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Smiles and frowns can impact the bottomline

In the service sector, managing emotions and modifying behaviour effectively are crucial to success

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"How you react emotionally is a choice in any situation." - Judith Orloff

Emotions, when unbridled, can adversely affect organisational outcomes. Therefore, organisations expect employees to manage their emotions better while interacting with customers.

There is clearly an emotional component to jobs in the service sector. What muscle power is to manual

work, emotions are to service-oriented work. Interactions between service providers and customers take place in three modes – voice-to-voice, face-to-face and online.

From an organisational point of view, these interactions are extremely important as they will largely help customers define its quality of service.

Not only that, an assessment of the organisation on the whole will often be made on the basis of the perform-

ance of its service personnel. Flight attendants make a classic example. As employees such as these are at the organisation-customer interface, they represent the organisation to its customer; Now, what is good service? And, how is it delivered?

Customers will see assurance, empathy and reliability as components of good service, and these are delivered through a channel of emotions.

So, to offer the desired service, employees have to reg-

ulate their emotions, which includes modifying behaviour in accordance with the emotions displayed by customers.

To put this in plain terms, it's all about the ability to strike up a rapport with another human being – in this case, a customer. Employers believe customers will stay loyal when they are offered personalised service in a mass consumer market driven by technology. Therefore, employees are instructed to provide service with

personalised naturalness, spontaneity and warmth.

Natural warmth

Though paradoxical it may sound, this natural and spontaneous warmth is a result of practice. It also has a lot to do with hiding emotions, especially when they are in a disarray due to any personal upheaval in the employee's life. To quote from sociologist Arlie Hochschild's work on the subject of emotional labour, "Customer courtesy begins and ends with you...

Under no circumstances should a customer ever wonder if you are having a bad day. Your troubles should be masked with a smile. Tension can be seen and received negatively resulting in an unhappy dining experience, or what is called frustrated food... Once an unhappy customer walks out the door, they are gone forever!"

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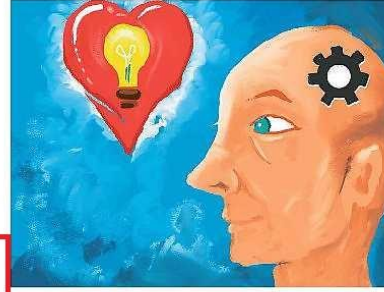


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