

Yes, good guys do finish first

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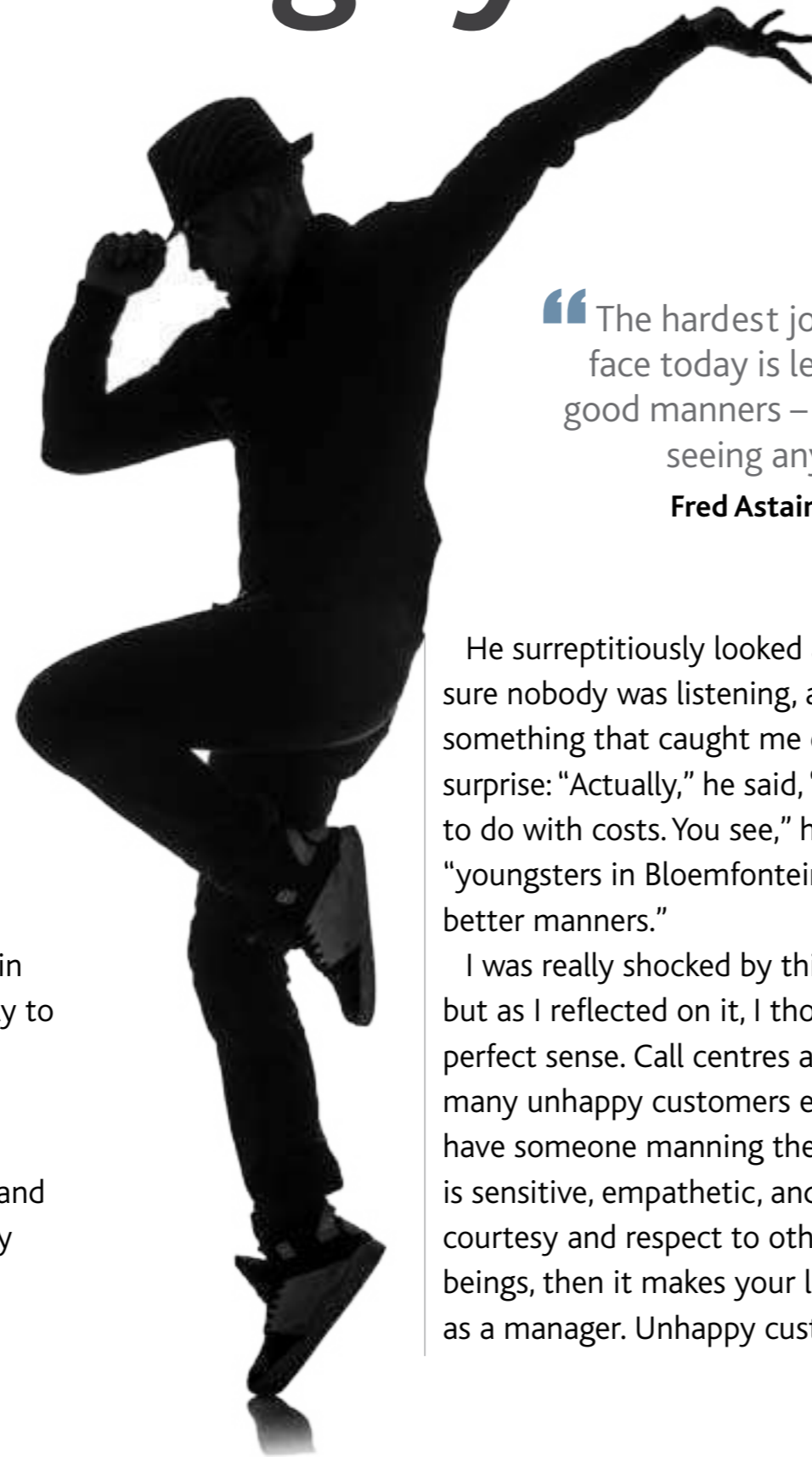
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In this series of Supermarket & Retailer's articles, we share stories of what some organisations and managers have done to motivate and inspire their teams. We give you practical ideas of what you can do to create the most amazing, customer-driven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

I was recently chatting to a client of ours and he told me that he was slowly closing down their call centre in Johannesburg, and moving it gradually to Bloemfontein.

I immediately voiced the obvious conclusion that this must have been a financial decision. After all, salaries and services in the Free State are probably cheaper than in the epicentre of commerce in Sandton.



“The hardest job kids face today is learning good manners – without seeing any.”

Fred Astaire

He surreptitiously looked around to make sure nobody was listening, and then said something that caught me completely by surprise: “Actually,” he said, “it’s got nothing to do with costs. You see,” he whispered, “youngsters in Bloemfontein have just got better manners.”

I was really shocked by this statement, but as I reflected on it, I thought made perfect sense. Call centres are where many unhappy customers end up. If you have someone manning the phones who is sensitive, empathetic, and shows basic courtesy and respect to other human beings, then it makes your life a lot easier as a manager. Unhappy customers can be

turned around, and they won’t escalate their problems or try to damage your business, mainly because they felt that somebody had in some way treated them with dignity.

In today’s uneasy world of controversy, inattention, reality TV, celebrities and politicians alike being obnoxious just to grab attention, it appears that old-fashioned behaviours like politeness, charm, poise and dignity have become lost virtues. Some of the most viral videos show adults behaving obnoxiously and throwing a temper tantrums at a fast-food drive through.

And while it is always true that being excessive and outrageous will get you the shocked attention of others, the fact is that nothing beats compassion, consideration and helpfulness as a way to create a strong personal image and positive, long-lasting relationships.

A lot of you reading this may say that it’s because I’m old and nostalgic about times gone by that makes me say this, but there is research that shows that in the confused and alienated world of even the most diehard adults under the age of 30,

it's still critical. Apart from the fact that people of all ages remember your kindness, and feel a need to repay the favour, apart from the fact that it also makes them feel better about themselves, it's even more important for you.

Study after study about human happiness has shown that people who distance themselves from others, who live only for themselves and what they can gain, who display too much pessimism and cynicism, harvest nothing but unhappiness. But true happiness comes from contributing towards the happiness of others. We somehow find our happiness when we bring surprise and humour and joy.

It seems like your willingness to put the needs and desires of others ahead of your own actually helps you because their gratitude helps you to be healthier, and in fact to also live longer. It is like a mirror that reflects back to you what other people feel.

Here's a quick checklist that may help you decide who you want to be:

- How often do you catch yourself smiling every day? Fifty times? A hundred times? You don't need to be goofy about it – but it makes a huge difference.
- How many times a day do you genuinely and consistently say 'please' and 'thank you'?
- How often do you help people in order to make their lives a bit easier? It may be that you answer a question that has been puzzling them, or that you show them a shortcut to



make their lives easier. Or it could be that you help them to physically do something that they are obviously struggling with. Or maybe they feel a little less confident or worried about something that you can reassure them about. I'm not talking about big stuff here – just the little things. And you need to be able to do these before they ask. If they have to ask, it diminishes the value of it a lot.

- How do you show people and customers that you truly respect them? Do you look them in the eye when you are talking with them? Do have an appropriate and welcoming handshake that you share when meeting someone new for the first time?

- When you address people, what do you call them? People are proud of their titles, so start off by respectfully addressing them as Mr., Ms. or Dr. They will quickly let you know when it's okay to use their first names.
- Do you let people know that you recognise them as human beings – even if you've never met them before? As I've written in a previous article, your customers and colleagues should not have to wear a badge that says: Ask me about my children.
- The same is true for paying genuine compliments. Everyone has something good about them – even if it's not always obvious. You may just have to dig a little bit.

- Speaking of which, how do you dress and take care of your appearance? Is it offensive, or intimidating, or does it create barriers in some way? (And will you sometimes just need to "cover up"?) I'm not asking you to be regimented, and to not display your personality, but just to be aware of the effect your appearance has on others.
- How would most people – from your friends, to your colleagues and managers, to your customers, and even total strangers that you meet – describe you? Will they say, "What a nice person," or something else?

This is just a start, but if you open your minds to it, you will find all sorts of wonderful ideas for what you can do popping into your head.

Remember, I'm not asking you to just roll over and let everyone take advantage of you because you are a softy. On the contrary, displaying good manners and courtesy, especially to people who don't deserve it, requires great courage. But as the current Prime Minister of New Zealand, Jacinda Ardern, has said, "One of the criticisms I've faced over the years is that I'm not aggressive enough or assertive enough, or maybe somehow, because I'm empathetic, it means I'm weak. I totally rebel against that. I refuse to believe that you cannot be both compassionate and strong."

Oh, and by the way, it's great to know that there are still some areas in our country where good old-fashioned manners are still displayed by young people coming into their early careers. I'm so desperately looking to feel respected, that I'm actually thinking about moving to Bloemfontein myself! **SR**



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