

“To strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.”

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From Ulysses,
by Alfred Lord
Tennyson

This is the next article in a short series on how behavioural economics and 'being human' affects your business.

I stood in the aisle at my local supermarket holding the bag of my favourite crisps. Not only was the packet smaller, but the price had also gone up – a lot. I could feel my blood pressure rising as cortisol – the stress hormone – rushed through my body. I don't need to tell you that in an instant I lost my temper.

It probably brought home and reminded me about the hurricane we faced as we started this year, already exhausted, depleted, running on empty and carrying the surreal trauma of loss – not only of loved ones, but of finances, of health, of certainty. And then there was an urgency, a whirlwind of trying to catch up on what we had lost. It's left our mental and emotional health in tatters, and you probably experienced the same yourself.

But suddenly – and there is no denying it – most businesses also felt a need to recover and catch up on lost profitability by forcing customers to pay more and get less. The modern term for it

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is 'skimpflation'. Prices have increased substantially over the past 18 months, no matter who measures them. Fuel, energy, and all utility costs have shot up, but the same has happened in clothing, recreation and transport. Almost no industry has been immune.

But when prices go up, even for the essentials, and quantity, quality and service go down, don't expect your customers to be understanding, nor forgiving. The first thing they do is to look

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for where they can cut costs to battle this stress – and axing the brands and businesses that don't provide really terrific or remarkable service is where they start.

When Netflix offered me unlimited choices to watch almost anything, with no ad interruptions or endless narcissistic self-promotions, and at a fifth of the price I was paying before, the decision took less than 10 seconds to make.

Truth be told, I have never negotiated contracts as hard as I'm doing now. I have never shifted my business to lower-cost providers like I have recently, and I have never been more willing to cancel subscriptions in all my history as an adult.



But the one thing that all of these actions have in common is that the targets have always been the businesses where I have felt abused, neglected or just plain frustrated. It may surprise you to know that price is no longer the great differentiator – the quality of customer experiences is what wins their business.

I thought it was just an age thing. I hear myself saying stuff like, “Life’s too short to read bad books or watch bad movies,” or “I’m too old to have to put up with bad manners from my bank, mobile provider or car dealership.” But then I hear the same sentiments from the much younger delegates on my courses, or my sons’ even younger friends.

The past three years have taught us that stress is not something we want to keep experiencing over and over again. That cortisol I mentioned earlier has exposed us to a number of really dreadful side effects – more illness and reduced immunity to fight it all, various stomach ailments and chronic fatigue, poorer relationships with people, perpetual ‘flight, fight or freeze’ syndrome that makes us feel that life is out of control – depression and anxiety, and so on.

But in this time of reflection at the end of the year, I don’t want to dwell on the bad news. Of course, we could also chat about ways to cope with all the stress: Eat more nutritious foods. Breathe. Get a good night’s rest. Exercise regularly. Reduce caffeine. Relax with and indulge in your hobbies.

For your business I could list a whole bunch of more ideas to cut costs and be more productive

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– automate what you can, reduce waste, become more efficient and save space, find legal loopholes for your tax bills, and so on.

And those are all great ideas and suggestions.

But please indulge me as I share the most meaningful moment of my year: attending an awards function for an NGO where I volunteer and that nurtures entrepreneurs. Seeing them winning awards was incredibly rewarding. Feeling their personal appreciation as they hugged me was

probably the most positive emotion I felt after the love of my family.

And this is for me the essence of what you can practically do. I’m asking you to remember that you are all that you have – and that is enough. I’m asking you to be kind on yourself, and to let others do good for you too.

“ I’d like you to remind yourself of who you are and what you have persevered through, and what you have conquered.

Because only then can you do what will give you the most meaning in your life and help you to be successful in this skimpflation world – and that is to bring kindness and compassion to your customers. There’s not one human being I’ve ever met who couldn’t use just a little bit more of the healing comfort of kindness. ”

Skimpflation doesn’t have to affect your customer’s experience and, if you need to cut costs, taking away from customers is not the way to go.

“Yes, but how?” I hear you ask. Being clever about the technology you use to simplify things is a good start. One of the things I like about delivery apps is that they remove the fear of uncertainty about my order. I also love how businesses and their people take a few minutes to show me how my life can be made more simple with a QR code, or share information in an instant. I can order my medicines via WhatsApp without worrying whether it went through.

I prefer to support businesses that take away tedious, routine and boring tasks from my life. (How hard is it anyway to pre-populate a form with data that I have shared with your business dozens of times?) I love it when making things simpler also saves me time and possibly even money, reducing wait times and freeing me up to do things that are more valuable in my life.

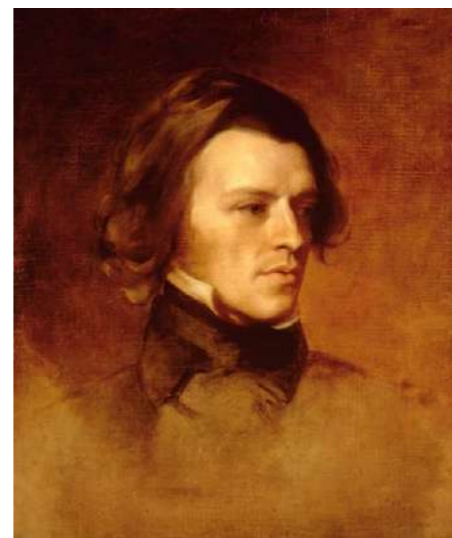


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But most of all in this down-economy now is the time to reinvest in your customer service, which includes enhancing your staff's skills, and interacting with customers in a totally human way. What can you do to make them laugh, or remember something nostalgic from their happy times, or make them feel important and appreciated again?

Prices might be rising – for your customers, for your organisation and for your competitors too. But by focusing your sights on customer experience at a time when they are most desperately in need you can retain their loyalty – and capture many new ones.

“ Tho’ much is taken, much abides; and tho’ we are not now that strength which in old days moved earth and heaven ... made weak by time and fate, but strong in will, to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield. ”



From Ulysses, by Alfred Lord Tennyson SR



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and friends, playing with a pet, physical touch, (like holding hands and hugging) and giving compliments to others, it produces feelings of love and connection, and it's what binds human beings to each other.

While you need to think very carefully before you go out there and start hugging your customers, simple gestures like a handshake, or allowing a customer to feel a soft toy or similar can make a difference.

“ A short personal chat can also work wonders, especially if it acknowledges that your customer is someone you know, recognise and appreciate. ”

But it should also be obvious to you that simple acts of generosity and kindness achieve the same, especially if they hit some problem – like dropping some of their shopping, or being unable to find something, or reach something. But there is one very important factor that plays a role in this. Obviously, the person on the receiving end feels good, and the person who does something nice also gets a hit of oxytocin (which makes it more likely that we pay it forward again). But even an

To a lesser degree some fragrances or a massage also help. Once again, what you can do is obvious, and you can manage these things in your business without spending a fortune.

Now, one final word of advice ... unless you are like my dad whose need to understand the science was so important ... don't get caught up in the terminology and try to identify which chemical plays what role. We've looked at a bunch of things that you can do to create positive feelings that result in loyalty. ”

And finally, **endorphin**, the pain killer chemical. Endorphins trigger positive emotions

don't have to do it every time. The principle of occasional reinforcement – a little surprise out of the blue – can also be potent.

“ When we develop addictions – to gambling, eating, smoking, drugs, online gaming, likes on social media, and so on, it's the dopamine that makes it so hard to stop. ”

But you can also use dopamine effectively by celebrating things with your customers. Anything that you do to make them feel even a small win can trigger

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Serves: 6
Preparation time: 30 minutes
Cooking time: 1 hour

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INGREDIENTS

Chicken:

1 x Chicken Braai Pack
3 red onions, cut into 8 wedges each, skin discarded
4 Tbsp (60ml) olive oil
Juice & zest of 2 lemons

Juice & zest of 2 lemons
4 rosemary sprigs, roughly broken and torn
4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
Salt and milled black pepper
1 Tbsp (15ml) olive oil
800g red grapes

ROSEMARY ROASTED CHICKEN WITH RED ONIONS & GRAPES

Method:

Chicken:

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

Place the chicken in a large mixing bowl with the red onions.

Add the olive oil, lemon juice & zest, rosemary, garlic, and a generous pinch of salt and pepper.

Gently toss all together to coat evenly.

Tip the contents of the bowl onto a sheet pan or into a roasting tray. Ensure the chicken is skin-side up.

Roast in the oven for 45 minutes.

Remove the tray from the oven, add the grapes and drizzle with a tablespoon of olive oil.

Return all to the oven and roast for 15 minutes more.



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Serves: 4
Preparation time: 15 minutes
Cooking time: 40 minutes

GOLDI, COUNTY FAIR, FESTIVE or MOUNTAIN VALLEY Braai Pack

We love one-tray roasts as they lock in all the flavour. Try this version.

INGREDIENTS

Chicken:

1 x Chicken Drumsticks (6pcs) $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp (3ml) salt
pinch ground black pepper
1 tsp (5ml) dried oregano
Zest of 1 lemon
3 Tbsp (45ml) olive oil
 $\frac{1}{2}$ onion, finely chopped

2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 Tbsp (15ml) fresh oregano, finely chopped
(or dried) 1 cup (250ml) basmati rice
2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups (625ml) chicken stock
1 lemon, plus extra slices for garnish
150g green olives
100g feta cheese
A small handful fresh parsley, chopped



Ideal for a family meal

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ONE-TRAY GREEK CHICKEN WITH RICE AND OLIVES

Method:

Chicken:

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

- Season the chicken drumsticks with salt, black pepper, oregano and lemon zest.
- Heat the olive oil in a skillet or heavy-based pan over medium-high heat. Add the chicken skin side down and caramelize until golden; turn over and repeat on the other side. Remove from the pan and reduce the heat to low.
- Add the onion to the same pan and sauté for 5 minutes until slightly softened. Add the garlic and oregano and sauté for 3 minutes more.
- Add the rice and chicken stock, stir to combine, and place the chicken pieces on top.
- Place the skillet in the oven and bake for 20-25 minutes, until the rice and chicken are cooked through.
- Once cooked, remove from the oven. Grate over the lemon zest and squeeze over the juice. Scatter over the olive and crumble the feta. Finish with freshly chopped parsley and lemon slices. Serve.

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