

GIVING A \$#!+ SYNOPSIS

There was a day when businesses wanted to be helpful. There was a day when businesses took pride in obliging people. There was a day when businesses would jump through hoops to make sure customers were taken care of. But those days, sadly, seem to have left us.

Today it seems like many businesses are regularly cooking up ways to make it easier and less costly for them while making it more difficult for customers. It often seems like things are purposely done to get in the way so customers will get out of the way.

All of this brings up a couple of questions, 1) why have things come to this, and 2) what can be done about it?

Let's begin by looking for answers to question 1.

For centuries, we have been hoodwinked into believing that humans are fundamentally competitive and selfish. And while that is partially true, it is also true that we have better angels in our nature who are cooperative and helpful. However, while we listened to those better angels for the first 200,000+ years, over the last 10,000 years, we have opted more times than not for the lesser-angels option. We have warred against one another and fought viciously to win all manner of things from land to resources to wealth to the bigger slice of pie, and the fallout has been tragic. Yet, we persist. We persist in the relentless pursuit of getting more and being better than our neighbor. And nowhere has this pursuit been more relentless than our workplaces.

While every reason for business is to serve people, that has been lost and replaced with the thinking that 1) business is all about money, 2) productivity is paramount and command and control are the ways to get it, and 3) business, so as not to appear weak, must be void of emotion and humanity. This has left us with workplaces full of self-interest and apathy, and why customers are largely distrusting and dissatisfied. When those who serve, or are supposed to be serving, are self-focused, the experience can only be false and disappointing.

Early in the book there is a story about a florist who had a policy that placed company interests above customer interests. It's the kind of thing most of us get from businesses on a fairly regular basis, and it sucks to be quite frank.

But it doesn't have to be this way.

In another story, we found a few flight attendants who did things differently. They took the time to be helpful. They took the time to go out of their way to take away anxiety. They took the time to make a bad situation better and bring a little happiness to a stranger.

But why? What made them different? This is where we find the answer to what can be done to change things.

What made those flight attendants different, put simply, was that they gave a \$#!+. They were willing to be inconvenienced by the work of compassionate service. They opened their eyes to see outside of themselves beyond their needs and their company's needs.

But those were just a few employees, what about an organization? How can an entire organization do it?

There are all kinds of answers that people might suggest. Some are complicated and others less so, but there is fundamentally only one way to get the ball rolling and that is to build a service-focused culture, not an employee-focused or customer-focused culture, a service-focused culture.

And why? Because service is the business of business. Every business is in business to help people succeed and achieve their goals. That's it. So, if service is what business does, that should be what it focuses on and continually works to perfect.

Moreover, if you put employees or customers at the center of your attention, you inevitably exclude one or the other, but when you focus on service, you include both. When employees are well served and get what they need to be successful, they can do their best work. When customers are well served and get what they need to be successful, they can achieve their goals. So it follows, when serving is a cultural norm, everyone helps others naturally, and people see success regardless of whether they are employees or customers.

So, how does this cultural norm get created?

1. By communicating messages regularly and often that service is the priority.
2. By having leaders model what it is to be of service.
3. By encouraging cooperation and helpfulness throughout the organization.
4. By ensuring every delivery system is continually tweaked to show as much concern for human needs as technical ones.

But there's a rub. Until you get this service-focused foundation built, there is no point in working on things like journeys or hiring practices. And you can stop training behaviors, greetings, how to shake hands, etc. These are just bandages covering a cancer. And that cancer is having priorities in your organization's genetic makeup that compete with the fundamental purpose of helping people. It's like a sports franchise where the players are interested in personal achievement rather than winning games. Without everyone rowing together, it will never work.

So, how do we begin? It starts with giving a \$#!+, the willingness to be inconvenienced to be compassionate (i.e., cognizant of the needs of others coupled to a desire to help). It begins by looking around and searching out opportunities to help those next to you, to lift them up before lifting yourself. It means seeing others as humans with needs, goals, and challenges and then adjusting what you do to be more helpful. This is where the fix begins, being willing to take the time to be aware and then taking action for someone other than yourself. This is the essence of giving a \$#!+.

We don't have to be fearless superheroes, we just have to be willing, aware, and helpful.

