

smile!

**Evaluation copy
SMILE! customer service training
www.smile-video.com**



Facilitator's Guide

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A positive attitude can help you be more successful and go home happy!

“Welcome to the #27, smiles for everyone!” announces Reggie Wilson, the amazing singing bus driver from Seattle.

Since you are all now part of the #27 club, welcome! I think you’ll agree it’s a special place. Reggie’s positivity changes attitudes, even lives. And that’s the opportunity you have as the facilitator of a SMILE! workshop. Watch your people snap their fingers, sing along and learn from Reggie. He’s a great role model for people at all levels of an organization, from the frontline to the back-end support team members and everyone in-between.

This guide will help you prepare and deliver the SMILE! program. There’s even a module for follow-up. The goal of the SMILE! program is to give you the tools so that you can help your people learn how to choose a positive attitude. As the facilitator, you’ll get to watch, lead and enjoy – it all comes back!

First, watch the tape and take notes – you only get to watch it for the first time once, so, jot down your impressions. Then scan through the guide and get a feel for how the SMILE! workshop will draw out the learning so you can apply Reggie’s principles to your situation. Make notes you can refer to while leading your workshop. Please send me your comments and suggestions about the workshop – joel@smile-video.com – we’re committed to improving this guide and sharing what works.

I’ll step to the side of the bus, now, and let Reggie take over. Enjoy the ride! Joel Leskowitz

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*It is almost impossible to smile
on the outside without feeling
better on the inside.*

– Author Unknown

*People like doing business with
people who like doing business.*

– Matt Weinstein , author

Managing to Have Fun

*Success is a journey,
not a destination.*

– Ben Sweetland, author
I Can!

Thanks for smiling!

You can probably tell, I'm not really a singer – I just like to have a good time. What I found over the years, is that when I smile to my riders, they smile back and it makes me feel good. It also makes the day go quicker, I have more fun and, at the end of the day, I'm happy.

I've been smiling and singing with my riders for almost 17 years. When I started driving, I said to myself that I wanted to do something for Seattle they've never seen. First, I put a "SMILE!" sign in the front window. People started waving and asking me about it. So, I started greeting each person as they got on, encouraging them to smile. If I forgot to give them a smile, they asked for one. Well, before long, I couldn't hold back anymore – I started singing! It was fun and when they started singing with me, I realized something special was happening.

Now, on a day when I feel a little tired or down – one of my riders will say, "Hey, we haven't heard the smile song," and they'll sing it to me. Before I know it, I'm feeling good again. It's what happens when you're positive. Smiling is a great way to get along with customers. Try it yourself!

When you show the tape to your people, I hope you'll help them *feel* what a difference a smile can make. And also how much happier they will be within themselves when they're positive. Each letter of the word SMILE! has a lesson for those of us on the frontline. For example, integrity is about doing a good job – and you're really doing it for yourself. It all comes back.

Well, I'll catch you at the next stop. Remember, the best thing to do with a smile is to give it away! Keep on smiling!

Reggie Wilson
reggie@smile-video.com

P.S. Please send me some new stories, songs and jokes – I could use some new ones, and so could my passengers!

how SMILE! was born

Joel Leskowitz, producer

One rainy Seattle day, I was sitting at a coffee shop (guess which one) hoping to see Frasier walk by, when I noticed an interesting headline in the paper, “No Gloomy Riders on Reggie Wilson’s Bus.” The article was about a bus driver who carried a handmade sign with “smile” written on it. He delighted his passengers by telling jokes, singing and, above all, making them smile. I wanted to meet this singing bus driver.

So, I waited at the bus stop on the corner of First Avenue and Pike Street, just across from the famous Pike Place Market – oh, and just outside that little place that throws you-know-what! A green bus, #27, pulled up and the doors slid open. Reggie flashed me a smile, “Hey, how are you today?” I stepped up, paid my fare and took a seat near the front. As we rolled down 1st Avenue, Reggie told a few jokes. Some of the passengers laughed, while others shook their heads and tried not to smile. “That reminds me of a song,” said Reggie, and he started singing – and some of the riders started singing, too! “You make me smile...” Within minutes, the bus was transformed as the usual barriers to social interaction were falling before my eyes. Strangers were singing, clapping their hands and having a good time *together*, and Reggie was leading the show.

At the end of the route, Reggie relaxed for a moment and shared his thoughts about the day. “We’re all in this together,” he said. “I love seeing people get along, but the best part of making people smile is that *I* get to go home smiling.” We started filming the next week. Over the course of this project, I learned more about Reggie’s wonderful personal philosophy that has changed his life and the lives of thousands of people around the city. Now, you can ride with Reggie, too!

A big thanks for your interest in SMILE! It’s an honor to work with Reggie and bring out the SMILE! program, and it was a pleasure to work with the talented people at Metro-King County Transit. It’s given me a new glimpse into the challenges and successes of being a customer service professional. I hope YOU enjoy SMILE!

Joel Leskowitz
joel@smile-video.com

*What sunshine is to flowers,
smiles are to humanity...
along life’s pathway, the good
they do is inconceivable.*

– Joseph Addison
author

*The difference between ordinary
and extraordinary is that little
extra.*

– Unknown

*I’m going to control my side.
They want someone who’s
positive. Give them some
service, be nice, do your job
and you will feel great.*

– Reggie Wilson

If you want to know what I'm about and why my job is the way it is— and why I make it that way— that comes from what's inside of me.

– Reggie Wilson

To give real service, you must add something which cannot be bought or measured with money and that is sincerity and integrity.

– Donald A. Adams
author

He or she who empowers customers the mostest and fastest will win the grand prize.

– Tom Peters

What's in it for me?

We've all heard that question from our associates on the frontline. Or, perhaps, "Why should I bother?" or, "It's just too hard..."

For those of us training, managing or hiring, the question is, "How do you motivate frontline customer service providers?" Until now, no program has adequately addressed this issue. SMILE! is different and you will notice its uniqueness immediately.

I never thought I would be excited about customer service again. After years of customer service focus as a service rep, a manager, a trainer and even a guest expert on a FOX-TV special, I moved on.

Then, Reggie and SMILE! came into my life as an unexpected surprise and gift. The program rejuvenated my enthusiasm and passion about customer service and elevated my desire to contribute a critical piece in the customer service equation: the power of one's own attitude.

This entertaining video training package is a simple, effective way to inspire your associates, colleagues, supervisors and managers to adopt habits that will make a profound and positive difference in their own lives and raise the level of success of your organization.

When the riders on Reggie's bus experience the authenticity of his positive approach, it puts them in touch with something special and unique within themselves. Their day is lighter, brighter, and the impression is lasting.

As you deliver the SMILE! program, notice when your colleagues tap into something inside themselves. Often, as people get in touch with their own authenticity, they begin to live from the inside out and the opportunity for personal and professional breakthroughs is tremendous. In today's world, this is truly a gift.

Margie Summerscales Heiler is an executive coach, consultant and author. You may contact her at margie@smile-video.com

why SMILE!

background reading

SMILE! is a program about attitude for frontline customer service professionals, their supervisors and managers. In an engaging, entertaining, and inspiring way, it answers the question that customer service trainers and managers often hear, “What’s in it for me?”

The world is your mirror and your mind is a magnet. What you perceive in this world is largely a reflection of your own attitudes and beliefs. Life will give you what you attract with your thoughts. Think, act and talk negatively and your world will be negative. Think, act and talk with enthusiasm and you will attract positive results.

– Michael LeBoeuf, author
How to Win Customers and Keep Them for Life

While many books, videos, and programs ask customer service professionals to treat their customers in the same manner they would like to be treated, SMILE! breaks new ground with its Inside-Out Model for Customer Service[©].

In SMILE!, Reggie points out that he chooses his positive attitude each and every day. He is aware that he can’t control the external circumstances he encounters into on the road, whether it’s traffic, weather or difficult passengers. He makes a choice and in that way, he controls his side of the equation with positivity. This is what we mean by living from the inside out. Living from the inside out is what Reggie is referring to when he says, “...it comes from inside of me.”

To love what you do and feel that it matters — how could anything be more fun?

– Katharine Graham
Journalist

SMILE! shows how powerful every interaction is when the front-line customer service person makes a choice to be positive – for the sake of the customer AND, most importantly, for his or her own sake – because it improves his or her own quality of life.

The SMILE! program’s purpose is to demonstrate how attitude is THE PRIMARY FACTOR in each and every customer service interaction – attitude affects results and influences customer loyalty. Most of all, attitude affects our quality of life, which plays out in work and home situations every day.

Smiling is something that... it’s a beautiful thing. And like I always say, the best thing to do with a smile is to give it away.

– Reggie Wilson

Remember, most people spend more time on the job than anywhere, including the time they spend sleeping. So, why not make the work experience rewarding? Or, better yet, with the right attitude, the workplace can actually become a path to improve the quality of our lives... the possibilities are endless.

With that in mind, watch the tape, listen to Reggie’s S-M-I-L-E! song and consider how it empowers people to choose a positive attitude.

sincerity motivation integrity laughter enthusiasm!

The worst bankrupt in the world is the person who has lost his enthusiasm.

– H.W. Arnold
author

There are days, that I get on that bus and I don't feel like smiling, don't feel like putting up the smile sign. But I have to make a choice – where I want to be mentally, where I want to be with my attitude. Everybody needs help; sometimes you have to help yourself.

– Reggie Wilson

The only thing that cannot be duplicated by another company is the relationship your people have with the customer.

– Ken Blanchard

How will SMILE! impact your company or organization?

The potential is limitless. SMILE! offers a fun way to tap the most important resource in every organization, the human resource. When people connect a job well-done and a positive attitude with feeling better at the end of their day, they've discovered a secret they can use for life.

Some may say, "I don't have a microphone or an audience like Reggie."

While it's true not everyone has a captive audience like Reggie does, the video demonstrates how Reggie interacts with each and every rider to make each rider feel comfortable and like they're part of the group. He is attentive and he finds a way to connect with each passenger. He takes charge of his side.

So, regardless of whether you are behind the wheel, the counter or a desk, a positive attitude will help make your job easier and more enjoyable. SMILE! is a great way to plant new seeds for a new culture in your organization.

When you don't take things personally, it's easier to maintain a positive attitude that carries through into your life beyond the workplace. As one passenger in the video said, "Just that little bit of extra effort that he gives me, I do, I feel like I can turn around and give that to my patients. He's a good example." For society as a whole, you are starting a domino effect of positivity. What better outcome can there be from doing your job?

the workshop

Okay, now it's time to get ready to use SMILE!

Here's what we suggest: skim through this guide, watch the tape so that you become comfortable with the ideas and energy (it moves quickly). Then, watch it again and take some notes. When you turn off the tape, you may want to integrate your impressions with the facilitator's guide material and capture ideas for how SMILE! applies to your organization.

Review the background reading and incorporate any ideas from that into your trainer notes. There are no wrong answers! Feel free to tailor the structure and content so that it fits your organization's goals and your personal style. These times are merely a suggestion. Use your own judgment as you work through the program.

1. Introduction	5 minutes
2. Video	12 minutes
3. Large Group Discussion	15 - 20 minutes
4. Small Group Activity	20 - 30 minutes
5. Debrief Small Group	5 - 10 minutes
6. Team-Assessment / Action Plan	5 - 10 minutes
7. Small Group Action Planning	10 minutes
8. Large Group	10 minutes
9. Completion	5 minutes

Materials needed:

- TV-VCR
- Flip charts to record participants' observations and ideas
- Handouts

Pages 13 - 17 and 19 should be copied and ready to hand out to your participants

- Pens, extra paper for notes

introduction

Directions for Trainer: Introduce yourself to the group. Give a brief description of the session, why your organization is conducting it, what the objectives are and how the session will benefit the participants personally. There's a sample introduction in the SMILE! benefits section below.

The learning objectives of SMILE! are to:

- Learn how your own positive attitude can be the most important part of any customer service interaction.
- Understand that you are in charge of your own positive attitude in all situations.
- Discover how your quality of life improves by adopting the SMILE! philosophy.

SMILE! benefits

Today's session will show us an example of how a positive attitude can make a difference for our customers and for us. We will be watching a video called SMILE! It's a fun video about a bus driver who entertains his riders while he provides great customer service. Feel free to sing along! It also demonstrates an important lesson in the dynamics of attitude, relationships and customer service.

The producer of the video learned about the driver from a newspaper article. "No Gloomy Riders on Reggie Wilson's Bus," was the headline. It was about a bus driver who delighted his passengers by telling jokes and singing and, above all, making them smile.

Reggie has become famous in Seattle because of his SMILE! attitude and positive customer service. In a profession where drivers can become discouraged by rude, discourteous and even antagonistic customers, Reggie enjoys his work because he chooses to be positive. As he performs his job, he chooses an infectious, cheerful, positive attitude because he knows how significantly his attitude impacts his interactions with his riders, and how significantly it impacts his own quality of life. He is pro-actively positive, or, as he puts it, "I'm going to control my side."

Using the SMILE! program offers everyone the opportunity to improve his or her quality of life by learning and applying Reggie's fundamental truths. Reggie is very clear about how it helps him – he feels better.

Beyond greater personal satisfaction and happiness on the job, using the SMILE! principles will help us become walking magnets to attract the best customers and to convert difficult customers into loyal

customers. A side benefit of SMILE! is a positive workplace that attracts and retains good employees, a fun culture where people enjoy happiness along with success.

video

Purpose: Prepare participants for what they will see and its importance. Focus their attention on the points you want them to discuss later in the exercises, depending on the context for your training event.

Directions to Trainer: Introduce the video to your associates and tell them what it's about. Ask them to watch how Reggie interacts with his customers because you will discuss it later.

For example: You might suggest that they pay attention to how Reggie interacts with his riders, or notice how the riders respond to the attention he gives them. Or, if you like, have your participants pretend they are on the bus with Reggie, give them permission to sing along and have fun. By pointing out these and other examples, you can prepare them for the discussion that will come after the tape is played.

Show the tape now.

large group discussion

Purpose: The goal of this exercise is to highlight and reinforce the main ideas from the video. You want them to pick out the positive behaviors and understand the effect those behaviors have on customers.

Directions to Trainer: You can open the discussion with an inquiry:
“Let’s explore the possibility that we can create a SMILE! environment here in our organization.”

A good way to have the participants focus their attention on this inquiry is to ask questions. Here are some questions you can use to both start the discussion and to keep the discussion on track. Record their comments on flip charts.

- How can a positive attitude make a difference for us?
- Can you imagine what it would be like to have a day full of happy customers who enjoy being with you?
- What was your first impression? What do you think of Reggie?
Did you notice Reggie’s attitude? He acknowledges each passenger and considers what will be the best way to engage them and lift their mood. He’s friendly but appropriate for each person.
- How did Reggie use his SMILE! sign? Do you think people notice it in the window?
What did Reggie mean when he takes care of what he calls, “his side.”
Can you have fun AND be respectful of a customer’s concerns?
- Would you like to ride Reggie’s bus? Why?
- How would Reggie’s attitude affect you if you were on his bus and you were “feeling down?”
- What did you see Reggie doing to make people feel good?
- What did Reggie say about those days when he’s not feeling like smiling?
Notice that he admitted he’s not always happy. What did he say about choice?
- How do you think Reggie felt at the end of his day?
- What would it feel like if we had a SMILE! attitude here in our organization / team?

Notes to the trainer: Here are some critical points you can bear in mind as you conduct your large group discussion. They should be called to the participants' attention before they begin their small group discussions.

- Reggie creates a group by treating everyone with respect and going out of his way to stay positive.
- One rider said he knew he would be taken care of. What did Reggie do or say that made him feel that?
- Another man said Reggie's energy infuses everyone. Energy can be positive or negative. How does that show up for you in the workplace?
- It's hard not to smile when you're feeling good. How does smiling break down social barriers and put people at ease?
- Smiling gave one of the riders a workout with his face and made him feel good.
- Reggie knows people aren't always cooperative. What do you do when someone doesn't cooperate the way you think they should or doesn't meet your expectations?
- Reggie doesn't take things personally. He says he maintains his positive attitude in all situations. By remaining positive he takes home more energy. How about you? [Note: when someone behaves in an uncooperative manner, it often has nothing to do with you so you don't have to take it personally.]
- Reggie's supervisor says that when a driver extends his heart and kindness, it comes back tenfold. What does this mean to you?



SMILE! team-assessment

Rate our team or organization with respect to each of the following on a scale of 1 - 5.
1 = never 5 = always

1a. When it comes to sincerity, where would we like to be as a team when we deal with our customers (internal and external)?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 always

1b. Where are we?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 always

2a. As a team, how motivated would we like to be in order to do a good job?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 always

2b. How motivated are we to do a good job?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 always

3a. When it comes to maintaining integrity as a team, where would we like to be?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 always

3b. Where are we?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 always

4a. Where would we like to be in terms of laughing and having a good time?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 always

4b. Where are we?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 always

5a. As a team, where would we like to be when it comes to enthusiasm?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 always

5b. Where are we?

Never 1 2 3 4 5 always

SMILE! Action Plan

As a result of this training, I will demonstrate SMILE! In the following ways:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The following describes how I want to be remembered by my customers and associates:

small group activity

Purpose: Transfer knowledge to on-the-job application.

Directions to Trainer: Divide up the participants into smaller groups, and have each group discuss one part of the SMILE! acronym – Sincerity, Motivation, Integrity, Laughter, Enthusiasm.

Tell the participants: In this small group exercise we are going to explore how to apply SMILE! to our organization. Now, I realize you're not all driving a bus, but let's see how aspects of what Reggie does on the bus to create a positive interaction with his riders could work here. For example, what do you think would happen if you smiled at your customer when they walked in the room? Now let's break up into small groups and look at each letter in the word SMILE. Take a few minutes to write down your thoughts, and then discuss among yourselves.

Distribute the S-M-I-L-E! handouts.

Tell the groups to be ready to report to the large group with their most important findings.



S... Sincerity

Reggie describes sincerity as being real, caring, and working each situation in a positive way.

What does sincerity mean for you?

How did Reggie show sincerity?

How do you show sincerity on your job to your customers? To your associates? In your life?



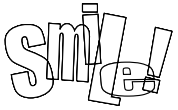
M... Motivation

Reggie believes that attitude is 99% and the other 1% is your approach, the action.

What does motivation mean for you?

What do you believe motivates Reggie?

What motivates you to do a good job? At home?



I... Integrity

For Reggie, integrity is “seeing it through, doing the best you can, and realizing that you’re really doing it for yourself.”

What is integrity for you?

Where did you see integrity showing up on the video?

Where do you see integrity showing up in your life? At work?



L... Laughter

Laughter gives Reggie a “pump” and energy. It helps people get along and is attitude changing.

What do you love about laughter?

On the #27 bus, how did laughter make a difference for the riders?

What do you think happens when people take themselves too seriously?

Would it make a difference if you had more humor and laughter in your workplace?



E... Enthusiasm

“Enthusiasm,” says Reggie, “is what we all need. Keep it deep inside your soul and you will succeed.”

What does enthusiasm mean for you?

What does Reggie’s comment about enthusiasm mean to you?

What did you notice about enthusiasm on the bus? Was it contagious?

What happens when you feel enthusiastic about your work?

What does it take for you to be enthusiastic at work? At home?

debrief from small group discussion

Purpose: To aid participants to learn from each other. This section of the workshop can help gain “buy-in” to the concepts of SMILE!

Directions to Trainer: Have each group report its most important findings. Record their comments on the flip chart. It may be interesting to compare the comments and see how they are different or similar.

Tell the participants: Reggie’s SMILE! song lays out what he thinks about each of those values. A value is something we hold important in our own lives, something we live by.

- Who would like to share from the small group discussion?
- What do you think is meant by a value?
- When Reggie talks about his values, he says SMILE!
- How would you describe your organization’s values?

large group

Purpose: To anchor and reinforce the learning from today and transfer the behaviors back to the job.

Directions to Trainer: Ask participants to complete the self-assessment and action plan individually. Reproduce forms. You’ll need plenty of pens, too.

Tell the participants: Now is your chance to think about and rate where we are as a team and where we want to be. For example, circle “always” if you think we are always sincere with our customers. Some of you may notice a gap between where we want to be and where we are. After the exercise, we’ll talk about how we can keep our good scores high, and also how we can close any gaps between where we are and where we want to be. Your honest assessment is critical, and no one is being singled out.

This exercise also gives us a chance to make a plan of action. These can be simple things. For example, “I plan to greet 5 customers a day and watch what happens.” Make your plans realistic, concrete and specific.

Remember, our goal is to come up with a plan to transfer what we saw Reggie doing on the bus to what we can do here in our organization.

Hand out the team assessment form for participants to fill out

small group action planning

Purpose: To state the intention of committing to an action.

Directions to Trainer: Have participants go back to their small groups to share their action plans.

Note to Trainer: Committing to a new action or behavior is a powerful event. Sometimes people are shy or hesitant. Try to create a spirit in the group that encourages risk-taking. Some groups like to make it into a game!

Tell the participants: Now is our opportunity to break some boundaries. This is exciting! In your groups, each of you will describe your action plan. When the first person has spoken, the person on his or her left will make a positive comment and then read his or her own action plan, and so on, until all the people in your small group have spoken. Then, decide on one action plan that, as a group you think is the best, and discuss that for a few minutes.

Each group will report the action plan it has agreed upon to the large group. Choose a reporter. When we come back to the large group, we will discuss your action plans and choose those we wish to pursue as a team.

completion

Purpose: To reinforce your message and send the group away smiling!

Tell the participants: Well, we're all getting off at the next bus stop. It's time to gather our things and get ready to leave. I hope you've had fun and learned how much fun you can have when you choose a positive attitude and how productive it can be when you work as a team. Thank you for your participation. And remember what Reggie says, "The best thing to do with a smile is to give it away."



for supervisors only

Supervisors of frontline customer service professionals have a challenging role. They are responsible to their management, employees and customers. They are on the frontline all the time! It's especially important for them to use the principles of SMILE! for themselves. Supervisors have an opportunity to model these principles for their associates. They also have an opportunity to practice these principles for their own peace of mind and happiness.

Discussion points:

- How can you support your frontline customer service providers as they choose positive attitudes?
- What can you do to support your associates even when they choose methods that may seem unorthodox? Reggie's supervisor worked with him to accommodate an appropriate way to display the smile sign and to allow him to have fun on the bus. They made a deal: safety was the number one consideration.
- What happens when you don't take things personally?
- How can laughter be a part of your management style? Can you remember a time you laughed at yourself and enjoyed a fun moment with your associates?
- What does it mean to your associates when they know you are sincere? When you listen?
- Can you identify ways that SMILE! demonstrates how to motivate your associates? How would you explain that when they choose a positive attitude they accomplish the maximum in benefits for your organization and for themselves?

the inside-out model for customer service[©]

background reading

*Attitude is, in my opinion,
99 percent. And the one
percent is the approach:
that's the action.*

— Reggie Wilson

*The way we see the problem IS
the problem.*

— Steven Covey

*Good customer service and a
positive attitude come from the
inside out.*

— Margie Summerscales Heiler

*The highest reward for a
person's toil is not what they
get for it, but what they
become by it.*

— John Ruskin, author

Many facilitators have found the SMILE! program to be useful in launching a discussion around the ideas of choice, attitude and the power of being positive.

Some of you may be familiar with the concept of the Law of Attraction. This model offers the perspective that the world is as we are, we attract our own experience. For example, how many times have you felt angry and then faced customers who are also angry? Rarely do we look in the mirror and consider how we might have helped create our situations and circumstances.

When we are willing to pause and look inside ourselves, we can consider how the customer mirrors our own attitudes. Remember, most customers will smile when you smile at them. The Law of Attraction holds out the idea that we are magnets, that we create and bring experiences to ourselves. We can polarize or repel. Radiate frustration and we'll get frustrated customers and have a difficult day. Choose friendliness and we'll get friendly customers and feel better.

The Inside-Out Model for Customer Service[©] is similar. By choosing our own attitude, we are setting the tone for our interaction with our customer. It makes us feel better about ourselves. Now, even if we adopt a positive attitude, there may be times that customers are unhappy and even rude. We still have a choice to be positive.

TRAINER: If you'd like to open this discussion with your group, invite your participants to consider the possibility that they can choose their attitudes. Talk about the difference between reacting to the environment and being proactive.

Ask if anyone has chosen to set a positive tone for an interaction despite a customer's attitude. Here are a few questions that can open a discussion of the Inside-Out Model and the Law of Attraction.

How does Reggie set the tone for each interaction with his passengers?

What other examples can you remember of meeting someone who sets a positive tone? A negative tone?

How will you set the tone for each interaction with your customers?

How will it feel when you get your first smile from a customer?

They Who Laugh, Last!

Humor and Fun Support Customer Service

by Paul McGhee, PhD.

A middle-aged man dies, and soon finds himself with both St. Peter and the devil. St. Peter asks his name. And he says, “Bower, Johnny Bower.” And St. Peter says, “Johnny Bower? Oh, I’m so sorry, you’re not supposed to die for another five years. We’ll have to send you back down.”

Mr. Bower is overjoyed, but he notices the two doors, one leading to Heaven, the other to Hell, and hears what sounds like a party behind the door to Hell. He asks if he can go over and just look around. The devil says, “Of course, but just for a few minutes.” So he goes over and finds an incredible party going on, with wonderful food and drinks, and everyone obviously having a great time. He says to himself, “If this is Hell, I want to be part of it!”

So when he gets back to earth, he sins his brains out for the next five years, doing every immoral thing imaginable to be sure he winds up in Hell. And sure enough, five years to the day later, he’s facing the devil again in front of the door to Hell. As the door opens, he hears no music, and there is no food or a party. There are just these flames leaping out from the door. In disbelief, he asks, “Where’s the party? Where are all the people having fun?” The devil grins and says, “Oh, you fell for that? Well, five years ago you were a prospect. Now you’re a customer.”

This story serves as a memorable reminder that we sometimes treat our customers differently once we’ve won them over--in spite of the fact that most successful companies today emphasize the importance of outrageous customer service. Companies that consistently provide excellent service have employees who take the initiative to do the little things, and employees are much more likely to do those little things when they enjoy their work. Also, a funny thing happens when your customers see that you love what you do. Since the spirit of fun is contagious, they are drawn toward you, and (other things being equal, such as prices of your competitors) want to do business with you. If your customers enjoy their contact with your company, they are more likely to want to develop a long-term relationship with you.

Having fun at your work helps assure that you’ll leave your customers feeling better as you serve them. As Gene Webb, area supervisor for Quick Stop Food Mart Inc. notes, fun on the job makes your employees feel good, and “. . . if your employees feel good, they’ll always make your customers feel good.”

Just think about the difference in the reactions you’ve had speaking to people who answer the phone 1) with an upbeat and energetic voice that communicates they’re having a great day and are eager to do whatever it takes to satisfy your needs, or 2) with those whose tone suggests they are emotionally drained, are just going through the motions, and hate their job. Which one do you want to do business with?

An important part of service, then, is your attitude. A positive attitude is an essential “people skill” that many companies now try to cultivate in employees, since it is considered a cornerstone of quality customer service. Chances are your competitor is also committed to quality, so you need to go the next step and make customers’ interaction with you enjoyable – even fun.

This will help set you apart from others and keep your customers coming back, because your attitude will be remembered long after other details are forgotten. Cultivating your sense of humor helps assure that you bring a positive attitude to all of your customers and boosts your chances of making the interaction fun. It also provides an effective tool for managing frustrations, upsets and tensions on the job. This is essential, because stressed out employees do not provide quality service.

If service is important in your business, you've probably heard statements like the following:

- 90% of customers who are dissatisfied with service don't complain.
- 80% of those dissatisfied customers will not come back.
- Each one will tell a minimum of 9 other people about his/her bad experience.

The opposite is also true. Satisfied customers come back. And they also tell other people about their experience with you. This is especially the case when you do something that makes your customer's contact with you fun. It stands out so much from their experience with other companies that it's memorable. People can't resist saying to their friends, "You're not going to believe what happened to me today. . ."

Stew Leonard's Dairy Store in Norwalk, Connecticut consistently applies this principle. One day, as shoppers came to the produce section, they found a band of mechanical farm animals playing country music. The store does something like this every day. People flock to the store for groceries, and can't help but tell their friends about that day's shenanigans. As one customer said, "The main reason I shop here is that it is fun."

The Wall Street Journal recently reported a study of Sears employees which found that a 5% increase in measured employee job satisfaction leads to a 2% increase in customer satisfaction. There is every reason to assume that as fun and humor on the job help boost employee satisfaction even more, customer satisfaction will show a corresponding increase.

Reggie Wilson demonstrates the impact of fun and humor on customer satisfaction every day. He uses laughter and a light touch to take control of his own positive attitude— even on the tough days. The shared fun on his bus rides creates good feelings and a positive relationship with his customers— the kind of relationship **you** want with **your** customers! He improves the quality of life of everyone who rides with him. By bringing fun and humor (when appropriate) to your own work, you'll boost your effectiveness on the job and help assure that your customers love doing business with you.

Paul McGhee is president of The Laughter Remedy in Wilmington, DE. He is a professional speaker who has published 11 books on humor and is internationally known for his own humor research.

For more information: www.LaughterRemedy.com



the SMILE! song

*You have to be sincere and you
have to care. And I care about
people, so I just try to empa-
thize and work each
situation in a positive way.*

— Reggie Wilson

*Integrity is doing the best that
you can. And you're really
doing it for yourself. I feel
really good when I'm doing a
service. With all the smiling
and all the laughing, my first
and foremost obligation is to
get people where they're going
safely. Now, I may sing and
I may laugh, but I'm always
watching my road, I'm always
checking my mirrors, and I'm
feeling good, because I went
through the day, my service is
good, my job is good, and I get
to go home smiling..*

— Reggie Wilson

Some groups enjoy singing the song. It's a chance to be silly!
Let someone be the driver and invite others to be the chorus.
Think of it as bus-karaoke!

SMILE

You make me smile, even when it rains
You make me smile over and over again

Now the S in smile, stands for sincerity
'cause it's got to be so real, oh can't you see

Now the M stands for motivation
Because I'm in charge of my positive thinking in
all situations.

Now I, it could mean me or you,
But it stands for integrity, so I'll see it through

Now L, there's an L in this song
It stands for laughter and helps us get along

Now Enthusiasm is what we all need
So keep it deep inside your soul, and you will succeed

So, no matter where you go, no matter if it snows,
Just smile, just smile, just smile
Say it,
Just smile, just smile, just smile