

Small steps to strengthen
the relationships with
people you serve

SERVICE HABITS

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Never be caught by surprise

I ONCE WORKED at Melbourne Park, a sports and entertainment precinct made up of three venues and hosting 200 events a year, including the Australian Open Tennis Grand Slam. For the first five years, I was in an operational role where I was responsible for all the corporate hospitality and function rooms. We'd have up to ten different events or functions happening at the same time, with hundreds of staff to lead, hosting thousands of customers at once.

It was exciting and hard work all at once. In my busy operations role, it meant that I always had a to-do list. In the peak periods of the year, my days were full of delegation: relying on chefs, supervisors, bar staff and frontline staff to do their roles. I'd have my to-do list next to my bed when I slept at night, so that when I had a thought in the middle of the night, I could capture it quickly. I'd write down conversations I needed to have, stock levels that needed checking, items of interest to include in briefings, and last-minute signage changes or price updates.

In the early days, I was often caught by surprise. I would have asked for a task to be completed and then found that it wasn't done to the standard it needed to be, or worse, hadn't been done at all. Some of my biggest lessons were when:

- I opened a coolroom an hour before 1000 guests arrived, to find that no chilled champagne had been stocked for the function.
- I arrived at a corporate box 15 minutes before the VIP guests were due, to find the box had been set up incorrectly.
- I conducted a staff briefing with 50 staff ready to lay tables, to find the set-up staff the day before had laid the incorrect linen.

I thought that if I communicated a message or an instruction to my team, then it would just get done.

However, when you involve other people, you have no control at all.

OUT OF CONTROL

Internally, you rely on many people to deliver service, whether you're leading a team in a busy stadium, running a department or working in a call centre with a large team. You're responsible for your part of the service chain and you rely on others to do their part to achieve overall customer success.

Working in a team is like playing a team sport. Everyone has a role to play out on the field, everyone knows the common goal and direction of the game, and everyone relies on the other team members being at the top of their game and playing to the best of their ability, so that together the whole team performs and

ultimately wins. However, despite best intentions, the coach's training and guidance can't control other people and their performance. You can plan for things to go a certain way, but none of us really has any control over others – the only person you can control is yourself. You cannot control your teammates. You cannot control the customer.

People are people. Things happen. Consider some examples:

- You expected your teammates to turn up to work today and complete the priorities that were identified early in the week at a team meeting – however, three people called in sick and those tasks weren't completed.
- You expected a certain number of customers to walk in the door today – sales have been strong and your forecasting has been accurate of late – however, there's an unexpected street protest out the front of your store that means no customers can get to you today.
- You expected to present a compelling business case to your boss today, to gain more resources and tools for your team so you can get better results – however, your boss cancels the meeting at the last minute and declares a freeze on recruitment and additional spending.

We have expectations based on past history – something has happened before, so there's no reason it won't happen again, right? We often project our past experiences into the future, and so, many of us unconsciously expect most days to unfold a certain way. We think because we've experienced something previously, it will happen again, and that we have some level of control over the future. The reality is, the future is filled with surprises.

FOLLOW UP

Following up on people's progress isn't about not trusting people or trying to catch them out: it's about being realistic about the fact that things change, and circumstances and situations will present themselves that have not been considered. Realise that surprises will occur, and accept that you have little control over them. If you can mitigate the number of surprises and the cost of those surprises, however, you're bringing care to your work.

You want to be in an environment where everyone has everyone's back, where you move away from blame and finger-pointing about why something wasn't done, or wasn't done to the standard you expected. Rather, encourage team members to improve one another's performance, even when mistakes are made or things get missed.

When you're part of a culture that encourages checking in on how a task was performed, it can improve everyone's performance. It reminds people that we all have much to learn, that situations and scenarios change, and that keeping agile and alert is critical to future success.

The purpose of follow-up is to maintain performance. It doesn't take much time or effort to follow up, and yet it can fundamentally drive long-term success in a service team culture:

- It can serve as an opportunity to offer coaching and feedback. It can also inform you of people's skills and limitations.
- It's a way for co-workers to gain ideas for improvement.
- It provides you with greater awareness of how you impact others. When you go back to the source, to the person you delegated a task to, you see with your own eyes what has been interpreted from your communication.

- It can create long-term positive change in a team.

Taking the extra step to check whether a task was done has significant benefits:

- positive results occur sooner
- next steps are always in view
- budgets are managed
- scope of activities is kept in bounds
- bad programs and projects are stopped sooner.

Follow-up means you get to the person before a problem gets too far out of control and you find out at the last minute that the work is going to be late, below quality or over budget.

In 2014, leadership coaching network Marshall Goldsmith Partners reviewed leadership development programs in eight major corporations, and reported, ‘Time and again, one variable emerged as central to the achievement of positive long-term change: the participants’ ongoing interaction and follow-up with colleagues’.

Creating a culture of follow-up is creating a culture of care.

DO YOU CARE?

Recently I was asked a question on a webinar: when do you deem a customer no longer a customer? In other words, when do you stop hustling? My response was, ‘Never!’ The sale is never over. In my business, I do everything I can to set up a system in which follow-up happens regularly to ensure I am nurturing the relationship.

Ask yourself:

- When your customers are using your product or service, how would you and they evaluate the user experience?
- What happens after your customers are through using your products or services?

After any exchange of currency or transaction for your goods and services, you have an opportunity to keep a friend for life. Using a friendly follow-up shows the customer that you're thinking about them, and will more likely keep you front of mind for them for next time.

So, what do you follow up for?

- to find out whether they received the product
- to ask how they're finding the product or service
- to send birthday wishes or well-wishes for a sickness in the family
- to thank them – simply to express gratitude and appreciation.

The real question is: how do you follow up with staff without sounding like a nagger, micromanager or someone who just plain doesn't trust them? How do you follow up with a peer who is equal to you? Here's the secret:

Effective follow-up is less 'Did you do it?' and more 'How did you go?'

It's more positive to be interested in how someone performed the task and to come to the conversation from a place of wanting to learn. Ask questions like:

- How did you go today?

- What was the impact?
- How can we do better?
- How can we do it differently next time?
- How can I help?

When you check in with staff, also be prepared to ask questions to help you determine their interpretation of what the job was. This is immediate feedback for you – how well you communicated, how well you influenced or persuaded, what their level of commitment is to you.

When you discover that something wasn't done to the standard you expect, or wasn't done at all, frame the conversation so that it's not a lecture. Try:

- I'd like to give you feedback and provide clarity on what the goal was...
- I'd like to find out why this is happening...
- I'd like to understand for next time, so I can help remove obstacles...
- I'd like to check in on what the priorities are...

Don't be caught by surprise and regret not following up. Make following up part of your habits, part of the way you work with people. Remember, too, that following up provides another reason to loop back in with a colleague or customer, and it's how relationships are strengthened. Make it a habit to not strike anything off your to-do list until you've followed it up.

Following up is another way of showing people you care and want to know what they experienced.

Service habit 10: Always follow up

Reflect now

- When was the last time you asked someone to do something for you, and they did it, but you were disappointed by the quality or level of execution?
- When did you last receive feedback from your own boss?
- What's vital about follow-up?
- In what ways do you find following up useful?

Embed the habit

To embed the habit internally, during your next team discussion:

- Create an expectation that there will be follow-up.
- Listen for what task you should personally follow up on and the standard that has been communicated.
- Check that there's a clear date or time when the task is expected to be completed.
- When you follow up on the task, remember that your intention is improved performance, and therefore approach with less 'Did you do it?' and more 'How did you go?'

To embed the habit externally, choose a client or customer and write a simple thank-you note, either handwritten or an email.

In the note, follow up on how they are; perhaps connect the message to the product or service you provided and simply express gratitude and appreciation. Then ask yourself:

- How did you feel following up with that customer just because you appreciate them?
- Did you receive a response?
- How could you create a system to make this follow-up part of your business-as-usual processes?



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Inspire people to take action

ON CHRISTMAS EVE 2014, Muharrem (a man who is hearing impaired) and his sister took a walk around their town in Turkey and encountered a very big surprise. The entire town had spent a month secretly learning sign language so that they could talk to their deaf neighbour! The video that captured this event (which can be found on YouTube, titled ‘Hearing Hands’) was coordinated by Muharrem’s sister, Özlem; telecommunications company Samsung had arranged the stunt in order to celebrate the launch of their video-call centre, which was specially designed for deaf people.

You face barriers, too, if you ask people to cooperate with you but haven’t learned to speak their language – not the spoken word, but rather their language of needs. No-one likes to feel that they’re being sold something or told to do something. People much prefer to feel that they’re buying something or acting based on their own ideas and needs.

To be able to talk to the heart of people’s needs, you need to be able to determine what’s in it for them beyond external motivators.

THE HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

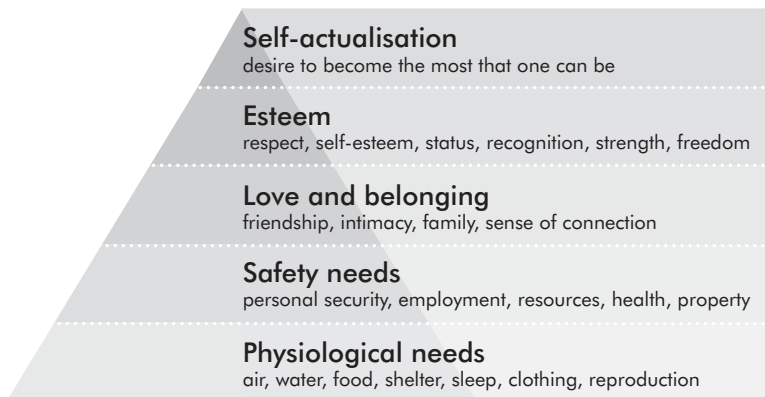
Think about the day-to-day tasks you do at work. If you work in a service industry, your role most days involves asking people to cooperate with you in some way:

- Please adopt a new procedure.
- Please behave a certain way.
- Please change to a new package.
- Please come back and see us again.

If you find yourself repeating the same instructions but not seeing people act, or having people forget your instructions when you walk away, or noticing that your communication is not resulting in the preferred actions – it's time to get clear on what drives people and pay attention to their needs.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs, shown following, was the first framework to set out what motivates people. The general idea is that lower needs have to be met first, before the higher needs become a focus.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs



So, let's take a look at physiological and safety needs through the eyes of employees and customers:

Employees' lower needs

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Security | Safe working conditions, benefits of employment, job security |
|-----------------|---|

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Physiological | Pay, food and drink options, benefits of employment |
|----------------------|---|

Customers' lower needs

| | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| Security | Need a trusted brand to rely on |
|-----------------|---------------------------------|

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| Physiological | Product or service meets their fundamental needs now |
|----------------------|--|

The truth is, these lower needs will influence people's decisions short term, but may not drive them to feel loyal to you or the business longer term. Their needs will motivate them, but may not be enough to inspire them to act again and again, the way you hope. What you've really got to do is inspire them.

The *Inc.* article, 'Why great leaders (like Richard Branson) inspire instead of motivate' makes a helpful distinction between motivation and inspiration. It refers to motivation as coming from an external force, pushing to accomplish or achieve an end result – it has a push tonality about it that requires effort. Inspiration, on the other hand, comes from within, after something or someone has inspired you and creates a pull tonality – an emotion you experience that inspires you to take action regardless of the end result.

This is where higher needs come in.

Employees' higher needs

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Self-actualisation | A challenging job (growth), advancement and achievement in role, business, life |
|---------------------------|---|

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Esteem | Job title, a sense of prestige and status, and of being a valuable contributor to the team or business |
|---------------|--|

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Belonging | Good work relations, professional career development, social capital |
|------------------|--|

Customers' higher needs

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Self-actualisation | The company or brand I buy from is aligned to my values; I like what the brand stands for |
|---------------------------|---|

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Esteem | The product or service I buy makes me feel good about who I am and contributes to my identity |
|---------------|---|

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Belonging | The brand or company knows me and what I like; they treat me like a friend, not a customer, and this gives me social capital |
|------------------|--|

These higher needs are the gateway to inspiring people. Motivation can be fickle at times and may not be enough to spur people to repeat an action time and time again; inspiration, however, can accomplish this.

Inspiration drives action.

HEART BEFORE HEAD

When you're trying to win the hearts and minds of your colleagues and customers, you need to communicate both feelings and function:

- Talking *feelings* is tapping into higher needs, their 'why', what's in it for them.
- Talking *function* is communicating the task or idea you want them to hear.

Feelings come first; function is second:

Feelings first

Function second

Deepen your working relationships

By making more time for your colleagues

Be appreciated by others

By staying back and finishing the job

Make your contribution valuable

By paying closer attention to the detail

Talking feelings before function is what will make your idea or message more impactful and lasting. So, when you start a conversation with the intention of inspiring someone with a message or idea, it's critical to start with the feelings – their 'why'. Present the benefits to them; show them why they should care. For example, if you wanted to inspire a colleague to stay back after hours and put in some extra time, you might say:

As you know, we're under pressure this week to meet this deadline, and you're a valuable contributor of this team,

with great ideas. Would you consider staying back one or two hours this week to assist us in getting this project over the line?

Or, if you wanted to inspire a customer to purchase a dress that they've tried on, you might say:

This dress is perfect for an interview scenario. It sets the tone for who you are – professional and presentable – and has been extremely popular lately. It looks perfect on you.

Simon Sinek explains in his book *Start with Why* that the power of 'why' is not opinion, it's biology. We're wired so that when the 'why' is presented to us first, we tap into that emotional component first – the feeling, the heart – before the rational components kick in and influence the decision. If we aren't given a 'why', it creates doubt, and then we look for data or science to guide our decision.

So: why should people care enough to do what you've asked? What will they gain? What's the benefit to them?

WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

'What's in it for me?' is the fundamental question people ask themselves when they're asked to do something. The most effective way to get someone to do the things you want is to make them happy about doing those things. You need to think about the answer to this question from the other person's point of view. Ask yourself:

- Do you know what's in it for them?
- Do you know your employees, teammates or customers well enough to talk to the heart of their needs?

If you want your teammates to do something for you or a customer to buy something, then make time to get to know them. Find out what makes them tick: the problems they have, the things that keep them up at night, and what gets them up out of bed in the morning to do what they do.

*The more you know about the people you serve,
the better you're able to help them.*

Service habit 11:

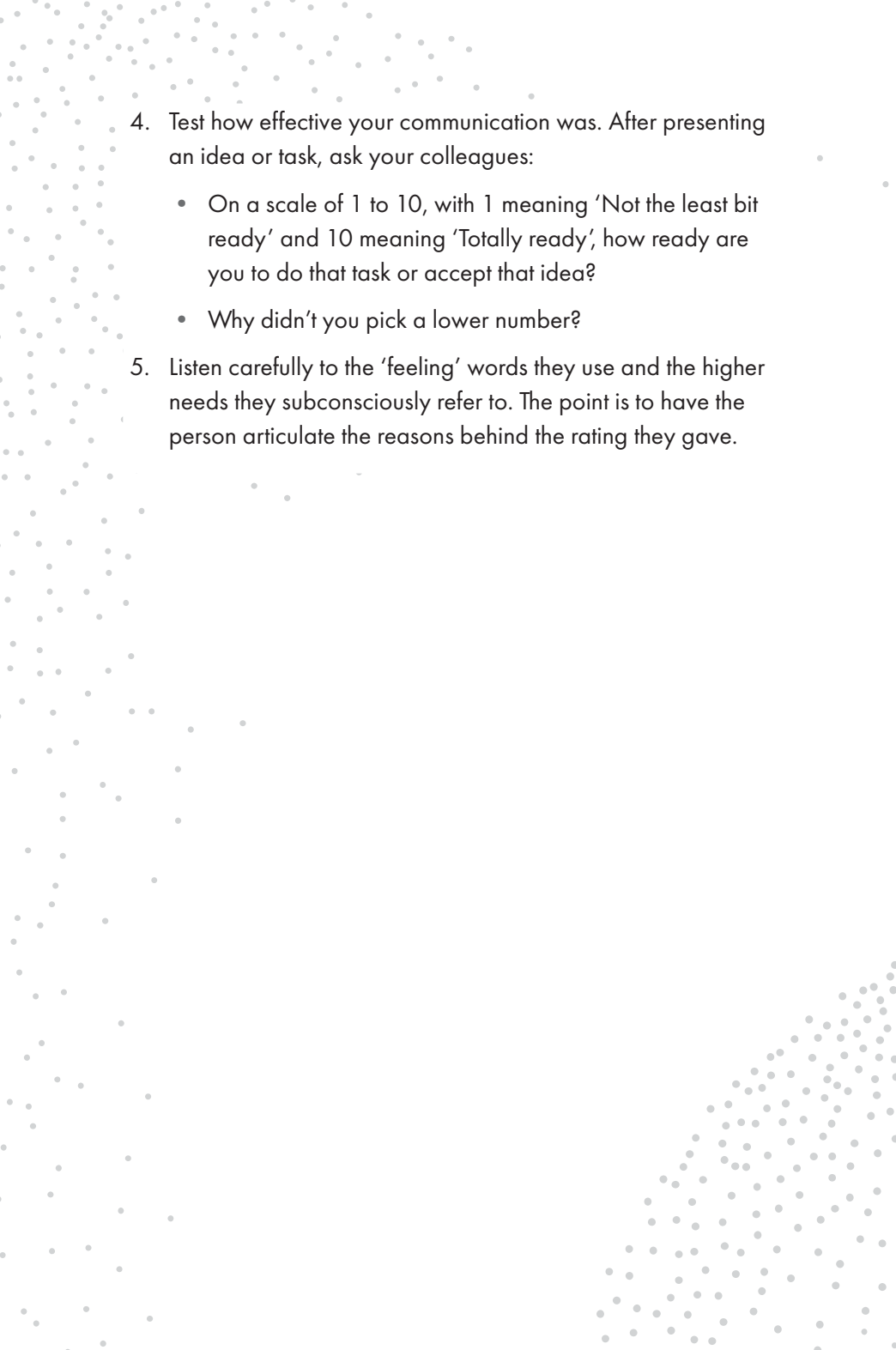
Start with the benefits when asking people to cooperate with you

Reflect now

- How can you craft a message, idea or instruction that makes people feel something?
- Who do you know who inspires people with their words?
- How well do you know your employees' lower and higher needs?
- How well do you know your customers' lower and higher needs?

Embed the habit

1. Make a list of all the tasks or behaviours that you would like someone to do (a colleague or customer).
2. Think about how their 'why' and feelings, and how those tasks and behaviours will benefit them (their higher needs). List your feelings and function side by side. If you're unclear about what people's lower and higher needs are, or if you're trying to work out what the benefits of certain tasks and behaviours might be for others.
3. Practise delivering your ideas and messages to people by first mentioning the benefits to them, and notice how responsive they are.

- 
4. Test how effective your communication was. After presenting an idea or task, ask your colleagues:
 - On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning 'Not the least bit ready' and 10 meaning 'Totally ready', how ready are you to do that task or accept that idea?
 - Why didn't you pick a lower number?
 5. Listen carefully to the 'feeling' words they use and the higher needs they subconsciously refer to. The point is to have the person articulate the reasons behind the rating they gave.