

The passport to your future

Education



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Delight your customers

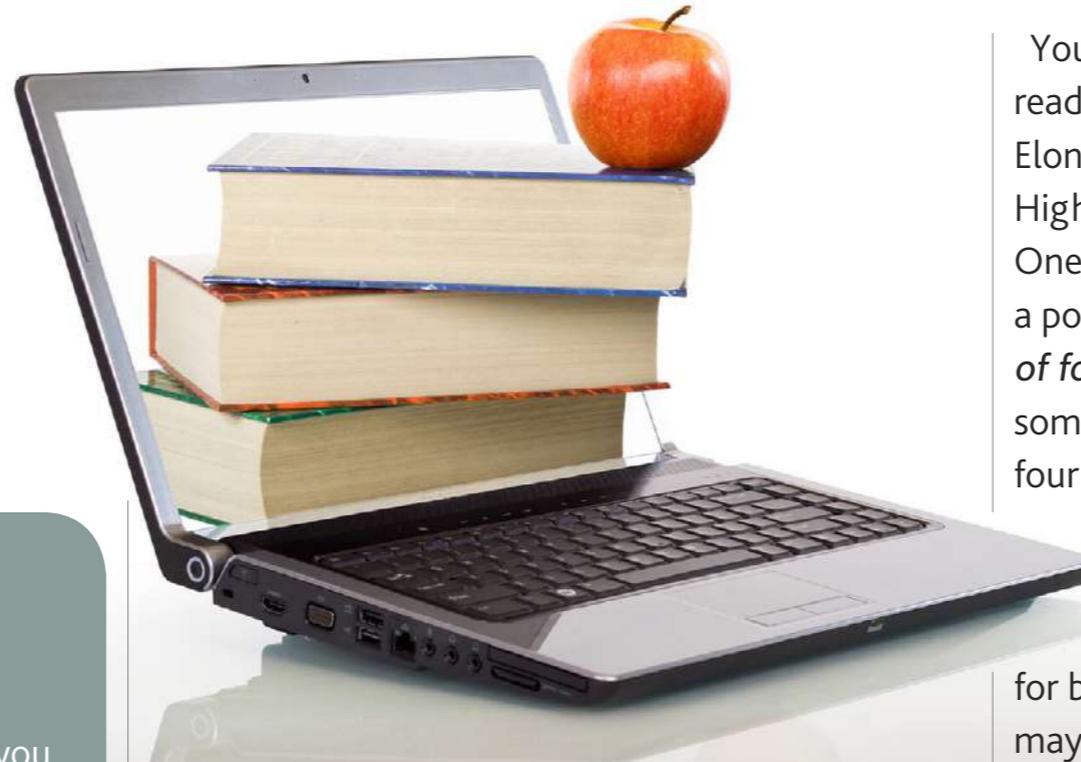
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In this series of Supermarket & Retailer's articles, we share stories of what some organisations and managers have done to motivate and inspire their teams. We give you practical ideas of what you can do to create the most amazing, customer-driven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

You've no doubt heard this silly little joke. It's about a young man who walks up to a stranger and asks, "Sir, how can I get to Ellis Park Stadium?" The man looks at him intensely and says, "**Practice! Practice! Practice!**"

In this series of articles on the *10Es of Managing and Motivating People*, we have covered enlisting the right people, engaging with them, and explaining and clarifying expectations for them. In this month's column, we look at education



and training. At some stage in your career you may have made the decision to do what you do because you didn't want to get caught up in academic life, studying seemingly-forever just to get "a piece of paper, or some letters after my name." And in the past, this may have worked: a good entrepreneurial spirit and a keen focus were what you needed to get ahead. As Aristotle put it: "The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet."

But those days are over. Even the smallest organisations have become so complex today that you need to have a good knowledge of lots of things just to stay with the pack – never mind get ahead.

You've no doubt heard that successful people read a lot – Bill Gates aims for 50 books a year, and Elon Musk states that even as a kid at Pretoria Boys High School he used to read **two books a day**. One of South Africa's most successful retailers has a policy that every employee must get a *minimum of four hours of training every month*. (I know some businesses that don't train their staff for four hours a year!)

But let's go back one step first. **Why would you spend the energy training people on your team?** After all, won't they just leave for better pay if you invest in them? Even worse, maybe their expectations will increase and they will want more money. Or perhaps you believe that they already know everything about treating customers well. Maybe you think that they are just not smart enough to be properly trained. Or perhaps you imagine that your customers come in because of your great prices, or your beautiful displays. None of these is true! Training is the life blood of great service – it's not a luxury.

At the risk of stating the obvious, *skilled people are just better at what they do* – no matter what measure you want to use. Do you want people to be more productive, to produce better quality, to help you keep your costs down, to be great team-players, to give your customers great service, to have more confidence, or to be the very best



they can be? Continuous and focused training is the only way to do this. Ongoing education helps people to become even better at service (which doesn't always come naturally to all people) and it prevents backsliding into bad habits. It also helps you to establish your role as their 'protector'. For example, at Starbucks, managers are often heard saying things like, "Your apron is your shield."

But where do you start? First, the good news is that *90% of good education is about encouragement*. It's about knowledge sharing rather than knowledge management. But the better news is that you don't necessarily have to read books or attend numerous live seminars. There are so many superb resources on the internet (including educational videos, motivational talks, personal coaches, and much more) that you can be pretty selective and get access to the very best education that nobody in human history has ever had access to. As a minimum, you should do lots of training on your products and processes. There is nothing that kills customer confidence (and staff confidence for that matter) than not knowing what you are talking about.

Whatever training you do embark on, make sure that you follow up to make sure that learning has happened. The same message needs to be repeated over and over again before it becomes second nature for people.

But you are not limited to formal training. This is especially true when you are trying to build skills in traits like empathy, self-control, communication, complaint management, resilience, and so on.

For example...

- Assign small projects and assignments which require learning new tasks, working under time pressure, and dealing with new groups of people. Such assignments may include things like, getting your team to make recommendations for solving a pressing business problem, planning a promotional event, ordering and installing a new piece of equipment, or going off-site to deal with a disgruntled customer.
- You can also arrange for your team to do some research: send them out to businesses that are very customer- focused, and ask them to come back and tell the rest of the team what they learned, and to make some suggestions for improvement.
- Getting people involved in brainstorming sessions or generating new innovations is not only lots of fun, but can also produce some magnificent ideas. Use the power of your businesses 'community'.
- Giving people individual feedback, and sharing important information with your team helps them to understand what you want – and don't want – from them. Variation of this also includes things like mystery shoppers and recording calls. I know people really hate role plays, but if you ask people what could have been said or done differently, you are getting them to think about their role in customers' experiences.
- If you feel brave, ask your team to produce a newspaper, make up a motivational poster, write a song, or produce a video or a short theatre play which leads to deeper learning.

- Get creative and have some fun: For example, if you want to show your team how small things really irritate, then get them to put a small stone or marble in their shoe for a day. It shows how one tiny little thing disrupts everything, and creates a 'lopsided' body. But if you just stopped to take out the stone, then everything would be fixed. There are countless super-quick activities like this that help people get insights into what it's like for your customers.

- To take the subject of 'fun' further, don't forget the power of quizzes and contests, game shows, 'Customer Service Olympics', and so on. People always respond well to these, and laughter opens up the brain to new ways of thinking. It also helps people to laugh at themselves and to lighten up the general atmosphere of your store.

As you apply your time to educating your team, there is also one final important action: take a look in the mirror, and ask yourself about what kind of an example you set. A careless comment can lead to a good excuse for people on your team to not perform beautifully, but when they see you being a great role model, they will aspire to the same.

Your business and its future are in the hands of the people you hire and train. Training isn't a luxury anymore – it is the life blood of great customer service. As quality guru W Edwards Deming put it...

“ Learning is not compulsory.
Neither is survival. ”



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