

Who brung you to the party?

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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.

There's a wonderful American idiom that goes "Dance with the one who brung you!" If you know American culture, you'll know that it means that if someone invited you to a party, you should stick with them, not leave them alone, and certainly not go and hang out with others.

“There is an unwritten rule in society that you have an obligation to stay loyal to someone who has been loyal to you from the beginning.”

You probably agree with it when it comes to your friends and family in your personal life, but it all seems to fall apart in business. But it shouldn't be that way.



I've said it before, and I'll say it again: how can you expect your customers to be loyal if you are not visibly loyal to them?

In compiling the content for my latest book, I brainstormed at least 156 ways to add value for your customers to capture their hearts (and their wallets), but the most astounding fact was that most of these ideas and innovations are free, or cost a minimal amount.

For example, my friend Taki, who own a business that manufactures and distributes biltong (for overseas readers, that's what is called 'jerky'), one small act of including a toothpick in the package

– worth just a few cents – made all the difference. Just a silly little toothpick to clean your teeth. (Of course, one of SA's biggest retailers picked up this idea and immediately imitated it.)

So what can you do to create a business or a brand that your customers love? What will create positive feelings about you? What will make them say "I know this is good for me"?

Most of us in business don't produce spectacular rock concerts, nor do we run theme parks or 5-star hotels.

But I know you want practical ideas, so here are some suggestions ...

How can you expect your customers to be loyal if you are not visibly loyal to them?



- If you want to reward your best customers, by all means give them something meaningful and personal. I'm afraid that the typical points-based systems used by all retailers just don't achieve this.

But the message is the same as when you bribe your kids to eat broccoli. Broccoli is not as nice as ice cream, and you need to get a reward to eat it. But when the parents stop rewarding them, kids stop eating it.



Whether it's with kids, adults, employees or customers, we tend to default to carrot and stick – rewards or punishments ...

These are very powerful in the short term, but they often tend to undermine what they set out to achieve. They work in the short term, but at what cost in the long term?

These systems are expensive, hard to administer, cheapen your brand, are open to fraud, and now the government is starting to tax rewards.

- It's probably far more meaningful to give away free choc-chip cookies or sweets or bags of popcorn, or even vouchers that are tangible.



But it's also important to make it personal – to touch their hearts. So, for example, one Mozambican restaurant that we go to gives each person at the table a small paper cone of peanuts.

An ice-cream shop in Umhlanga always adds a small scoop of another flavour on top of your cone.

- Honour your customers, and make them feel important. As a minimum, recognise them when they walk in. Even if you just say "Nice to see you again." In 99% of cases you will be right! Introduce them to others. Ask them their opinion on a new product or a new display. Even scribble handwritten little thank you notes for them and randomly put them in their shopping bags.

- Use the power of positive emotions – it's so simple to make them laugh a bit with a corny joke, or by wearing something totally ridiculous, or even bringing in a magician. You can do quizzes, and lucky draws, and strange contests, and live music from your local high school band – or your staff doing a talent show. You can even bring in an out of work cartoonist or artist to draw their caricatures,

or a mime. We are dying of boredom, and a little bit of kindness goes such a long way. You don't even have to be a humour creator – you can be a humour curator. So start collecting the things that make you laugh and spread the joy. Humour is a secret weapon in business – and in life!

- People also love secrets and mysteries. Secrets create social currency, especially if they are remarkable and make people feel special and unique. You can include secret venues, secret guests, secret information, secret events, secret sales and previews, secret 'behind the scenes' tours. You can also reveal mysteries slowly, like a cliff-hanger in a TV series. Secret special service (like Chef's Table) or 'hidden menus' – for example, when you send them a secret note about where to find something that other customers cannot access – are all a lot of fun. Those that are 'in the know' love it and it makes them feel like insiders, which also creates communities or 'tribes'. And the dirty little secret about secrets? They tend not to stay secret very long!

- Nostalgia and tapping into older customers' memories is a great strategy – and a lovely loyalty spinner. I read once that nostalgia is the vice of the aged – and it's true! Remind customers of something positive in the past. For example, we all wanted to be a 'rebel' when we were younger and even old music brings back memories. I saw this at Pensioners Day at a butchery chain, and loved it. All five senses can be used – a certain smell



Just do something – anything –
that adds value.



immediately took me back decades. You could even send your customers notes and photos about positive events from their past – like what your store looked like when it first opened.

These are just a handful of ideas and, if you'd like, tell us if you want to hear more. The point is, just do something – anything – that adds value.

And don't just run off with someone else and ignore those who bring you. **SR**



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