



## In spite of what you think, people love serving others

**I was chatting to the marketing director of a company that most of you are familiar with, and I had already spent some time looking at its website. It seemed flamboyant enough, and the content was quite fascinating and eye-catching.**

I also filled in the "Contact Us" form to ask a simple question, not optimistic that I would actually get a response. And I was absolutely right!

What was missing on the "Contact Us" tab, however, was a phone number. Believe me when I say that I searched and searched and searched, and clicked around the whole site. It was very frustrating, because I also wanted to chat to someone live. I am, after all, 61 years old, and I cannot trust you if I can't look you in the eye, or at least talk to a live human being on the end of a phone. Now I certainly don't hold the past on a pedestal, and I am certainly not going to demonise the future. I accept that the internet and social media have won the marketing battle.

I asked the marketing director why there was no number on their website and he said that the company wanted customers to use the form. So I asked how their customers wanted to contact them, and this is the response I got: "Well you see, if we put in a phone number, then they are going to call all day long."

And I'm like, "Who, your customers? Your customers are going to 'call all day'?" Aren't they actually just trying to reach you?"

For me this is social engineering\* at its worst, and your business may be driving your customers to your competitors who don't do this. Most businesses all over the world are broken, and there's a service crisis that seems impossible to solve.

I always get the same response from senior managers: "Well, you know, it's so difficult getting young people motivated to take care of customers in today's world." It's quite strange, but these same young customers seem to be very fired up when they are with each other. They seem to be able to focus on social media for hours at a time. And just watch them arranging a party or a wedding that their friends will attend!

Somehow it all seems to fall apart when people come to work and there is definitely a crisis of customer service everywhere you go today – including your business. But it doesn't have to be so. Consider this next illustration.

Nobel Economics Prize winner Daniel Kahneman tells the story of when he was a seven-year-old Jewish boy caught up in Nazi-occupied Paris during the Second World War. One night, well past the curfew time, he realised he had spent too much time with a friend, and, wearing his sweater with the Star of David sewn into it, he ventured out. Very close to home, he suddenly encountered an SS soldier with a black uniform, and he was terrified. And then the soldier beckoned him over, and before Kahneman realised it, the soldier picked him up and hugged him. He then put him down, took out his wallet, and showed young Daniel a photograph of his own little son, and gave him some money. A trained killer could still find it in his heart to do something nice, and although it affected Kahneman and his later work on how irrational human beings are, the seven-year-old was totally confused.

Service is all around us. From the moment we are born, we depend on our parents and others to serve us with food, clothing, protection, help us when we are



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sick, teach us what to do, and, of course, to be loved. As we grow, teachers, doctors and sports coaches also take on this role, and then we study and join a company. Hopefully, our managers and our associates are successful in serving us too, and the government and broader community helps us through service. As we become parents, we are service providers to our children, and in a reversal of roles, we become caregivers to our aging parents. We live in a world completely suffused with service.

When you look at how we use the word "service," there are a huge number of words associated with it, medical service, counter service, roadside service, delivery service, even self-service. There is military service, traffic service, public service, the foreign service, church service and a memorial service. But there seems to be a huge divide between the low quality of service and the high volume of it. With service all around us in our lives, why does this happen? Maybe it's because we think that service is slavery, or servility, subservient, or being humiliated by others. "Customer service" is the department where customers go when they are unhappy.

And yet everyone knows that being of service to others helps us to sleep better at night. The company is better off, managers are happier, and people love, and feel proud of, the fact that they were able to help others. It gives us a sense of fulfilment and inspires deep gratitude from other people. It uplifts everyone around us. It is the reason we are alive. As Albert Schweitzer put it: "I don't know what your destiny will be, but this I know: the only ones amongst you who will be truly happy, are those who have sought and found a way to serve."

The people on your team are the ones who make service come alive, and make it real with the actions they take every day. They can be creative, motivated and inspire your customers and each other. Zig Ziglar probably put it best when he said, "You will get all you want in life, if you help enough other people get what they want."

\*Social Engineering: Usually defined as the use of centralised planning in an attempt to manage social change and regulate the future development and behaviour of a society.



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