

I now “get” tattoos

Nobody wants to be just ‘another brick in the wall’



Aki Kalliatakis

Delight your customers

Seemingly out of the blue I noticed a few years ago that a lot of people starting showing some pretty bold tattoos. Until then, it was only people from some traditional cultures (such as the Maoris), some old sailors, professional soldiers, a few rock stars and members of cults, and biker and criminal gangs. In fact, today it seems as if you are a bit odd if you don't have a tattoo on some part of your body.

I have to admit it: I just didn't get the whole “tattoo-as-a-fashion” thing, but one day I had a conversation with a young employee, and it suddenly hit me that there is a good reason that tattoos have become so popular, and not just because it's the latest fashion. It's because in today's world of work we have been dehumanised, and we have been forced into being like everyone else.

It starts off when you are still a small child where you have to conform to the teacher's rules of where to sit, when and how to play, what to say and what not to say, and to think and analyse things in the same way that everyone else does. It certainly makes your teacher's life easier, but it also means that you are, in the words of the famous Pink Floyd song, “just another brick in the wall”.

It's probably not much different in most companies, and that's why we see such a proliferation of tattoos today. People who feel alienated, who feel alone, who are filled with despair because they are just another one of thousands of powerless employees, or because they are just an account number to their clueless manager, want to display their uniqueness and specialness. They want to almost flip a finger at the world and say, “So this is who I am, and you can take it or leave it. I don't care.”

Tattoos are just one of many other symbols of people around the globe wanting to assert their uniqueness and specialness.

When engaging with new clients, I often ask staff: “So, how do you like your job?” In about



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two thirds of responses, the overwhelming answer is: “I don't!” Now you have to remember that I ask this question from the most junior to the most senior people in the organisation, and beneath the surface there is just so much dissatisfaction and unhappiness.

This is borne out by the huge research conducted by the Gallup Company – 30 million employees surveyed over 30 years – in which they discovered that a staggering 87% of employees worldwide feel “disengaged” from their companies.

What's just as bad is the fact that it's even worse for customers worldwide, who are incredibly disloyal to the businesses that they deal with. There is a huge delusion that senior managers live with. It goes something like this: When employees and managers are asked about how well they think they are doing in customer service and customer care, most rate their companies quite highly. However, when you ask the customers of those same companies how they feel, the

answer is shockingly poor.

It doesn't have to be this way. In fact it had better not be this way, because otherwise your business is on a slippery slope to nowhere. When we start looking at correlations of employee engagement and customer loyalty (with typical financial and reputational measures such as profitability, stock performance, reputation and trust in their markets), the evidence is very clear and direct: There is a significant correlation between performance by any measure, and culture as it affects employees and customers. The consequences are too horrid to live with.

But back to my interview with that tattooed young man, a young team leader from a manufacturing company. He explained himself with such simple eloquence that it hit me like a whack on the side of the head. For he said, “I'd like to see a big board like when a shopping mall or office block goes up, engraved with the names of every single person that contributed to this building. All the steelworkers and bricklayers and concrete deliverers, all the electricians and plumbers and wire and cable installers, all the painters and window cleaners and polishers. So when a guy walks past, he could take his children and say, ‘See, that's my name over there. I was the one who installed the escalator that everyone climbs on every day.’ Stephen Spielberg can

Read the first in our series of articles where we share stories of what some organisations and managers have done to motivate and inspire their teams in the next edition of **Supermarket & Retailer**. We will give you practical ideas of what you can do to create the most amazing, customer-driven company in the world.



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point to his movies. Picasso can point to his paintings. JK Rowling can point to her Harry Potter books. Everyone should have something that they can point to.”

It was one of the most memorable and meaningful conversations I've ever had. I don't know why that conversation struck me so hard. Maybe it was because after four decades of working in a business, many people retire with nothing they can point at proudly. How can you boast about the fact that you took thousands of the same calls every year from mostly irate customers? How can you be proud that you served 200 faceless and ungrateful customers who don't even look at you every day? Where is the sense of dignity in loading countless groceries into bags every day? In our modern world, there are few people that can point to a personal accomplishment in their jobs.

It all fills me with a great deal of sadness, but I also know that there is hope. I have seen it, and when it exists the results are incredible! That's why, together with the editors of this fine journal, we decided to create a series of articles, and share stories of what some organisations and managers have done to motivate and inspire their teams, (and we'll also occasionally share some examples that may fill you with shock and despair.) We will talk about the so-called "10 E's of Managing and Motivating People", and give you practical ideas of what you can do to create the most amazing, customer-driven company in the world.

So until next month, good luck out there in the trenches.

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