

# Your personal power to provoke positive



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In this series of Supermarket & Retailer's articles, we share stories of what some organisations and managers have done to motivate and inspire their teams. We give you practical ideas of what you can do to create the most amazing, customer-driven company in the world.



**D**on't you just love it when people just simply take personal responsibility, especially for the positive experiences of customers? It always makes such a big difference, and in a world filled with apathy and indifference, these small acts are remembered and rewarded.

For example, we have some young beggars in my neighbourhood, and many of them do the windscreen washing thing, or in one case, there is a young man with a few big boards of one-liner jokes which he shows drivers at traffic lights.

More recently I noticed another group of young people who decided that they were going to fill and fix potholes (which are all over the place in Johannesburg), all for a small discretionary donation from motorists. So these kids have taken the initiative by tapping into the frustration of citizens, responding to the appalling lack of action from the authorities, and not only making a living for themselves, but also improving our society.

Here is another example: A hotel general manager in Cape Town, whose business is experiencing a very quiet time because of recent events, looked at how he could keep his staff busy and at the same time give his team a chance to earn some money. They initially used their staff to give the hotel a complete makeover, with lots of spring cleaning, fixing, painting, and all the other tasks needed to make the hotel beautiful again.



But when that was all over, there was nothing else to do. After mulling it over with his managers, they brainstormed some excellent ideas, of which I would like to share just two.



First, hotels do a lot of laundry, but with no customers, the washing machines were standing idle. He thought...

“If there’s one thing that we do well, it’s laundry, especially of large items like duvets, cushions and more”

So now they offer a laundry service for the citizens of Cape Town where, for a small and very competitive price, you can take them your dirty linen, and they will clean it properly.

The maintenance team were also unable to find more things to do at the hotel, so once again they offered an appliance repair service so that people could take in their broken toasters, TVs,



“Look at the common frustrations and pain points of your customers, and take responsibility for improving these”

microwaves, and most other household appliances, and have them fixed.

These are just two examples, but when you look at all the things that are needed to run a hotel effectively, you can see how he was able to respond to his community.

You may be asking yourself how this applies to you. I don’t expect retailers to start offering even more new products and services to the suburbs that they service. (Although many banks now offer so many products that have nothing to do with

looking after your money, including various forms of insurance, financial advice, cell phone contracts, ID documents, and so on.)

No, what I am suggesting is that you look at the common frustrations and pain points of your customers, and take responsibility for improving these.

People on your team probably already walk customers to the products that they seek, and your various departments like the butchery or bakery occasionally respond to special requests from

customers. But there is so much more that every member of your team could do.

- Start by asking what your team can do to reduce or eliminate excessive customer effort.
- Look at it from a physical point of view such as making sure trolleys are all working, products are easily accessible on the shelves, helping customers carry heavy items, keeping the temperature comfortable and the noise levels quiet, helping them with unruly children that are creating distractions, and making sure that there is a place to rest for people who are tired.
- There was even a store I saw in Knysna where they sold various household bric-a-brac, and right outside the store there was a nice bench with a sign that said: "For bored husbands."
- Another area that you can focus on is when customers are confused, or where they don't understand certain things. What can we do to simplify things that are complicated for our customers?
- Take time to explain things that are complex for them so that they understand it better. Show them how they can make their lives a little easier by sharing tips and hints.
- You can also show them how your products and packaging work, or read the instructions to them so they understand how to cook that intimidating pork knuckle.
- Explain additional services that you offer that they may not be aware of (like gas bottle refills, or special deals that are on right now, or your refunds/returns policy).



- Where possible, let them help themselves to make life easier. In short, help customers with anything that confuses them or causes them to have to think too hard.

We need to treat every customer like he or she is family, and to be as helpful and responsive to them as is humanly possible. Uncomplicate their lives so that they always know that at your business they will never have to worry about extra effort and stress.

In today's difficult world, we know that many of customers experience lots of difficulties, financial and otherwise. It's not only the fact that money is short. It's also that they are surrounded by lots of stress and bad news, no matter where they turn. Doing business with any company is a lot more

complicated than it has ever been in the past, and we have a chance to bring a little bit of joy and warmth and helpfulness to them. We can make their lives a little simpler and better, and they will always be grateful for that.

Do they always deserve it? No: some customers are not always polite and courteous, nor are they always going to appreciate all of our efforts – but perhaps the one thing that you can specialise in is making sure that nobody ever has a reason to talk badly about your store. We know that customers are not always right – but we also know that being respectful and helpful is always right. And apart from all of the other benefits to your business, taking personal responsibility for customers is also something which makes you feel good.

Bringing happiness to others, we find ours. **SR**

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