

Authentic Emotions Matter! Choice Bank Strives to Create Emotionally Contagious Experiences.

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When I worked for the Cambridge Country Inn and Pub as a waitress in high school, I was told I shouldn't let the customer see I was having a bad day. Common practice for organizations with frequent face-to-face encounters is to implore their workforce to "smile" for the sake of providing great service, even when someone doesn't really want to.

I don't recommend the customer service advice I received in high school to clients. One client, Choice Bank of Oshkosh, is striving to create authentic experiences people crave.

Researchers studying the area of providing authentic service focus on the emotional effort (a.k.a. emotional labor) it takes to succeed at great service. Choice Bank of Oshkosh is specifically interested in the theory that emotions can be "caught" between employees and customers, which academics call "emotional cognition."

Dr. Dwayne Gremler (www.cba.bgsu.edu/faculty_staff/gremler/), a marketing professor at Bowling Green State University, conducted a study with two colleagues from Germany and one from Australia. Their research focused on how contagious employee emotions are and how those emotions affect service. Their findings provide evidence that an employee's emotional state can change a customer's emotional state, and ultimately the customer's satisfaction and loyalty (the two holy grails of marketing).

Gremler states, "Customers who are helped by authentic employees are much more likely to "catch" the emotions of that employee rather than one that is perceived as unauthentic."

Creating an authentic experience seems logical in today's environment. Choice Bank is focusing on training to increase positive customer emotion because they appear to be the driving force in building rapport with the employee, which is critical to creating more authentic experiences.

Specific activities include "deep acting," where Choice Bank associates feel the emotion of the customer themselves. A deep acting example is having the employee "step into the shoes" of the customer, a perspective-talking technique.

Managers and marketers have great opportunities leverage emotional cognition research recommendations to rethink how they are providing service. Authenticity is critical to relating to customers today. Clearly, Choice Bank is carving a niche by building a culture of passing on contagious positive emotions. They know the competition can replicate their product and their facilities, but they cannot steal their culture. I encourage you to put them to the test to see if you "catch" a great experience with one of their associates.