

A photograph of a woman with long dark hair, wearing a green t-shirt and tan pants, smiling warmly. She is holding the hand of another person whose arm, wearing a white striped shirt, is visible in the foreground. The background shows a floral arrangement with purple and yellow flowers.

CUSTOMER EMPATHY™

Inspirational Stories of
Internal & External Customer
Service
...from the Heart!

Ross Shafer

ROSS SHAFER

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NOTE: We uncovered these amazing stories while doing extensive research for our latest book, ***THE CUSTOMER SHOUTS BACK!***

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CUSTOMER EMPATHY

Dear Employee,

Customer Empathy is far different from customer service. Customer Empathy is the art of seeing the transaction through the customer's eyes. It's thinking about the customer's fears, anxiety, and trying to understand their previous transaction experiences (good and bad) before they've met you.

Other times that "external" customer is someone you've seen before - and is expecting to repeat a good experience with you.

It is our privilege to create long term relationships with these people. So, listen carefully. Look inside their hearts before you respond. Then, respond with kindness, thoughtfulness, and understanding. You'll be rewarded with trust, friendship, and loyalty.

Ross Shafer

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**We make a living by
what we get. We make a
life by what we give.**

Sir Winston Churchill

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

INSPIRATIONAL

EXTERNAL

CUSTOMER

EMPATHY

STORIES

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I'd been having the worst day. In the morning the toilet overflowed and I ran all over the house looking for the plunger. Then, the car wouldn't start so I had to call AAA to come and give me a jump start. That made me 90 minutes late getting my daughter to school. On top of that, I needed to pick up a cake for my son's birthday party, buy groceries, balloons, and well...my list was pretty long. When I got to the grocery store to pick up the cake, I realized I'd left my husband's dry cleaning on the couch. I just broke down and started crying right in front of the bakery clerk. She asked me if I was Ok and I told her about my morning. So, she came out to the other side of the counter and took my list. "Go get a coffee and relax. I know right where everything is. This won't take me a minute." She grabbed a cart and took off down an aisle. Less than 10 minutes later I met her at the checkout stand. She had the plates, beans, chips, dip...everything. I can't tell you what a miracle worker she was. After that, all I could do was invite her to the party. *M.K. Tucson, AZ.*

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I don't wear make up. Neither do my close girlfriends. We are what you would call "natural" girls. But when my fiancé and I set our wedding date I knew I wanted to look beautiful on "my day." So, about a month before the wedding I went to our local mall to buy a knife for our wedding cake and try to get some tips from someone at a make up counter. But when I got to our largest department store, I didn't know there were going to be ten different make up counters. It was overwhelming. Then, I heard a pleasant voice say, "When's your wedding?" I turned around and said, "How did you know?" The salesperson pointed at my shopping bag; which bore the logo of the nearby wedding store. "July 13th. I want to look pretty but I don't know what to buy." The make up woman (Sasha) put me in a chair and proceeded to turn me into a princess bride. I couldn't believe it. I also couldn't believe how much it all cost. Something like \$110. Way out of my budget. But Sasha said, "No worries. I'm going to send you home with the basics and samples for the rest. You'll be beautiful." She was being so

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kind. Then, I started sobbing. “There is no way I can make myself look like this on my wedding day.” Sasha said, “You won’t have to. Come and see me a few hours before the wedding and I’ll do it for you.” I told her I couldn’t afford a “make up artist” and she said, “Who said anything about money?” You’re going to have your wedding pictures for a lifetime. You have to look gorgeous.” My husband nearly forgot his vows when he saw me. Now, every time I look at our wedding pictures I think of Sasha; my personal make up angel.

H.Z. Los Angeles, CA.

I found some shoes I loved and the clerk dutifully brought out my usual size eight. But the shoes were extremely tight. She asked if she could measure my foot. I told her there was no need because I have worn a size eight for 25 years. She explained that sometimes the company mislabels the shoes or the European conversion measurements are off. “Would you like to try and 8 ½?” she said. I said, “No,

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

thank you. I always wear an eight.” (I’ll admit to being a little stubborn) She said, “I totally understand. You know, we just got some beautiful new pumps you might like. May I show them to you?” “Why not?” I said. She brought out three different shoes, in my size, and I bought two pair of them. “See what I mean?” I told her. “These feel wonderful and they’re all eights.” She said, “You were right. I’m glad you like them.” It wasn’t until a couple of months later that I noticed the inside label on the shoes read, size 8 ½. I went to my closet and the shoe boxes read size 8. I liked that shoe clerk even more. She treated me like my opinion was important. She was preserving my dignity and it made me realize just how silly my stubbornness had been. The truth is I had gained 30 pounds in the last 25 years. But I didn’t want to admit some of that weight had gone to my feet.

D.N. Federal Way, WA.

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**Too often we
underestimate the power
of a touch, a smile, a
kind word, a listening
ear, an honest
compliment, or the
smallest act of caring, all
of which have the
potential to turn a life
around.**

Leo Buscaglia

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

I needed to replace a section of our patio with concrete. So one Saturday I headed for the local hardware store. I played football in college so when I bought six bags of cement I had every intention of loading them myself. In fact, when the young clerk (Jason) asked me if I needed help, I turned him down. He did, however, load them onto a flat cart for me to roll to my truck. When I starting lifting the first 80 pound bag into the back I realized I'd made a serious mistake. I couldn't get enough elevation to clear the tailgate and now I looked like a fool. That's when Jason suddenly appeared. "I get off in ten minutes and I'd much rather help you load this stuff than shag shopping carts in the parking lot." Believe me, I let him. As we loaded the bags I found out he played football on the High School team and we both complained about how the coaches call all the plays these days. He was a nice kid and I was really grateful. "Where do you live?" he asked. I told him and he said, "Hey, that's on my way home. Why don't you let me follow you over and we'll get these unloaded." How

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could I turn down a fellow ballplayer? As I drove away from the hardware store, I noticed the parking lot was clean. There were no shopping carts to shag. Jason was helping out because he knew my playing days were over. When we got to my house, he unloaded the bags by himself and wouldn't let me tip him. That kid is going to be successful in whatever he chooses to do. I was sore for three days.

G.B. Baltimore, MD.

I drive a ten year old car. One day on my way home from work, I started hearing a bad scraping noise and feeling some nasty shaking from the steering wheel. I had two thoughts. First, I am going to die driving this car. And two, If I don't die, it's going to cost me a fortune to fix. I stopped at a repair shop and, after the mechanic looked under the front end, he told me the tie rods (whatever they are) were worn out and about to come loose. He said the car was extremely dangerous for me to drive. He estimated the cost would be about \$900. I didn't have \$900 dollars.

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

So I carefully got the car home and took the bus to work the rest of the week. On the weekend I drove slowly through some back roads to another mechanic. For \$900 dollars, I wanted a second opinion. When I told the new mechanic about my problem and the other bid, he said, “Hmm. Could be something other than the tie rods. Let’s take a peek.” This guy didn’t want to look under the front end. Instead, he put my car on his inside rack and lifted it six feet into the air. Then he started making notes. He was nodding his head, grunting, touching things, and making more notes. I was getting worried that \$900 was only the tip of the iceberg. He came over to me and said, “First of all you caught a metal coat hanger on the rear axle and that’s what’s causing the scraping noise. So, here’s your souvenir (handing me the hanger) The rest of it is in good shape. Tie rods are tight. Shims are good. Steering mechanism doesn’t have any sloppy travel. But I can see you lost a couple of wheel weights; which can happen around here with all the potholes. If we replace those you should be good to go. “How much will that be?” I said. “Oh, I think with the parts and labor...pretty much...nothing.” He said. “Just come

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back when you need an oil change or something.” In ten minutes I was back on the road with no shaking or scraping noise. He could tell I was a novice but he didn’t make me feel like one. Now, all of my friends use that guy.

J.N. Battle Creek, MI.

I love photography but had only used “point and shoot” style cameras. My parents got me an incredible new camera for Christmas and I couldn’t wait to get my first batch of pictures developed. I was so disappointed when I saw the shots. Some were out of focus. Others were too dark. I know enough about photography to know it wasn’t the lab’s fault. Clearly, I didn’t know what I was doing. The guy at the camera store (who developed the film but *didn’t* sell us the camera) could tell I was upset and asked me what kind of camera I used. I told him and he went into his showcase and opened a new box containing the exact same camera. He said, “Obviously you have a photographic style you’re going for and this camera will do everything you want and more.” He took the next 30

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

minutes to walk me through all of the settings and trick features the camera had to offer. Not once did he treat me like an amateur. He acted like I was a fellow photographer who was just trying to get the most out of our equipment. I've purchased two extra lenses from that guy. Why aren't more salespeople like that?

S.R. Chicago, IL.

I travel a lot and have to eat alone on the road. I hate it - but I hate sitting in my hotel room eating room service on the bed even worse. I got seated in this one hotel restaurant and I must have had a sad look on my face because the waitress said, "Looks like you could either use some company or a newspaper. What'll it be?" I told her I would love to read a paper while I'm waiting but I left my reading glasses in my room. She handed me *her* reading glasses. "I don't need 'em. I know the menu by heart and I can take orders up here (pointing to her head). Then she went to the newspaper box in their breezeway and brought back today's paper. The meal was great. What was

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funny was that from time to time (as a joke) the waitress would walk by, point at the paper and ask, “What does that say?” When the meal was over and I returned her glasses, I also left a 50% tip. I’ll never forget the waitress who made me feel welcome to be alone.

W.A. Boca Raton, FL.

**Constant kindness can
accomplish much. As
the sun makes the ice
melt, kindness causes
misunderstanding,
mistrust, and hostility
to evaporate.**

Albert Schweitzer

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I got two months behind in my natural gas bill because I had been laid off and there just wasn't enough money to spread around. When I got a call from the gas company's collection agency I expected the woman to start reading me the riot act. When the lady asked if I was the homeowner I got immediately defensive. I told her, "I lost my \$#@&*job! Haven't you ever lost a job before?" But she didn't act mad. And, she certainly didn't deserve my angry remarks. In fact, she was really sweet. She said she understood about good and bad times and they appreciated our business over the years. She asked me what I could afford and suggested a payment plan that didn't start for 60 days; to give me some breathing room. She also asked to know what my skills were and offered to keep a lookout for any jobs in that field. I couldn't believe she cared about anything except getting the money. When I got another job (I still have it) you can bet the gas company is the first bill I pay every month. I learned a valuable lesson. There are still human beings out there who understand life throws

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

you some curve balls. And some of the people work for the gas company.

J.G. Dallas, TX.

I was freaking out because I made an ATM deposit to my bank account and when I went online to check if it had posted, it hadn't. What caused me to panic was that I had written a couple of checks and now I was sure they were going to bounce. So I called the bank. The phone rang and rang and finally someone answered. "Yes, can I help you?" I explained my problem and the voice at the other end said, "Actually, I'm the janitor. The bank closed 45 minutes ago." I checked my watch and he was right. I didn't know what I was thinking. Then, the man said, "But I'll tell you what. Give me your number and I'll try to call someone who can help you." About fifteen minutes later, I got a call from the Branch Manager. He told me he could get the deposit posted, over the phone with the central office, and that I shouldn't worry. I asked him if he had talked to the janitor. He said, "Yeah I did,

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but he's not our regular janitor. He must have made four or five calls before and he found me at the gym."

I was so impressed with the fact that the janitor took the initiative to help me that I bought a Starbucks gift basket and took it to him the next day. I did the same for the bank manager for interrupting his work out to talk to a guy who was panicking about an ATM deposit. These people care enough about how I felt to make me feel comfortable. I don't think I would have slept that night if not for them. Who does that for you anymore?

Y.E. Frankfurt, Germany

One night, at 3 a.m., I woke up with some very serious stomach pains. I mean I felt like knives were trying to cut their way out of my stomach. I live alone and somehow I drove myself to the emergency room. When I got inside, the admitting nurse gave me a clipboard and told me to fill out the four page questionnaire. Are you kidding me?! I was practically in the fetal position in the waiting room chair; convinced I was dying! The nurse didn't ask me

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

twice. She left her desk and came out to where I was doubled up. She said, “I’ll fill this out. Just give me your name and a contact person. I’ll do the rest.” I managed to give her what she wanted and within minutes I was in the ER on a morphine drip. Turns out, I had a pretty substantial kidney stone. More importantly I had a nurse who saw how much pain I was in and didn’t stick to “procedures.” She used common sense and empathy to treat a patient. Her name was Millie. Thank you, Millie! I love you!

K.M. Amherst, MASS.

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**A positive attitude
may not solve all your
problems, but it will
annoy enough people to
make it worth the effort.**

Herm Albright (1876-1944)

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

I am so happy I get to tell this story. I drove to the beauty supply store to get my favorite conditioner. It was a nasty November day. Raining cats and dogs. I waited in my car to see if it would let up, but no luck. I opened my car door with my purse over my head...and a man came running toward me with an umbrella. He was wearing a shirt that identified him as a worker at the nearby video store. "Here you go," he said. And he walked me to the curb where the awning covered the sidewalk. I thanked him but told him I was going to the beauty shop; not his video store. He said, "That's Ok. We are an equal opportunity rain deflector." I went to the beauty place, got my hair products and I had to walk back by the video store. The same young man saw me and said, "Are you headed back to your car?" I told him I was. He opened his umbrella, and again, walked me to my car. Now, I can understand if I was a beautiful young woman. But I'm 71 years old and afraid to see myself in the mirror. So, sex appeal wasn't his motivation. I suspect he was just a nice young man who showed respect for his fellow man...or woman. And he had nothing to gain

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that day. However, a month later I bought about \$150 dollars worth of videos from him as Christmas gifts. Old women don't forget people who treat them like that.

L.O. Manchester, England

My wife is very hard to buy for.

She has a good job and she can buy anything she wants. So it's always a struggle for me to come up with something she doesn't have. I finally had a brainstorm to buy her a telescope. As a child she said she always loved looking at the stars through her Daddy's telescope. Yet, as an adult, she hadn't thought to buy one for herself. So, I researched all these telescopes, went to a large camera store and ordered one. I told the manager not to call our home when it came in because it was a surprise. As my wife's birthday was getting closer I didn't hear from the camera store manager. So, I called him. He told me it was on back order but not to worry. He had a back up plan if it didn't come in. I called him every day. Each time I

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

called he was pleasant and always reassuring. But on the actual day of my wife's birthday, I still didn't have the telescope. I had planned a dinner at an elegant restaurant with a few of our friends and I didn't have a gift for her. However, I called the manager who told me, "I've got it. Tell me where you are and I'll deliver it." That night, the dinner was perfect. Our friends were funnier than ever. And still no telescope. Near the end of the dinner I got a note from our waiter that we were all expected to go up on the roof of the restaurant. It was very important. Of course, nobody had any idea why we were going to the roof. Once we got up there, a large ribbon adorned my wife's new telescope. It was positioned directly at the full moon. And all of us got the sight of a lifetime staring at all the craters. She loved the gift. My manager friend apologized for the delay but he told me he never got his order. He bought this telescope from a competitor (at the normal retail price) and arranged to place it on the roof of the restaurant. I was stunned. When I asked him why he went to so much trouble, he said, "On my 50th birthday, my sister hunted all over town for an unusual hydraulic drill that I wanted. Nobody carried

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it. So, she drove 250 miles to get pick one up in time for my birthday. I was so blown away by her thoughtfulness, I promised myself to return the favor someday.”

C.U. New York, N.Y.

I was flying back to New York from London on a British Airways plane. I was lucky enough to upgrade to “business class” and was feeling pretty good about life. I was feeling so good that I decided to buy a watch from their product catalog. The watch face featured two time zones and cost about \$300. I gave the flight attendant my Visa card and she disappeared. A few minutes later, she came back to my seat, bent down and whispered, “There seems to be some difficulty with processing payment; which is undoubtedly our fault. Sometimes at this altitude, we aren’t able to connect with the server. I can take care of it immediately upon landing – or if you prefer we could attempt a different card after we start to descend? In the meantime, can I get you more wine?” I waited until we were on final approach to La Guardia

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

and I gave her a different credit card. The payment sailed through. When I got home I realized that my wife hadn't sent in a payment on the first card. Wow, that was cool. The flight attendant didn't embarrass me. She didn't make an issue of it. She took all of the blame. That's a company who cares about the feelings of their customers.

J.C. Kansas City, MO

**No one ever listened
himself out of a job.**

Pres. Calvin Coolidge (1872-1933)

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I hate to go shopping for new dresses because I am what people call pleasingly plump. Being around all of those skinny girls can be humiliating. When I shop, I go late at night (not as busy) and I try to buy several dresses so I don't have to come back again soon. This time when I went to the only department that has my sizes - wouldn't you know the prettiest and skinniest sales girl in the store walked up to me and said, "I'm Daryn. How are you doing tonight?" I expected her to scan my body in that snide way skinny girls do but she didn't. In fact, she just looked directly into my face and smiled. She took my hand and led me over to some dresses that were actually very flattering. She also kept telling me which colors and patterns looked best with my skin tone. She wasn't a pushover either. I'd pick out something and she'd say, "It's nice but I think we can do better. Oh, this is darling. Please try this on."

I left that store having spent over \$1,700. I'm going back next month for their annual sale because I have never had so many compliments on my clothing.

F.V. Brussels, Belgium

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

My wife and I went to a new restaurant for our anniversary. It was especially hard because we were both on the low carb diet. We live in a town that takes pride in good food and our bodies show it. We both love warm bread and we couldn't have that. We both love potatoes and rice and we couldn't have either of those either. So, when the waiter brought the dessert tray around we felt like we were seeing a mirage in the desert. The cheesecake looked better than the chocolate torte. The chocolate torte looked better than the warm apple cobbler. We were in serious sugar withdrawal. I finally explained to the waiter why we couldn't eat what we wanted and how it was ruining our anniversary! He said, "I think I can help. I'll be right back." When he came back he carried a small tray of four big chocolate covered strawberries. He said, "These are sugar free from across the street" as he pointed to a specialty bakery. "I'm going low carb myself and I've lost 13 pounds so far," He added. He made our whole night by sympathizing with our plight. It turned out to be a

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great anniversary thanks to a waiter who took the time to go the extra mile and relate to us on a human level.
F.G. New Orleans, LA.

This is going to sound like one of those unbelievable stories and if it hadn't happened to me I wouldn't believe it myself. One year, my husband and both lost our jobs just before Christmas. We worked at the same automobile plant and they had to shut it down. We only had about one month's salary in our savings account which meant we really had to scale back our spending for Christmas presents. We decided to get nothing for ourselves and something small for our two young boys. One thing we didn't want to eliminate was getting the boy's picture taken with Santa Claus. It was an annual family tradition. So we went to the mall and it was so hard to pass by the windows and tell the boys that Santa had a lot of extra little children to get presents for this year and that we should not expect too much. It broke my heart. When it was time for the boys to sit on Santa's lap for the picture, Santa asked. "So what do you two young men

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

want for Christmas?” My youngest whispered in his ear, “I want to get jobs for Mommy and Daddy.” No one else heard my boy but my heart just sank. Santa was caught off guard, too, but managed to say very quietly so no one else could hear, “If you guys have been good I’ll see what I can do.” I felt so badly for those little boys I wanted to cry. Anyway, we picked up our pictures and walked toward the exit. Just before we were about to go through the exit, there was a high school gymnastics team performing a juggling act and some tumbling stunts so we stopped and watched them for a while. The kids were mesmerized. The next thing I knew I was being tapped on the shoulder. I turned around and a well dressed elderly gentlemen said, “I was going to give this to my grandson but I think it’s better off in your home.” He was holding a shopping bag that contained a brand new Playstation2 video game console. “Please take it, I insist,” he said. I didn’t know what to say except, “How did you know?” He smiled and whispered in my ear, “Ho, Ho, Ho.” Don’t let anyone ever tell you there is no Santa Claus.

L.G. Flint, MI.

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I always hear people talk about how lousy computer tech support can be. Also, that the tech people are impossible to understand because of all the telephone outsourcing to other nations. But I had an entirely opposite experience. I wanted to install a wireless router in our house so that we could get a high speed Internet connection in every room. I bought the equipment and tried to install it myself. I got it to work on the main computer but the other computers couldn't "find" the router. I called the tech support number on the box and was immediately connected to a woman who spoke perfect American English. In fact, I thought I detected a bit of a southern accent. She patiently walked me through every step slowly and methodically. Several times, I entered the wrong codes and I had to reboot the computer and start over. I apologized for not "getting it" as quickly as I thought I should and she said, "We aren't in a hurry. I've been frustrated with my own computer so I know how it feels. Take your time and let me know when the computer is up again." I was on the phone with her for

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

over 40 minutes and when we were done, every computer worked perfectly.

Before she hung up I asked her where I was calling. She said, "I'm in New Delhi...India." Wow! I guess I'm not very good at accents. I was so grateful I wrote a letter to their company *not* about the service, but about the kindness and patience of this woman. Now, when people complain about tech support I can argue with the best of them.

E. W. Windsor, Ontario.

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**Listening well and
answering well is one of
the greatest perfections
that can be obtained in
conversation.**

Francois de la Rochefoucauld

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EMPATHY

STORIES

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**Kindness makes a
fellow feel good
whether it's being done
to him or by him.**

(unknown, but brilliant author)

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

Dear Employee,

Our *internal* customers are the people we work with every day; either in person or on the phone. We are all on the same team so we need each other. We need to appreciate how we can help one another.

Let's treat each other with respect and kindness. Even when deadlines are closing in and we've been mentally or physically tested, let's continue to honor our individual talents, strengths, personalities, and experiences.

We need each other to grow our personal expertise - and to serve our customers as we've promised them.

Ross Shafer

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I schedule and coordinate all of the loan document signings for a large mortgage lender. With lower interest rates, I have been swamped with refinancing loans. During one of our busiest months, my husband was rushed to the hospital with severe chest pains. As soon as I heard I rushed home and spent two days and nights with him at the hospital while they did tests. On the third day I knew I had to go back to work. The pile on my desk was only getting deeper. I didn't want to talk about the incident with my coworkers because I didn't have any answers and was just so drained. My boss, Nadine, could tell it was hard for me to focus on my work. At lunch, she came up to me and said, "I can't possibly know what you're going through but I want you to know that we will all take over your loans if you want to go home and get some rest. Don't worry about rushing back. Take as long as you need." I went home and bawled for two hours. I can't tell you how much her attitude meant to me. I'd do anything for that woman.

P.I. Bloomington, MN.

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

I work in a large accounting office.

I lobbied for one of our biggest account and I got it. But to be honest, I was in way over my head and kept screwing up. My numbers were off so I kept getting called into the office to explain what I had done. I always found the mistake but it was embarrassing. After one of these particularly humiliating sessions I came back to my desk to find a really nice card from my cubicle partner, Rex. The card showed a cat whose claws were stuck to a ceiling fan and was whirling in circles. Inside, the card said, “You can’t stop this on your own. I’d better help.” It really made me laugh. Rex knew I needed to put the whole thing in perspective. So I did let him help. He never asked for any credit. I am still working on that account and I owe it to Rex. I sure hope I get a chance to return the favor.

O.R. Chattanooga, TN.

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I finally found a great job. I loved all of my coworkers and was looking forward to a long future with this company. Unfortunately, I was also going through a break up with my boyfriend at the same time. To add insult to injury, he was calling my office several times a day. I asked him not to call but he wouldn't stop. He didn't understand why we were breaking up. He kept wanted me to explain why I didn't want to be with him anymore. It was really embarrassing and disruptive to my workday. As you can imagine, my boss (a really tough no-nonsense woman) called me into her office. I knew what it was about and I was prepared for the worst. She said, "Mindy, you've been getting a lot of personal calls at work and I'm worried." I told her what was going on and that I was sorry. I had told him not to call but it didn't seem to do any good. I was actually on the verge of tears about this. My boss gave me a cold stare and said, "You are an incredibly gifted asset to our company and I hate to see you bogged down with this extra emotional stress. With your permission, I'd like

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

to have all of your calls routed to my office. Maybe I can get this man to stop calling you at work.” I almost started to cry. I was so relieved I wasn’t getting fired that I agreed with her plan. Sure enough my ex boyfriend called the office later that afternoon and the call went to my boss. I don’t know what she said to him but he never called the office again. In fact, I think he only called me at home one time after that. I’ve told that story to my friends and none of us know a supervisor who would understand such an awkward situation and be so forgiving. Let alone one who would intervene on my behalf like that. Maybe she had a similar situation in her life. Maybe she wanted to make sure I was as productive as I could be. Regardless, it made me loyal to the end. I would do anything for her.

A. W. Salem, OR.

My best friend Cathy and I played college basketball on the same team. After college, we got apartments in the same building and even went to work for the same marketing firm as assistant

ROSS SHAFER

publicists. About eighteen months later, there was an opening in the product design department and we both wanted it. I thought I was more qualified and it actually caused a lot of tension between us. In fact, we didn't speak for the last few days before our respective interviews. On the day of my interview I was really nervous. I had heard the supervisor was a perfectionist. He was a former US Navy commander who would apparently jump down your throat for even the smallest infractions in procedure. He was particularly intolerant of the casual way people dressed around the office. So, on the day of my interview, I made sure I had gotten plenty of rest and was dressed sharp. As I walked down the long hall to his office, I checked myself one last time in the mirror. I looked good. My right shoe felt a little loose so I bent down to tighten the lace...and broke it. Out of the corner of my eye I could see that Cathy had witnessed this "accident." She gave me a small smile and walked away. As I was trying to tie the broken lace into an inconspicuous knot (and failing) Cathy tapped me on the shoulder; holding a shoe lace. "It might be a little long but it's the right color," she smiled. It turns out

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

that Cathy won the job over me and I didn't mind, at all. I learned more about sportsmanship in one shoelace than in four years of playing college basketball.

J.B. Raleigh, NC.

ROSS SHAFER

**Kindness is more than
deeds. It is an attitude,
an expression, a look, a
touch. It is anything
that lifts another
person.**

C. Neil Strait

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

I tore some cartilage in my knee playing on our company softball team so I had to have knee surgery. I went to work a week after the surgery; which was probably a mistake. My arms ached because our parking lot is a long way from our office building and using the crutches was killing me. I also wasn't used to the extra weight of the cast and I would occasionally bang my foot into the wall or a chair and re-twist my knee. I haven't given birth but I think this kind of pain is close. Add to that, my cubicle is as far away from the elevators as you can get so I felt like I was hiking to another state just getting to my desk. Naturally, as our leading hitter, I didn't want to look like a baby so I sucked it up and hobbled around in silence. On the third day, a woman in our office, whom I say hello to every day (but who I really didn't know) came up to me. She said, "I'd like to switch desks with you until you get that cast off." Her desk was within a few feet of the elevator and (even more important) the bathroom. I asked her, "Are you sure? My desk is way out of your way and you won't be by your friends." She smiled, "It's just that I can't stand to watch you

ROSS SHAFER

banging into the furniture and I'm pretty sure they'll still be my friends when we switch back." I gladly took her up on her offer and she even moved all of our files during lunch. I was really touched by this. I also wondered how many of my coworkers have been in pain over one thing or another - right under MY nose - and I didn't notice...or worse...I did nothing to help them.

D.K. Birmingham, AL.

I work for a company who employs about 2,000 people. When my future husband and I decided how much time to take for our honeymoon, I called our HR department to clear my vacation days. We wanted to go to Europe and planned to be gone two weeks. I couldn't believe my ears when the HR assistant told me they were going through a software program change and they couldn't tell me how many days I had already used for the year. I hadn't used any! To be on "the safe side" the assistant said he could give

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

me one week. I was so upset. I had worked there for eight years and had three full weeks coming to me. Twenty minutes later got a call from the head HR director who told me, “We can’t verify your vacation records but I *can* verify your integrity and, records or not, you’re going on a two week honeymoon. Do you need longer?” I wanted to cry. We are an electronic communication organization but it was wonderful to know we still employed human beings with feelings. When we got to our hotel in Venice, Italy, we were greeted with the most beautiful flowers...from my HR director.

C.N. San Diego, CA.

We knew a merger was coming for months. But most of us didn’t think it would really affect our jobs that much. In fact, my boss was retiring so I was expecting to get a promotion and fill the void. I suppose you can guess I didn’t get the promotion. Our department was absorbed by the other company. A new manager came in, and I was crushed, emotionally. One of my longtime coworkers (who was

ROSS SHAFER

also passed over) bounced into my office and presented me with a coffee cup bearing the new company's logo and a Starbucks coffee gift card. He said, "We've all been under a lot of stress around here. We can either quit or ingest more caffeine." I laughed really hard and figured I would rather stay and work with people like that than take my chances moving into the unknown.

M.A. Cheyenne, WY.

**You must not lose faith
in humanity. Humanity
is an ocean. If a few
drops of the ocean are
dirty, the ocean does
not become dirty.**

Mahatma Ghandi

ROSS SHAFER

I work for a large computer parts supplier. I'd always been a good performer so I was awarded our 2nd biggest account. This meant a pretty big raise in my commissions. On my first visit, I serviced the account, negotiated brilliantly for an hour, and came home with a really nice order. But when I got back to the office I found out I'd made a \$4,500 mistake. I gave a discount I shouldn't have and there was no way I could go back to the account and ask them to pay \$4,500 more. So, the general manager called me into his office. I assumed he was going to rip me a new one and make me take up the slack for the difference. Not that he's a mean guy but he's all business. I was surprised when he told me, "I've made plenty of mistakes in the field. Some bigger than yours. Frankly, I'd rather have you here than the \$4,500 dollars. More careful next time though, huh?" He wasn't a man of many words. But he sure knew which ones made me loyal for the next 20 years.

H. H. Kyoto, Japan

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

We had a very nasty ice storm last year. It pretty much immobilized our small city. A lot of people who work downtown took taxi cabs but the taxi company was charging double and triple rates. It was awful how they took advantage of people. I work in a tire store and my boss called us all together to say, “Our customers are getting ripped off by the cabbies because they can’t drive themselves. I want you to get all of the tire chains out of the warehouse and offer them to our customers for free.” I thought his brain was frozen or something. Give away free tire chains? “Yes, give our customers free chains, put them on their cars, and tell them to bring ‘em back after the storm.” A funny thing happened after the storm. About half of the people came back and bought the chains. We re-boxed the returned chains and the boss put a sign on them like, “Ice Storm Tested” and “Previous Ice Heroes” and “I Rescued Somebody.” We sold out of every set of chains. I guess when you show humanity to people, they show humanity back. By the way, the taxi company is now under new ownership.

D.T. Portland, OR.

ROSS SHAFER

I had stayed up most of the night practicing a speech I had to give a big staff meeting. I don't like to speak in public but I was championing the proposal to reorganize our department and I was ready. That is until I slipped in the lunchroom and tore the crotch of my pants like wide open. I was mortified. I commute an hour to work so there wasn't enough time for me to go home and change. My best friend at work wasn't much help. He thought it was the funniest thing he'd ever seen. But he surprised when he said, "C'mon, let's switch slacks." We were both wearing black and we are almost the same size so I did it. He saved the day for me. My speech went off perfectly. More importantly this guy was such a good friend that he sat in that staff meeting with no crotch in his pants.

G.M. New Canaan, CT.

**I expect to pass
through this world but
once. Any good
therefore that I do or
any kindness that I can
show to any fellow
creature, let me do it
now. Let me not defer
it, for I shall not pass
this way again.**

William Penn

ROSS SHAFER

I'm not a natural leader. I work in a warehouse but I will say that I am a great "team member." I just don't like to be in charge. The problem is that our company expects us to get involved in the community. Well, in our weekly shipping review meeting, our district supervisor pointed at me and "volunteered" me to spearhead the annual holiday food drive. Our performance reviews require that we participate in these kinds of things but I was not happy to get this assignment. I think the spirit of the food drive is a good cause. But I was more afraid I'd mess it up and risk the anger of my typically hot-headed boss. Not to mention he knows I haven't done this before. I wanted to go into the bathroom and throw up. A newly appointed female forklift foreman (I'll call her Anne) was in the meeting and she approached me afterward to say, "Hey, can I help you with that? I've had some experience in food drives and I know I could do a good job for you." It took me about a nanosecond to say, "Yes, I'd love to hear your ideas!" God knows *I* didn't have any ideas. Anne and I met a

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

couple of times to develop our plan and she was incredible. She had a clear vision about where to find donors and how to distribute the food. She recruited three other people from the packing department and the drive came off perfectly. We raised about \$3,000 worth of canned goods and toys. The district supervisor sent me an email telling me how pleased he was with the results and said it was, “going to look really good on your review.” I shared the email with Anne and I bought a gift certificate - for her - to a local restaurant to say thanks. Then, it occurred to me that throughout this whole process, I had never asked her about her previous food drive successes. So I asked, “You are really good at this. Have your other drives turned out this well?” She said, “This is my first one.” I was confused. I thought I distinctly remembered her saying she had done this before. She looked a little sheepish and said, “From the look on your face in the shipping review meeting I could tell you could use some help...so I kinda fibbed.” Does it count as a fib if you have your fellow employee has your sanity in your best interest?

L.J. Tampa, FL.

ROSS SHAFER

I work part time at our church. Now, just because it's a church doesn't mean that everyone is nice and pleasant and forgiving. In fact, our church's operations manager can be a nasty, nitpicking pain in the...you-guessed-it. I've talked to our pastor about her but he says she works so hard and has such a strong relationship with God that, "We all have to tolerate each other's sins." The deal is this. Every Friday, twenty-five of us volunteers come to clean the church and get it ready for the weekend. Some of us fill the pews with response cards and pencils. Some of us fold the programs. And some of us polish the offering plates. We work really hard because we believe in the purpose we serve. But this manager is never satisfied and always barking orders at us like we're children. It was so bad that at least a dozen volunteers wanted to quit and let her do this work herself. But my friend, Loretta, had a truly bizarre idea. "Let's throw the bitty a birthday party," she said. You can imagine it took a lot of convincing but on the following Friday, we had a cake, some presents, and even some decorations. Our manager was speechless. We sang Happy Birthday and

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

she almost cried. Almost. But then when we were done laughing and singing, the manager said, “After all you have done for me I am...embarrassed to tell you today isn’t my birthday. My birthday is three months from now.” Loretta spoke up, “So what! It’s somebody’s birthday today and I know it’s none of ours. It must be yours!” We all laughed for a long time. Our manager told us she has felt alone for three years (since her husband died) and that we made her feel loved again. Talk about miracles. Do you know that our manager has been as pleasant as a lamb ever since. And it’s been over a year. Sometimes it’s hard to dislike someone when you know their whole story. How can you know their story if you don’t reach out in love and find out.

T.J. Vancouver. B.C.

ROSS SHAFER

My mother died two years before my 76 year old father had a stroke at home. Luckily, his best friend had come to pick Dad up for a golf game and found him. He called an ambulance and was rushed to the hospital. When I got the call I immediately left a pile of urgent billing paperwork on my desk. I didn't even tell people why I was leaving. I just left. Because of the testing, I couldn't see my Dad for a full day. When I finally saw him I didn't even recognize him. He was normally a strapping 6 foot 3 inch pillar of strength. But now, he looked frail and distorted. I was in total shock. I climbed on his bed and hugged him for about two hours. I wasn't ready to lose my Daddy. I stayed right by his side and by the third day, the doctor said he was showing markedly rapid improvement. I hadn't returned any of my cell phone messages from work and I thought if I got fired for this I didn't even care. On the fourth day I decided I'd better go into work and at least explain what had happened. When I got there, my desk bore a huge bouquet of flowers and a card the size of a magazine. Inside, everyone in the office had signed it with, "We

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

are all praying for your father. May he have a full and speedy recovery.” That’s when I lost it. I cried and cried and everyone circled around me in the most loving, accepting way. We are in a hard driving business but they completely understood that nothing is more important than family. It wasn’t until this day that I realized I had a new one.

O.Y. Madrid, Spain

ROSS SHAFER

**I am still determined to
be cheerful and happy, in
whatever situation I may
be; for I have also learned
that the greater part of
our happiness or misery
depends upon our
dispositions, and not
upon our circumstances.**

Martha Washington (1732-1802)

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

Three years ago, I had a difficult job change. It was difficult because I was making a good living and was really good at the job. But I didn't think I was being treated fairly by my boss and there was a lot of infighting on our team. Maybe that's the way it is in a competitive environment but it was starting to make me physically ill and I decided my health was more important. Furthermore, I left the company without a job to go to (something my father warned me never to do) I interviewed with several good companies and found that I wasn't going to earn what I was at my former company. I was having serious second thoughts about what I had done. Just when I was starting to run a little low on cash I interviewed with a really nice company. I had a good vibe from the minute I stepped into their lobby. It was in a different field so my previous contacts weren't going to help me. But I needed a job and thought, "Worst case is that I can at least earn a paycheck while I'm looking for something better." On my first day of work at the new company,

ROSS SHAFER

you'd think I was a visiting celebrity. There was a "welcome basket" on my desk with fruit, candy, candles, and a DVD of the funny movie *Office Space*. Then one by one, my coworkers came around to introduce themselves. One took me on a tour of the lunchroom and the office supply closet. Another showed me where they stored all of the company resource files. Yet another person walked me over to the manufacturing area and introduced me to the lead people there. Each one of them encouraged me to walk in on them anytime if I ever needed anything. I felt like I was important. They were glad I was a part of their team. Over the last three years I have come to adore these people. We have disagreements but we all respect each other. We care about each other. They are my friends and my biggest supporters; and I am theirs. I haven't even considered looking for another job. And the fun part is I am in charge of putting together the welcome basket for a new employee who starts Monday. Hmm. I wonder if he's ever seen *Office Space*?
B.D. Santa Clara, CA.

CUSTOMER EMPATHY

It's unusual that upper management looks at us subordinates as equally important. At least I've never felt that way until I came to work here. We are a retail watch and sunglasses store with twenty two employees. The owners care about us so much that they put our pictures in the paper as the store's main advertising message. They feel we are the reason people come in – not our products. Each week there is a full page ad for the store but it won't showcase any products or prices. The full page will be a picture of one of our faces, our name, and our hobbies. On my week, the ad included my dog's name. So now I get recognized on the street and people ask how my dog is doing. It's really weird but amazingly fun. Granted, our work isn't too challenging. We sell watches and sunglasses all day long. But I don't know of any other job where the employees are the stars of the show like this, do you?

N.M. Laughlin, NV.

ROSS SHAFER

**Do all you can. By all
the means you can. In
all the ways you can. In
all the places you can.**

**At all the times you
can. To all the people
you can. As long as you
ever can.**

John Wesley (1703-1791)

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