

Emotional Labor

By T. Scott Gross

Like it or not, labor is always a seller's market.

Watch the training tapes of major service companies and you'll discover that almost universally, corporations are attempting to mandate the emotional state of their employees. Try that at home and see just how far you get.

"Honey, I want you to be passionate after the news, please." Yeah, right!

People cannot be emotionally manipulated by the mere construct of policy. Happy people act happy just as grouchy people are destined, sometimes determined, to snap at a customer.

We all know this to be true, yet insist that friendly customer service can be achieved by policy. Crank up the old word processor, bang out something that sounds sufficiently policy-like and voila! You've got yourself smiling, cheerful employees who are dying to jump on the first customer coming through the door and "make their day!"

Pulling up to the drive-through window at a local quick service restaurant, I noticed that the young woman working inside was wearing a button that said, "We Care." Ever the eternal trainer, I didn't resist the urge to put what was obviously a corporate customer service program to the test.

"So, just what is it that you care about?" I smiled, referring to the large, shiny button.

"Oh, that," she said with all the enthusiasm of a week-old corpse. "That just means that we give a!" (You get the message.)

Someone in the corporation thought that a friendly service policy needed a badge to ignite the flames of passionate customer care. **WRONG!**

WIIFM Button

You may as well give up your quest for the holy grail of customer service if you are not willing to WIIFM. You know, answer the question that is on every employee's mind at one level of consciousness or another, "What's In It For Me?"

Okay, perhaps that is a bit overly cynical. There are employees who come to work, high on the prospect of loving on your customers. But they are not as common as we would like. They are the few that have already discovered that great customer service can be a reward in itself. These are the folks who thrive on the pleasant feedback that results from delivering great service.

Unfortunately not everyone you hire is motivated by the prospect of friendly conversation with yet another nameless stranger. Besides, all too many customers can be a royal pain, making a friendly interaction neither probable nor socially desirable.

Still, consistent quality customer service isn't out of the question if you can discover the WIIFM button.

Everybody has a WIIFM button, something that will satisfy a need unique to their own personality of the moment. Obviously the best solution is to hire people lovers who are so turned on by just being with customers that they would work for free. Back in the real world, things are a bit more difficult.

ASK

If you want to find out if someone is ticklish, hungry or tired, it seems so natural to ask. So why does it seem so difficult to ask our employees where is their WIIFM button? It's not like asking to see their birthmark or a rude tattoo that is the subject of office gossip.

Ask what it is that turns your employees on and be prepared to be surprised. WIIFM buttons are in the oddest places.

You may discover that one employee is highly motivated by fancy titles. Another will work forever for the chance to be in charge for a day. Still another will be turned on by the prospect of serving on a job enrichment committee. It doesn't matter where the WIIFM button is located, only that you find it.

Because once you find the WIIFM button...you can push it anytime you want!

And that's how you get people to labor for you emotionally.

You can policy all you want about procedure and schedules...but a smile that is genuine is much more difficult to come by.

Perhaps the difference between an ordinary manager and the manager that employees view as special is only a matter of WIIFM. The exceptional manager knows how to WIIFM...and does!

T. Scott Gross is the author of *OUTRAGEOUS: Unforgettable Service, Guilt-free Selling* (AMACOM, 1998) Visit his website at tscottgross.com