested we go to a local pub that he knew. By the end of the night we had pledged eternal loyalty to each other, although I did regret the headache next morning.) Or like the charming assistant at Exclusive Books who broke the rules and actually delivered a book that I was desperately looking for to my offices. (See full story below.) Or the waiter who walked to the local health shop to buy me sugar-free jam for breakfast when he heard that I was diabetic. Or the security guard who left his post to come and help me change the wheel of my car. Or the most enchanting doctor’s receptionist with the most beautiful Scottish accent who, seeing that I was feeling quite sorry for myself, said, “Och, sweetie, you look really miserable. Why don’t you have a lie down until the doctor sees you?” (She not only fussed like a dear old granny would have, but also jumped me up to the top of the queue.) And what about the Kulula.com flight attendant who gave me free coffee when she heard I didn’t have any cash on me?

I’m sure that you get the picture. There are hundreds of people who are willing to put in the extra effort to help others, people who make the world a better place because they realise “It wasn’t made for me alone.”

Do you think that your customers know or actually care about who the chief executive of your company is? Do you think they know or care about how sophisticated the factory has become, or that you have installed the best IT hardware and software in the world, or that your CRM system can do all sorts of imaginative things? Do you think they are interested in the fact that you have outsourced your logistics, or that you have a great canteen or a crèche in your building? They don’t care!

**But they do care about how you treat them!** And you have the power to do something special and memorable for your customers. I can’t remember where I first saw this, but I think you’ll enjoy it: *“They say it takes a minute to find a special person, an hour to appreciate them, a day to love them, but then an entire life to forget them.”*

## **Does it make a difference? You bet it does!**

There is no doubt about it: companies that look after their customers are far more profitable than those that neglect customers. We can probably go one step further and draw the following conclusion: if you treat your customers properly on the personal level, they will probably...

- Keep coming back and giving you repeat business
- Becoming less price sensitive because trust is established
- Be open to new opportunities from cross-selling and up-selling them current or new products

- Have a greater propensity to recommend and refer you to others...
- Saving you huge amounts of money on advertising and promotions
- Be far less likely to defect to your rivals
- Be very forgiving of you even when things go wrong, (as they sometimes do)
- Treat your staff with greater levels of respect and friendliness, resulting in higher morale and motivation
- Appreciate your business, and reward you buy doing things like paying accounts on time, being open to new ideas, sharing their own perceptions and ideas, supporting your functions, systems and processes, and actively cooperating with you on all matters.

You can get yourself out of all sorts of trouble just by being nice to people. As many teenagers are prone to repeating, “It’s a no-brainer.”

### **So what can we do to make that difference in other people’s lives?**

I don’t want to give you a list of prescriptive bullet points, but merely some suggestions. What you decide to do with them is your choice. Remember: *It’s Never “Beneath Me” to Take Care of Customers*

- **Take Personal Responsibility for Customers’ Experiences:** One thing that customers seem to hate more than anything is indifference and apathy to them. Never retreat into the “It’s not my department” responses, like phrases that begin with the words, “You’re gonna have to...” Also do you know what’s “a day in the life of your customer?” Do you *really* know what it’s like for them? Do you know what are their priorities, their fears and anxieties, their motivations and desires? Taking responsibility also means that we don’t allow pettiness, “rules”, bureaucracy, inconvenience, excuses and wordy legal language to get in the way of customer delight. They don’t care about your problems and priorities. So if you can’t help, offer them some alternative. After all, if you can’t help them, who will? You’re there to protect them from “the big bad wolf.”
- **“Notice” things, and record everything that you know about them:** this is the most powerful – and probably the cheapest - way of getting loyalty and adding value.
- **Be frugal with fawning and flattery and avoid pretentiousness, showiness and ostentation:** Nobody likes to be patronised, and nobody likes big deals.
- **Arrange to be in their spotlight:** Always thank them for giving you their business: true appreciation is rare. It’s not about frequent buyer points. But it is also crucial to follow-up, and to keep customers informed at all times. Never seem to be working too hard. Make sure that all your communication is timely, relevant, anticipated and personal. Pay attention to your physical appearance, then, and find a way to create a distinctive - a *subtly* distinctive-style and image. Show them how you are at the cutting edge of what you do. Surprise them with things they’ve never heard of in their lives before, that they can boast about. But don’t forget to also include the “good old stuff” that they are familiar with. Alter your style and language according to the person you are dealing with.
- **There are also some dangerous traps to avoid:** Never be the bearer of bad news. Never go beyond the invisible line of closeness. Never joke about appearances or taste. Never criticize them directly. Be very frugal in asking customers for favours. Do not be the company cynic: they are not interested in your problems.

- **Fight the spirit of our times:** Master your own emotions and especially the negativity that surrounds us. Be a source of pleasure for customers: Are they happy to see you? Do you bring a smile to their faces? What can you do that's personal and memorable?
- **Always continuously and regularly come up with innovative and creative ways to add value for them, and to create amazing, personal, memorable experiences for them:** What do I/we need to do less of, or maybe even eliminate altogether, to add value for my customers? What do I/we need to do more of, or even create from scratch, to add value for my customers? How can I simplify the complex, filter out the deluge of information that they encounter, explain how things work, show them the shortcuts, and even train them if you can? Even though they don't know what's in "the black box," doesn't mean that they like it: it makes them feel powerless and helpless.

**Remember coffee beans and Harley-Davidson?** You can do the same!

## Some Additional Examples of the "Extra Mile"

- Let me take you through security so you don't have to waste time there
- Would you like me to confirm your return flight and select your seat now?
- I bet you are going to need a pen to sign that birthday card. Here, take this with you.
- I will deliver it personally this afternoon.
- Since you are awake now, would you like me to get you some juice or ice cream? (Nurse in a hospital at 1:00am)
- I don't know the answer now, but I promise I'll call you back before 11:00 am
- Can I bring an extra plate so that you can share the dessert?
- Can I call you a taxi?
- Since we are going to take longer than we promised with your car, let me give you a lift home, and I will bring your car through as soon as it's done.
- How are you going to get to the hotel now? (Avis)
- Let me draw you a map so you don't get lost. (In a building of all places)
- Let me help you carry these things inside.
- Take this new cheque book cover, yours looks a bit worn out.
- Are you waiting for your wife? Why don't I bring you a newspaper while you wait?

## What Else To Do?

So basically, it's up to you! Customer loyalty is the responsibility of everyone within your organisation – but make it start with you. And where do you start? Here are some questions about choices you can make about whether or not you take personal responsibility for your customers:

- If this customer was me, what would I want?
- Would I be proud if my interactions with customers were recorded and shown on Carte Blanche, 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree, or Special Assignment?
- If this were my business, would I give the same attention to quality and service that I do now? Would I show more gratitude to customers, pay more attention to little details, or make them feel more special? If this was my Mom or Dad or favourite uncle that came in right now, would I treat them differently?
- Am I more careful about work quality or customer service when my boss is around? Do I deliver good quality and service even when my boss or co-workers do not?
- Do I actively search for ways to improve the service and experiences of our customers?

- Do I go beyond my job description, and maybe even bend the rules a bit, for my customers, (because I know I can justify this to my boss later)?
- Do I make a special effort to listen to and understand each customer's special needs?
- Can I guarantee that my last 10 customers were delighted rather than just merely satisfied?
- Do I believe that the technical aspects of my job are more important than delighting my customers, or do I view my job as being primarily about people and relationships?
- Would I rather work alone, or with "things," or do I genuinely enjoy working with and for other people?
- Do I work at my own relaxed pace, or do I display a sense of urgency and a high level of energy?
- Do I mostly seem depressed, angry or indifferent, (and insist on letting everyone know about it,) or do I have a positive, enthusiastic and cheerful outlook on life?
- Do I need to be the centre of attention most of the time, and do most of the talking, or do I put our customers on the centre stage and focus on them?
- Am I a "big deal" who needs to prove to others that I am always right, or do I allow our customers to be right – even when they wrong?
- Must I have things happen in a predictable and orderly manner, or am I flexible and enjoy new demands and experiences?

Ownership of great service is a necessary ingredient for delivering service that is worth bragging about. It needs to come from each and every employee. Don't wait for your boss to tell you how to treat your customers. Learn by building positive relationships, one customer at a time, by doing whatever it takes to delight them, and to create loyalty that gives your business an unbeatable competitive edge. Attitude is based on common sense and choosing to do the right thing.

**So stand up and make your statement**  
**If there's something that needs to be done, do it now**  
**Choose joy and laughter and warmth rather than pessimism and despair**  
**Choose to go for more, rather than less**  
**Choose more enthusiasm and passion, not less**  
**Choose to appreciate all of the wonderful things around us...**  
**And to not dwell on the ugliness**  
**Choose friendship and service**  
**rather than indifference**

**Be an Eagle, (but definitely not a duck!) Make that choice!**

## **Do Good Anyway**

**If people are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centred, love them anyway**

**And if you succeed, you're going to win false friends and true enemies.  
Succeed anyway.**

**And honesty and frankness and forgiveness may make you vulnerable.  
Have the courage to be honest and frank and forgiving anyway.**

**The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.**

**What you spend years building may be torn down and destroyed overnight.  
Build anyway.**

**The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest people  
with the smallest minds. Think big anyway.**

**Give the world the best that you have, and you'll be kicked in the teeth.  
Give the world your best anyway.**

**In essence, have the courage to be courageous.**

***Free One-Hour Seminar and Book Launch!***

***Date & Time: 14 October 2009 at 15h00 (ending 16h30)***

***Where: Durban Country Club***

For twenty-five years, the Customer Resources Centre (CRC) and Aki Kalliatakis have consulted only on the topics of customer service, customer loyalty and customer experiences. We do many talks, presentations and training workshops, and have dozens of resources that can help you to create a customer-driven company, (including many diagnostic questionnaires, useful checklists, and seven books published over the last few years.)

We'd love a chance to work with your business, but, because we are on a mission to change the culture of service in our magnificent country, we're also happy to share what we have learned with you for no extra charge. Please feel free to contact us if you'd like your questions answered:

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**Thank-You!**