2 powerful words

By Chris Laping on April 22nd, 2016 | **Comments (1)**

"What helps people, helps business." —Leo Burnett

Last week, I got a much-needed haircut. I went to see Rodger, who has been cutting my hair for 13 years. In that time, he has become a great friend and mentor. Rodger has opened a number of high-end salons with his wife, Lisa, and they've created the kind of environment that builds loyal customers for life. The energy from his team is awesome, and I constantly reflect on what billion-dollar companies could learn from their small yet meaningful business.

After another great experience, I drove home and pushed myself to articulate why I love getting my haircut with Rodger. Furthermore, I wanted to find words to describe his team and why they're so unique. It's funny how experience drives emotion. Instead of finding strategic words my business school professors would be proud of, I kept reflecting on a basic human need. You see, the reason I love my haircuts is simply this: Rodger and his team make me feel like I matter. And the real reason they're able to do is they treat each other the same way.

To be clear, there isn't some fancy, disingenuous mission statement hanging on the wall that says, "We provide unparalleled guest experience!" The bottom of the receipts don't advertise customer service surveys proclaiming, "Our customers are always right ... tell us how we did." Thankfully, there also isn't any salon standard that awkwardly forces the team member to say, "Thank you," for no apparent reason. Instead, it's a genuine human interaction that expresses, "You matter."

For many organizations, "You matter" is limited to the customer. Leaders drive an expectation that customers are the center of the universe. But as I've written before, the best way to build customer loyalty is to have **team members who love the brand first**. Obviously, love doesn't just happen either. It's the outcome of simple things leaders do (or don't do) to grow and develop their teams and reinforce how their work makes a difference.

I used to work with a guy who wasn't my boss but was senior to me. Routinely, I'd find myself in his office talking about the needs of his team, and how I could help. He was pretty direct about his expectations and was relentless about follow up. At the end of every conversation though, he'd politely ask, "Is there anything I can do to support you?"

It always made such a huge impact on me. In the early days, I didn't want to take him up on his request because I wasn't quite sure if he was being sincere. However, over time I looked forward to the magical question because I knew my work could benefit from his influence and thought leadership. In a simple way, he was saying, "You matter."

I also remember working with an esteemed board member who once said, "Everyone walks around with an imaginary sign on their forehead that says: 'Make Me Feel Important!'" To me, that's the essence of, "You matter!" It isn't team-engagement campaigns or slogans; it isn't a town hall meeting with a lot of better-for-being-here rhetoric; and it certainly isn't motivational posters and T-shirts. It's simple and

genuine expressions such as, "Is there anything I can do to support you?" Or, "When you were out of the office earlier this week with the flu, I thought about you a lot. Are you feeling better?"

Obviously, if you don't feel it, don't say it. But if that's the case, why don't you feel it?

During my executive tenure, I made mistakes I'll remember for a long time. As an example, there were times I was known to "look through people" when I was processing information or solving a business problem. Not exactly the kind of stuff that puts you in the leadership hall of fame. While I truly cared about my team (and still do), my actions didn't always express it. So let me ask you, are your actions expressing you care?

My haircut isn't just a haircut. It's in an environment that should be emulated everywhere in the business world. After all, when you're no longer on this planet, people aren't going to measure you by the things you did — they're going to measure you by the quality of your relationships. I know all of this may seem squishy and soft, but it's transformative to life and business. "You matter" drives outcomes, and it may even surprise you how much exhibiting it will make you feel like *you* matter.