



# ideas & inspirations

FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE PROFESSIONALS

From KIWIHOST

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## ideas

### RESEARCH IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR STAYING IN TOUCH

Research will never give you a deep enough insight compared to actually being in your customers' shoes. All Harley Davidson executives are expected to ride with customers on 10-15 days a year. At the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of Harley Davidson in Milwaukee, the job of the company VPs was to hand out brochures to visitors. One VP worked out he had spoken anonymously to 10,000 customers over the three days. How frequently is the authority of a job title a handicap to managers who want to get to the truth of what's going on. Why don't you stand outside your business and hand out brochures for an hour or two and listen to the feedback. You will be surprised and rewarded.<sup>(1)</sup>

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### QUOTE OF THE MONTH

*We are made wise not by the recollections of our past but by the responsibility we take for our future.*

Vince Lombardi

## inspirations

### YOUR MISSION FOR THE YEAR: MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Recently Herb Kelleher, CEO of Southwest Airlines told his employees:

*"When you're sitting around with your grandchildren, I want you to be able to tell them that being connected to Southwest Airlines was one of the finest things that ever happened in your entire life. I want you to be able to say, 'Southwest Airlines ennobled and enriched my life; it made me better, and bigger, and stronger than I ever could have been alone. And if, indeed, that happens with your grandchildren, then that will be the greatest contribution that I could have made to Southwest Airlines and to its future.'"*

That's what Kelleher means by 'a company led by love'. Whether you're a manager or CEO, finding and keeping staff who are customer committed will be the major challenge of 2007. As the level of unemployment dips and competition for great staff increases we need to carefully examine how we manage and how we respond to those we employ.

In this issue of ideas & inspirations you will find a number of ideas about the things that you can do to ensure that your team responds with enthusiasm to your customers.

It continues to amaze me how managers allow the interaction between their most valuable asset and the business to be managed by staff with negative attitudes and little or no training. Then they wonder why their business doesn't perform or why hard won customers don't come back. In 2007, focus on staff, their development and effective management. This will ensure that they will be committed to both keeping and building your most valuable asset – your customer.

## WAIHEKE – AN ISLAND OF WINE

Sounds great, and it is great. Waiheke, the warm sunny island of wine has over the last twenty years created a world-recognised brand. Just as the Champagne area of France has achieved universal recognition, so Waiheke is evolving in a similar way.

The rolling hills of this idyllic island embraced by the South Pacific breeze delivers a perfect environment for the ultimate wine tasting experience.

Many of Waiheke wines have won major international awards and can only be found on Waiheke or on the wine lists of some of the finest restaurants around the world.

Waiheke has achieved this unique world-class status by a combination of factors; climate, soil type and the north facing salt air. All these provide the basic ingredients to produce unsurpassed Cabernets and Merlots, but the key is people; the 27 Waiheke vineyard owners are dedicated to creating a unique and special experience.

I remember vividly the first time I visited Goldwater Estate, the oldest vineyard on the island. We purchased some of their wonderful Cabernets and as Jeanette Goldwater lovingly wrapped each bottle in tissue paper you could not but feel that she was parting with her most prized possession.

That was what customer experience is about; creating value and emotion in the mind of the customer by a combination of actions that support the product and/or service.

All of the winemakers have differentiated their business in some way by surrounding their products with “unique experiences”. Stephen White of Stonyridge, with his fabulous parties and funky newsletter (which doesn’t talk much about wine), has separated his wine product to a point where he probably achieves the highest retail and restaurant price for any New Zealand wines.

To create a significant and recognisable customer experience, you need to search for and then create a difference that is emotionally stimulating to those who participate as your customers. Waiheke vineyards have been producing world acclaimed wines, particularly Cabernet and Merlot blends and then building around them a very special interaction with their customers.

## RECOGNISING SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE

It takes more to retain good customer service staff than a salary. To earn their loyalty, you also need to provide training and recognition within a work environment that enables them to do their best work.

As a starting point it is critically important to keep your message top-of-mind.

Acronyms, those words in which each letter represents a word or phrase, can help your staff focus on their main goals. For example, one company uses the word LEAP when conducting training in how to handle upset customers.

The letters stand for:

- L = Listen
- E = Empathise
- A = Ask
- P = Produce (results)

Some bank branches have posters with the word GUEST by each customer service desk.

In this case, the word GUEST stands for:

- G = Greet
- U = Use customer’s name
- E = Eye contact
- S = Smile
- T = Thank

### Suggestion:

Why not develop an acronym for your customer contact staff to help them focus their behaviours. Be sure to get input from staff on what the acronym should be and what it should stand for. This will get them thinking about the many factors that go into providing exceptional service. I hope that these idea starters have given you some food for thought.<sup>(2)</sup>

Articles in I&I include reference to the following sources:

1. Durado, P. *Your December Customer Tips* 6. Email Dec 06
2. Dalessandro, M. *The Customer Service Group’s Service Starters*. Retrieved 25 Jan 07 from [www.customerservicegroup.com/enews1.php](http://www.customerservicegroup.com/enews1.php)
3. Kaye, B & Jordan-Evans, S. *Find Their Calling*. Retrieved 25 Jan 07 from [www.fastcompany.com/resources/talent/bksje/121306.html](http://www.fastcompany.com/resources/talent/bksje/121306.html),
4. Brandi, J. *Joanna Brandi’s Customer Care Tip*. Email 2 Jan 2007

## FIND THEIR CALLING

The match between your employees' values and the organisation or team's values is a more powerful factor by far than money in keeping good people.

Values define what we consider to be important. The more employees' work incorporates their values, the more they will find that work meaningful and important.

Today's employees across all generations want to find value and meaning in their work. Our lives aren't as compartmentalised as they were, and more employees are demanding a better blending of work and home life.

Organisations have vision, mission and value statements, but they rarely have a process that helps employees make the link between those statements and their own values.

Any of the following can help you start a conversation about values:

- What do you need most from your job? Does the job deliver?
- What makes a really good day for you?
- What would you miss if you left this job?
- What did you like best about other jobs you've had?
- Tell me about a time when you really felt energised at work.

These questions can be asked during any conversation that you have with your direct reports. Organisations are becoming increasingly team-based, however the failure to understand one another's values can lead to team discord. The team that cannot draw on its members' values will end up arguing, wasting time, and failing. Team members lose heart when organisational values and their values do not mesh. Be conscious of the individual values for your team and be willing to discuss them and as a result you will strengthen the group and increase members' job satisfaction.

Diversity of values will build strength in your team. Those who value creativity will be your innovators. Those who value independence will work more productively. Those who value order and routine will be more dependable. Recognise what each person values and mind those values for the sake of the whole team. Here are some questions that might stimulate a team discussion about values:

- What are the values of our work team? How are we similar? How are we different?
- How do our differences get in the way?
- Under what circumstances or pressures do we find our values colliding?
- What can we learn from someone whose values are different from our own?

Finally, be aware of your own values – and their impact on your staff. We have analysed hundreds of results from exit interviews and were amazed at how many talented employees left because their values conflicted with those of their supervisor or manager.

Ask the above questions of yourself and consider the values that are most important to you. Ask yourself whether your values are aligned with your current job. This may be an important conversation for you to have with your *own* manager! <sup>(3)</sup>

## BUSINESS BOOSTER IDEAS – BUILDING YOUR BRAND

### BECOME AN EXPERIENCE-BASED ORGANISATION

*Becoming an Experience-Based organisation will help you consistently and repeatedly create and deliver the kind of customer experiences that will win the hearts, minds and trust of your customers forever, providing the rewards customer-focused organisations justly deserve. Let's face it: if you don't your competition eventually will.*

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## ARE WE HAPPY YET?

People who are happy at work perform better and so do the people that work with them. Gallup reports that 9 out of 10 people say they are more productive when they are around positive people.

Clearly how you FEEL has a direct impact on how you perform and how much you produce. Of course, it makes sense, but has the workplace ever honored how we felt?

While it stands to reason that managers would want to create an environment where people feel good about themselves and have some degree of happiness at work, it's been largely ignored in a company's strategic plans. And that's rapidly becoming a problem as more and more people (according to the trend watchers) are looking to leave their jobs this year. When people are unhappy at work they move on. What can you, as a manager, team leader or supervisor do about it?

Here's a short list of five things you can do to create a happier workplace

**Clarity** – Be clear about what your and your employees' expectations are, and check in when they change.

**Connection** – Let everyone know the special part they play in the success of the company and the customers' lives.

**Positivity** – Focus on the positive (people's strengths and what's right) rather than the negative (their weaknesses and what's wrong.) Be positive yourself.

**Recognition and Reward** – Pay attention to the "what's right" and reward the behaviors, tangibly and intangibly.

**Appreciation** – It's the deepest of human needs. Make sure you let people know how you appreciate their showing up and doing a good job. Let the customer's know too!

So as you set your intentions for the New Year, remember these simple things that will add to the overall happiness in your company or department.

Can we measure happiness? Of course we can. When customers are happy with your products and your services they come back and tell friends. When employees are happy they participate more fully and solve problems quickly and creatively. They stay healthy and cost the company less. They spread positive vibes to the customer and the positive word of mouth about your company. And you see a measurable difference in your profitability.<sup>(4)</sup>

## VOICEMAIL

Voicemail can be a lifesaver for the busy customer contact department. It can also be a source of annoyance and frustration for customers.

Often the key to customer-friendly voicemail lies in the personal greeting and the follow-up.

Here are five steps your staff can take to move your voicemail from frustrating to friendly.

- Update personal greetings at the start of each day. Customers will have more faith that you will return their calls promptly if they hear a newly recorded greeting each day. Be sure to include the date or day of the week.
- Tell callers when they can expect a return call. Be as specific as possible; for instance, "within three hours" or "by 4pm." But never make promises you can't keep.
- Offer callers another person to contact. If you know that they'll be away for an extended period of time, give callers the name and extension of someone else in case their request is urgent. And more importantly, don't make customers hang up and call back. Give easy-to-follow instructions such as, "To reach Jane Smith, dial 422."
- Give callers a "live" option. If your phone system allows callers to talk to a receptionist by pressing zero, be sure to let them know that in your greeting. It can be as simple as: "To reach our receptionist, press zero."
- Check messages regularly. You should be checking messages at least every two hours and responding promptly.

Discipline and commitment will ensure that your voicemail becomes an asset as opposed to being seen by customers as a barrier to making contact with you.