

# What do cheerleaders, dogs and young kids have in common?

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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.

This month I've spent a big chunk of time completing a series of mystery shopping experiences for one of our clients. For the first time in the past year I travelled all over our beautiful country, visiting store after store after store. When I looked at the tempting products, neat displays, great special deals, and efficient processes like replenishing stock and paying at the end of it all, the experiences were mostly very good. 10 out of 10 all round.

But there was something that troubled me, and, once aware of it, I've noticed it just about everywhere where I spend my money, (whether as a consumer, or as a business owner.) The past year has been brutal for business and for people. I won't list all of the negative stuff that has happened,

**Knowledge is power  
– but enthusiasm  
pulls the switch.**



but if I am honest with you, I too fell into the depths of despair in what Winston Churchill called "The Black Dog." I too succumbed to negativity, pessimism and a lack of energy to complete even the most basic tasks, even as I fell desperately behind in my work.

Someone asked me, "Aki, who motivates the motivators?" and I just couldn't answer. (That's when I knew I needed help.) But this topic is really critical for all leaders if we are to get through the next few years.

“Do you remember when you were a little child of 5-years old, and the teacher asked the class a question? All the kids put up their hands and said, "Pick me! Pick me!"”

That energy and enthusiasm is so infectious. And we see it with cheerleaders too, as they try to get a crowd going.

Even my dog greets me and plays with me with great enthusiasm.

**It's infectious,  
contagious and just fun.**



Just in case you haven't realised it, there are so many positive benefits and consequences to enthusiasm ...

- It inspires and motivates people.
- It reduces stress, anxiety and pessimism. It helps people re-frame their nervousness as excitement.
- It breaks down barriers, especially when you need to resolve things that make customers unhappy.
- It leads to innovation, and an openness to learning something new.
- It's perpetual, and it feeds off itself.
- It makes you and people on your team immune to resistance to change and implement actions that lead to success in the way you do things.
- It builds self-esteem and confidence.
- And it delights your customers.



As writer Percy Whiting put it, "You can do anything if you have enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is the yeast that makes your hope rise to the stars. Enthusiasm is the sparkle in your eye, it is the swing in your step, the grip of your hand, the irresistible surge of your will. Enthusiasm is your energy to execute your ideas. With enthusiasm there is accomplishment. Without it, there are only alibis." Sam Ullman also put it so nicely:

“ We grow old by deserting our ideals. Years may wrinkle the skin, but to give up enthusiasm wrinkles the soul. ”

But my favourite (and fun) definition of enthusiasm goes like this: "Enthusiasm is when the bridegroom, on his wedding night, switches off the light – but is in bed before the darkness falls." Imagine if you could put that same excitement and eagerness into your business!

If you cannot put some energy and optimism into what you do, all you are left with is some excuses about why things didn't happen.

When you look at the top qualities of remarkable leaders, the ability to display enthusiasm and energy is right there. So creating and displaying passion and energy and enthusiasm is your job as a leader. But the big question is "How?"

Well, let me try to make this simple: If you walk enthusiastically, talk enthusiastically, think enthusiastically and act enthusiastically, then you will be enthusiastic.

If you don't feel it, fake it – and then the feeling will come. What I mean by is you occasionally have to talk your way to a positive attitude. If I wake up and think it's going to be "one of those days," guess what? It turns out to be dreadful. On the other hand, when people ask me how I'm doing, I'd much prefer to say "Fantastic! In fact if I was any better I'd be twins!" Words are contagious. Hopeful words infect people with energy and enthusiasm.

I know sometimes I'm one of those terrible people that some people love to hate. Someone once said to me, "But you're always in a good mood." But that's not true. Ask my wife! I do have my bad moments but the point is that when I put on a show it creates an expectation of optimism and hope – for me and for the people around me.

Nevertheless, if you want some examples of what you can do, there are lots of possibilities. For example pay people honest compliments. Or arrange lots of fun things, every day.

Make up a company song with a familiar tune but your own words. Serve ice-cream or muffins to your whole team to celebrate being alive. Have quizzes and contests, or create some innovative

gaming event with prizes. Bring in an entertainer or a magician to work.

One of our clients had a "Best T-shirt contest one Friday. Second place went to someone who wrote "Heaven is where the police are British, the chefs Italian, the mechanics German the lovers French and it's all organised by the Swiss. Hell is where police are German, the chefs British, the mechanics French, the lovers Swiss and it's all organised by the Italians."

But the winner wore a T-shirt that said, "Video games ruined my life. Luckily, I have two more lives." Or you can create some badges or shirts that people can wear and show others: "Business is GREAT!" Or, "I smile for no reason."

If people put as much effort into solving their problems as they do complaining about them, imagine how much happier we all would be. We need to keep hope alive, even perhaps against impossible odds, for true hell is when we lose hope. We all need to get a bit crazy again, and get in touch with all of the beauty around us. And to stop taking ourselves so seriously! **SR**



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