



LOVE, ALWAYS

by Will Marré

Enduring friendships and great service share the same key ingredient.

Over the years, I have advised many enterprises on methods to improve their customer connection. It seems everyone wants to offer a great customer experience, yet few really do.

Most customer care efforts fail because they over-focus on institutionalizing the efficiency of customer “touch points.” While it’s true that people like businesses that are easy to do business with, it isn’t enough to win customers’ hearts. The deeper truth is that people are jaded because too often we are treated like objects. Customers are dissected into groups characterized by their needs and desires, and then they are marketed to with specialized products and levels of service.

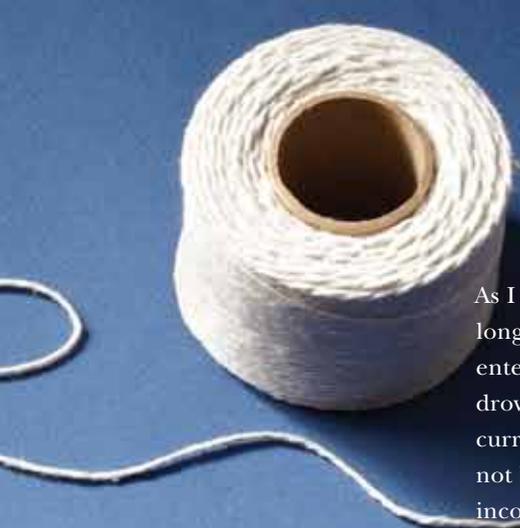
This, of course, is all good but woefully insufficient. As Mark Twain famously said when his wife cursed, “The words are right, but there is no music.” What he was getting at is that everyone has a sincerity detector that is alert for genuine, individual caring versus the kind of professional but fake sympathy undertakers offer.

So what does work? Over and over again, from great customer-focused companies to great individuals, what connects us to each other is genuine love. There is simply no substitute. Consider the few people you feel the most loyal to. Think especially of friends where the bonds of family and shared DNA are not present. What causes you to feel unbreakable ties of friendship to someone different than you? Someone with perhaps different opinions and different interests?

Think of deep, abiding friends who are riddled with quirks and imperfections. Why in the world have they earned your loyalty? Research from positive psychology gives us a clue to the mystery of friendship. It seems to come down to three big things:

1. Trust.

We create bonds of loyalty when we make promises and keep them. When the promises are timely, relevant and impactful, love blossoms like cherry trees in the spring.



As I write this my wife, Debbie, is spending three days with a longtime friend, quizzing her friend on a test she must pass to enter into a specialized profession. Debbie flew 1,000 miles and drove her friend to the testing center this morning, where she is currently waiting for her. This is a valuable act of help that will not be forgotten. Trust is built by making promises that may be inconvenient to keep but that are kept.

2. Seeing the goodness in others.

Very few people in our lives judge us by our hearts instead of our behavior. But all of us are far more than our behavior. Our motives are higher — and our deepest desires are nobler — than our awkward efforts.

I was recently coaching an over-controlling executive who has a well-earned reputation of being a jerk. Yet when you peel away the jerkiness, what's inside is a scared soul who desperately wants to be accepted and loved. He mistakenly thinks high achievement will make others respect and value him, so he bulldozes his way through life. This executive has become very coachable for one simple reason: when he feels “seen,” his defenses melt and his innate goodness emerges. We are not our behavior. We are all far more than that.

3. Giving our gift.

Each of us has a preferred way of creating value for others. Again, positive psychology tells us we like to enrich each other in one of these methods of gift-giving:

- *Teaching:* Like Oprah, some of us offer value through learning and sharing vital knowledge that empowers others.
- *Creating:* Like Steve Jobs, some of us want to create tools and the means for others to do great and amazing things.
- *Helping:* Like Mother Teresa, some of us thrive when we offer our hands to help.
- *Fun:* Although life may seem hard, there are those who always see the possibility of fun. Like Richard Branson, when they see an airplane they see a party.

All of us may have bits of each of these four gift preferences, but for most of us, one is dominant. When we become clear on the way we are designed to show our love, our life becomes much more satisfying and our relationships much deeper.

These three simple things — building trust, seeing the goodness of others and giving our gift — are simple acts that transform us. It's no surprise that love is at the core of enduring friendships, and the core of great customer service, and the answer to almost every truly important question.



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