

Never underestimate the power of showing you care



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The Oxford dictionary defines loss as, “the state of no longer having something, or as much of something; the process that leads to this.”

It won't surprise people that as potential subject choices for this article ran through my mind, all things Corona were at the forefront.

Done to death some might say... and yes, many articles have been written on the losses faced and those still to come as a result of the social and economic impacts of Covid. Including the many ways we humans have suffered both physically and psychologically, and are subsequently reflecting on the changes to our world. Many of which will have lasting impact.

My subject choice may not be new, but it gives me a chance to share my personal perspective of someone who experienced the loss of two friends through the course of lockdown; and personally got sick, tested positive and experienced a rough three weeks due to Covid19.



But it's not the fact I got sick that is the crux of my article – what I want to voice is my perspective as someone privileged to work for a company that has not just demonstrated dedication to managing the physical fallout of Covid on job security,

client management and company sustainability; but also to the emotional and physiological health of its employees. The recent series of webinars on 'Managing Stress and Loss' that have been facilitated by the company, with some amazing

guest speakers, is the most tangible demonstration of this care and concern.

The new 'socially distanced' way of working, and being away from our colleagues can make us feel lonely. But on the flip side, history tells us that society can be socially cohesive in times of crisis. By encouraging us to think less about our own interests and more about the interests of others, a shared sense of togetherness has been created. This in itself has led people to look past their differences and collectively respond to the challenges they face.

On a personal level, my own colleagues within the Cape Town office have been nothing short of amazing in showing their true colours. There have been countless examples of everyday care which I have been privy to in the past months. Times where the team has had each other's backs when someone needed help with work load, or to get advice or bounce an idea off someone, or just to lend an ear when someone needed to decompress. And the result of this is that we all feel closer and more bonded to each other more than ever before.

This aspect of demonstrating care is not just relevant in our one on one or personal interactions, but also more important than ever for all brands. Accenture Strategy's Global Consumer Pulse Research, revealed that consumers, across all generations, care about what retailers say and how they act. At this time of intense uncertainty, the key attributes that underpin trust in a brand are different from even a month ago. Building trust and loyalty in a time of crisis can make or break



a brand. When asked what factors make consumers trust brands more, the top three responses focused on the well-being of customers, the well-being of employees, and not taking advantage of the crisis to maximise profits; in other words – care and empathy.

Organisations showing up for their employees is one of the top reasons consumers trust any given brand. Recent data shows that during uncertainty, workers are looking to employers and managers to lead even more than they are looking to governments and other organisations. And consumers are watching.

A recent Qualtrics survey shows that fifty-four percent of them say they are concerned with how employers are treating their employees in this time of crisis. Better treatment fuels brand trust, with 48% indicating they trust brands more when they take care of their employees. And the same holds true for genuine concern demonstrated (not just expressed) by a brand for its customers. In the face of the Covid-19 crisis, brands must figure out how they can help, and what actions can be taken that are consistent with their values and abilities. Brands have an opportunity to strengthen the bonds of trust with consumers. It's logical that if a genuinely felt sense of care and community from friends, family and colleagues strengthens our bonds and commitments to each other; that brands demonstrating genuine care will benefit from strengthened customer bonds and loyalty too.

No one is suggesting you forgo encouraging sales, brands need to survive. But in showing solidarity with your customers and empathy for their circumstances in tough times, you ultimately win the long game. Recent market research by Rogerwilco co. shows that when consumers have a positive encounter with a brand, they become advocates who will gladly share news of their experience with their circles.

When aiming to introduce empathy into your marketing efforts, take a step back and put yourself in your markets shoes:

- Don't be obvious in your selling intentions
- Understand your community and your consumers wants, needs, and desires
- Understand their pain points
- Embrace, understand and use the emotion inherent to the situation
- Be authentic
- Don't be preachy
- Strive to inspire, but without seeming to be seeking glory

Here are some examples of brands incorporating and displaying empathy in their marketing efforts through the Covid crisis:

Shoprite showed real care about the mental health of their employees when they recognised the stress placed on them during the lead up to lockdown, when customers descended on stores in a wave of panic buying. In April 2020, they rewarded their staff with an appreciation bonus to the collective value of R102m.

Investec partnered with Capital Hotels and Apartments as part of the Get Well Hotel initiative. They made hotel rooms available to medical professionals so they could self-isolate or recover from Covid-19 without putting their loved ones at risk.

Pernod Ricard South Africa is another brand showing empathy for the people in its extended

industry. Through its #KeepTheSpirit initiative, the group committed R2m to help support nearly 1 000 bartenders and waitrons who couldn't work or support themselves during the worst of lock down.

Spar's Palm Grove store demonstrated empathy when it closed its stationery and frozen burger sections, and put up signs to encourage its customers to support the small businesses in the area that were open and selling these same products.

Whether the gesture is on a grand scale or a genuinely felt and executed small kindness, those companies and brands that rise to the occasion will be the real winners. To borrow from the words of the British chancellor Rishi Sunak...

“ You want to be able to look back on this time and remember how, in the face of a generation-defining moment, we undertook a collective effort, and we stood together ”

Demonstrating care is an important human and consumer insight that is more relevant than ever right now – and I believe it will be one of those psychological changes that is here to stay. It is likely to take on a much bigger role in the way consumers measure a brands value going forward. And I say amen to that, let a shared sense of empathy and care be one of the habits that continues long into the future – for all individuals, corporates and brands alike. **SR**



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