

SAMPLE ONLY

RAISING THE THE 12 STEPS TO AN AWESOME AND PROFITABLE SERVICE CULTURE BARISTA

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CHAPTER 8

Make Sure They Know We Care

*Happiness is having a large, loving, caring,
close-knit family in another city.*

–GEORGE BURNS

Creating lasting impressions and enriched experiences for our guests

Indifference towards customers is a business killer. We need to change and actively work on customer engagement that converts our first time visitors to regulars and our regulars to members of our club or VIP/loyalty/rewards program, and our members to raving fans.

Everyone wants to feel appreciated and valued—particularly when people are making hard choices regarding their wallets and where they spend their hard-earned cash. We can't take their patronage and support for granted. Regularly communicating that you care about your customers' needs and wants strengthens your connection to them and differentiates you from competitors who

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only reach out when they want to sell something. We need to do something about indifference because it's a big problem.

Why do customers stop doing business with a particular venue or hospitality establishment?

1% die

3% move away

5% develop other friendships

9% leave for competitive reasons

14% are dissatisfied with the product

A massive 68 per cent quit because of an attitude of indifference toward the customer by an employee(Michael LeBeufs, *How to Win Customers and Keep Them for Life*).

So, 68 per cent of customers don't come back because they think we don't care! This raises a number of other questions:

- How many people do we have with us every day that we lose as future stakeholders because of team apathy?
- Do customers have to prove they are worth serving?
- How do we convert our customers—what can we do every day?

How do we show that we care?

Make them feel like they belong

See your customers as friends and connect on a personal level. Make a friend, not just serve a customer. It is rewarding to you both when you show someone you care about the small stuff, the

things that might matter to them. People will never forget how you made them feel. Treating customers as a friend is all about the feeling you create, how you in your mind view the customer and in turn how you are in the interaction with them.

Finding a common interest totally changes a conversation. When we think of someone as a friend we start connecting with them. There is nothing as real as the passion shared when you're on common ground. Don't judge them. Full stop. Be IN the moment—Stay IN the moment—Be totally present. Nothing breaks the connection like the feeling that someone's mind is somewhere else. For as long as it takes stay totally focussed on that one customer interaction. Put yourself in their shoes, think about what kind of person they seem to be and how you might make them feel like they belong. Share a little of yourself when you're talking with customers, it will help both of you find the common ground. You might just make a new friend along the way.

Give them the real you, the real deal

Be genuine and authentically you. Why is it that being themselves is so hard for many people when it comes to customer service? Why do they put on an act? You know what I mean; an ordinary, clever, helpful, funny person suddenly becomes a completely different person when they step into their work role. It happens all the time, almost as if we think that's what is expected and what it takes to 'be professional'.

But the reality is that 'acting professional' is often just an excuse for tuning out and going through the motions. Think about those

over-used service statements you hear all the time like “have a nice day” or “will that be all?” They’re so predictable we don’t even notice them most of the time and they never, ever result in a memorable customer experience.

In order for a personal connection to be made, people need to see the real you, the good bits and sometimes even the not so good bits. Let’s face it, nothing is more intimidating than someone who’s absolutely perfect. I find people are very forgiving over a possible lack of skills if they have enjoyed the interaction anyway. It’s our little flaws, quirks and personality traits that make us human and will make people interested in getting to know us better.

Another reason that being authentic is so important when it comes to service is because it plays a vital role in creating empathy, a key element of connection. The reality is, customers prefer a real person than a perfect robot every time.

The three pillars of a good brand are clarity, consistency and authenticity. Is that you? Don’t use professionalism as an excuse to deliver bland and task or process focussed service. Don’t try to be perfect. Your quirks are what makes you and they’re the things that make you interesting to others. We lose authenticity when we worry too much about the approval of others and what others will think of us. Vulnerability creates empathy, which in turn creates connection. Let people see your human side. Don’t tune out, stay real. People can spot someone just ‘going through the motions’ a mile off. “Have a nice day!” Remember memorable customer service never ever comes from a script. It comes from being who you are.

Find out their story

The quickest way to make a friend is to get interested in the other person. Trying to impress them and get them interested in us will never create true connection. If you get curious about life and people it will naturally lead to conversation. Every person has a different story and you won't know what that is until you get interested and try to discover it. Take the time to stop and notice. Only when we look for the signs, do we have a chance of uncovering the real story.

Don't be afraid to take the time. Sometimes people want to stop and have a chat. Every time you find yourself responding to what they appear to be—stop—and try to look at the person as an individual instead. Set yourself the goal of finding out one piece of personal information about everyone you meet. You might find a common interest. If you feel uncomfortable talking to someone, try to imagine what they're like when they're talking to their mum (it's sure to help you see their human side). Just start talking. The easiest way to make a connection is to start having conversations with people and getting interested in them. The more you practise the easier and more natural it will become.

Make them feel really special

We want to know that we matter to others; we want to be noticed and acknowledged at least. If we are singled out for special treatment, given special privileges, receive special favours, we feel special. Customers will have different needs depending on what the occasion is. Take time to think about their situation and what

needs you might be able to meet for them. For example if it is their child's birthday dinner, then fussing over the child instead of the parent will have a huge impact on the parents. Also, honest appreciation creates connection. Insincere flattery can have the opposite effect and actually break connection. Making an exception for a person by showing that they matter more than just following the rules makes them feel special. Providing something special that is not on the menu will have a lasting impact.

Make a practice of using people's first names as often as you can. Nothing is as sweet to a person as the sound of their own name. Look for easy ways to bend the rules and make an exception for customers. Even the smallest thing can be enough to give them a warm feeling. Get into the habit of showing appreciation to the people around you—customers, workmates, friends and family—with a bit of practise it will start to come naturally. Try and avoid using terms like 'most people', 'other customers', 'people normally'. People hate to be compared to others. Try to remember a personal piece of information about a customer and then drop it back in conversation. They will be thrilled that you have remembered them. Choose one customer a day and go out of your way to make them feel super special. In every customer interaction, try to identify the most important need you could deliver on for them.

Give them what they want

They couldn't care less about your rules. It's not important to them. The reality is that all businesses have policies and procedures that can, at times, conflict with the best needs of the customer. When

that happens, the best solution is never to make it the customer's problem. The trick is to stay focussed on the very best result you're trying to achieve for the customer, rather than the rules you have in front of you. Showing this kind of flexibility will not only prevent a negative customer experience but can actually be a wonderful way of creating connection. Trying to find a way to 'bend' the rules to meet a customer's needs is a great opportunity to put that into practice.

Stay focused on the result you're trying to achieve for the customer, don't be straight-jacketed by the rules. Ask questions and listen with 'clean' ears. Make sure you're really listening. It's your job to find the 'yes', even when at first it might look like the answer is 'no'. When dealing with a customer you're the boss, so make the call.

Challenge yourself to say 'yes' to every request for one day from family members, friends, customers and workmates. When you're solving a customer problem spend some time up front to get really clear on what result you're trying to achieve for them. Practise silencing that little voice in your head and really listen to what the customer is asking for. You might be surprised at what you hear. Put yourself in the customer's shoes. What would you want someone to do for you in the same situation? Never blame policies and processes, you are ultimately responsible for the customer experience.

Be original and surprising

As the hospitality industry, like other industries, becomes dominated by chain groups, there is more 'sameness' than ever before. It's no surprise then that our appetite for 'different' and

‘unique’ is growing. Many of our loyalty or rewards programs tend to drive rational repeat purchase behaviour but not necessarily higher levels of loyalty. People get used to rewards quickly when the rewards are relatively predictable. However, people respond more positively to rewards when they are spontaneous, unexpected, original and surprising.

Through the eyes of a beginner

The great thing about a beginner is that they don’t know what they don’t know. Often, we get so used to the way things have been done for years and years that we can’t see the opportunity to do something in a new and different way. One of the best ways to see through the eyes of a beginner is to look around you and ask the question “why?”

Turn something boring into something fun. Get your team together and choose one boring routine/process and come up with ways to make it fun for customers. Don’t be afraid to be playful. Professionalism doesn’t have to mean boring. Dedicate at least an hour a week to doing nothing other than having fun with your team. Create a quirky, memorable signature item that’s given to customers. It could be a rubber duck or cow, or a bottle of your signature dipping sauce. Give away 10 ‘surprise and delight’ gifts every day. Create a list of items or services that cost you very little but would give your customers a big smile.

Now make it happen

One of the scariest things about any sort of change to your regular routine is getting started. We have a tendency to delay and wait for the 'right time' which never seems to come. There will never be enough time to do it. The best thing you can do is just jump in boots and all. Start putting the great stuff you've learnt into practice.

Start tomorrow, or even better start right now. What's the one thing you can take from this chapter and put into practice the second you put down this book?

You know the saying, "What's the best way to eat an elephant?" The answer, of course, is "one bite at a time". This chapter is a bit like that. We have shared a lot of ideas and it's a lot to take in, so rather than trying to digest it all at once, why not break it down into small chunks? Maybe you can tackle a different principle each month? Or decide to focus on a different technique or idea every day or every week. However you break it down, the key to mastery is practise, so whatever you are doing, do it over and over again and before you know it, it will become second nature.

If we want to transform our customer experiences, we need to start doing things differently. Remember it's not about better, it's about different.

The final word is from Andrew Griffiths, General Manager-Hotels at Coles Group.

I recently asked Andrew, "How do your team make sure your customers really know you care?"

It's applicable to any aspect of the hospitality industry; your farewell message. How many times do you walk out of a café or coffee shop where you've had a really good coffee and you've had a good experience, and you actually want to acknowledge someone and say thank you? Staff themselves actually turn away, because they're so action-oriented to the next transaction, the next thing. I think, if we're talking about competition, and we're talking about an industry that is suffering from very high labour rates, we've got high costs of doing business, and we want to distinguish ourselves against our competitors, whether it's another pub, restaurant, coffee shop or coffee cart, the best way to distinguish is to have not only a great product, but I think equally important, fantastic service.

We're human beings, we want that warmth, engagement, recognition and acknowledgement. So rather than competing on price, let's put the layer of value into the service proposition. And that was why I was really interested to see your notes, and hear that you're writing a book on this, because it's easy to give up and say "it's all too hard" and discount your price. That's not what hospitality is about to me.

Key ideas

- Make them feel like they belong—See your customers as friends and connect on a personal level.
- Give them the real you, the real deal—Be genuine and authentically you.
- Find out their story—The quickest way to make a friend is to get interested in the other person.
- Make them feel really special—We want to know that we matter to others; we want to be noticed and acknowledged.

- Don't ever make them feel wrong—No matter what, their version of the truth is the truth—take what they're saying at face value and move on with solving the problem.
- Give them what they want—They couldn't care less about your rules—it's not important to them.
- Be original and surprising—Turn something boring into something fun.

Activities

- Share a little of yourself when you're talking with customers, it will help both of you find the common ground.
- Don't try to be perfect—your quirks are what makes you and they're the things that make you interesting to others.
- Set yourself the goal of finding out one piece of personal information about everyone you meet. You might find a common interest.
- Choose one customer a day and go out of your way to make them feel super special. In every customer interaction, try to identify the most important need you could deliver on for them.
- Take every comment, big or small, seriously and fix it. Be quick to mop up the mess. The quicker you start cleaning up, the less damage you will cause.
- Put yourself in the customer's shoes, what would you want someone to do for you in the same situation? Never blame policies and processes, you are ultimately responsible for the customer experience.
- Get your team together and choose one boring routine/process and come up with ways to make it fun for customers. Don't be afraid to be playful—professionalism doesn't have to mean boring.

Notes

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Justin McGurgan is passionate about the hospitality industry, loves awesome customer service and helping hospitality venues unlock their true potential.

Justin is a hospitality industry 'tragic' (veteran) having spent his entire working life from the age of 16 working in and with hospitality venues around Australia. His industry knowledge combined with management skills gained from frontline, management and development roles in clubs, casinos, and hotels, provides the depth of expertise required to remain at the forefront of the hospitality industry's evolution and progress.

Justin now runs two successful hospitality industry businesses in Trojan Corporate and Academy Hospitality Australia. Justin is a consultant, facilitator, and presenter to the hospitality industry on topics including service culture, management and leadership, operational review, strategic planning, corporate governance, and feasibility studies. His past client list includes many leading brands such as Sheraton, Hilton, Holiday Inn, Mercure, Marriott, Grand Chancellor, Crowne Plaza, Lasseter's, Jupiter's Casino's, major clubs including Twin Towns Services Club, Greenbank RSL, Broncos Leagues Club, Sunnybank Community and Sports Club, Carina Leagues Club, Kedron-Wavell Services Club, Redcliffe Leagues Club, Caboolture Sports Club, and hotel groups including ALH (Woolworths), Spirit (Coles), Stewarts, McGuire's, and Fitzgibbons.

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Justin has launched a new business name and brand in February 2014 called ZEALIFI: 'A Culture of Hospitality'. The focus of Justin and his awesome team members is on 'service culture' through living it and breathing it.

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