
EMOTIONAL VALUE

Creating Strong Bonds
with Your Customers

By the author of the bestselling *A Complaint Is a Gift*

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and DIANNA MAUL

An Excerpt From

*Emotional Value:
Creating Strong Bonds with Your Customers*

by Janelle Barlow and Dianna Maul
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FOREWORD

Emotion: we experience it, we feel it, it affects us, it moves us. Our memories, our relationships, our decisions are all infused with emotion. Emotion is central to our lives as humans, which include not only our families and friends and those close to us but also the many people we interact with every day in the services we use. In the service economy, and more importantly in the new concept of the experience economy, the role of emotion is becoming increasingly recognized as a critical aspect of these interactions and indeed very often comprises the core of the value we receive. Consider the care of a doctor, the helpfulness of a sales assistant, the welcome of a waiter, the adrenaline thrill of a theme park ride, or the poignancy of a theatrical performance. Yet the interest in emotion has not always been the case, and for many, especially in the business world, emotion is still little understood and therefore kept out of the equation. Every business would agree nonetheless that customer satisfaction is vital for success.

Customer satisfaction measurement is now one of the leading performance indicators together with net profit and return on assets. Because we have statistical indices of satisfaction and can monitor and measure it, we often forget that satisfaction is itself an emotional response. We feel satisfied or we feel dissatisfied. But as customers we can also feel excited or

relaxed or angry or disappointed or confident. Is this the same as satisfaction? Our own experiences would say no. To say we feel dissatisfied hardly captures the experiential nature of the frustration and even rage that consumers say they feel when customer service doesn't meet their expectations. Staff have to learn to handle complaints that are often communicated in a highly emotionally charged manner so that a complaint is indeed a gift, as Janelle Barlow has previously highlighted. Without question, service providers have to be increasingly emotionally competent and intelligent in their emotional labor.

These many consumer emotions are the focus of a growing body of academic marketing research that is starting to open a window on the consumer experience beyond satisfaction. The study, understanding, and application of consumer emotions is a new and exciting field; the research is already providing fascinating new insights. Academic research eventually informs the practical questions asked and applications demanded by business, but the link has to be made. How do we measure consumer emotions? How do we train staff to recognize and deal with emotions? How do we maximize the experiences of our customers? How do we increase emotional value? This book provides such a link and is one of the first practical applications in this new field of consumer emotions. It is a book for the new experience economy that gives service providers a leading edge into developing customer value beyond satisfaction. Janelle Barlow has brought together these new ideas and sets them within a framework that enables companies to develop emotional value for their customers.

As a researcher, I have had a passion for the study of emotion, particularly consumer emotions, for the past ten years. From the early interest that Janelle showed in my work, and the work of others in the field, to the completion of this book, it is clear that she shares the passion as well. It is a passion to provide real value for customers and the people who serve them. It is a passion to give the reader the tools to do this. The book is timely, its contents very practical yet based on referenced published research. It is a terrific resource for those who want to open the window into the new era beyond customer satisfaction, and I'm sure the

reader will share in the excitement of the new view that is presented within these pages. Janelle Barlow and Dianna Maul should certainly feel proud of their efforts.

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PART ONE

BUILDING AN EMOTION-FRIENDLY SERVICE CULTURE

The greatest revolution in our generation is the discovery that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.

—William James

Emotions influence every aspect of our thinking life: they shape our memories; they influence our perceptions, our dreams, thoughts, and judgments—and our behaviors, including our decisions whether to return to a place of business, how much we are willing to pay for a product or service, and what we tell our family and friends about our experiences. Emotions are more than mere cognitive processes and indeed more than just feelings.

Emotions influence human reasoning. Emotions shape judgment. And emotions shape behavior. When “customer” is added to these last three statements, they read: *Emotions influence customer reasoning. Emotions shape customer judgments. And emotions shape customer behaviors.* Given this, it is a very good idea to pay close attention to customer emotions and attempt to influence them in the most positive manner.

Emotions in business are even more complex and less readily standardized, measurable, and manageable than previously thought.¹ But as Marta Vago, a family-business consultant, says, “You can’t divorce emotions from the workplace because you can’t divorce emotions from people. The challenge is not to get rid of emotions but to understand them and manage them in oneself and others.”² Self-awareness on both an organizational and an individual level is the key to starting the process of adding emotional value to service offerings.

THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS EMOTIONAL

Customers are not always right. They make mistakes; they forget things; they get confused. But customers are always emotional. That is, they always have feelings, sometimes intense, other times barely perceptible, when they make purchases or engage in commercial transactions. Some people dread shopping of any kind. Others define their lives by their purchases. Entertainment for them is a big shopping mall. Indeed, some people spend their vacations at the Mall of America in Minneapolis, Minnesota. They even get married there!

One thing is certain: no one is entirely neutral about consuming. In part this is because money is involved with consumption. British psychologists Adrian Furnham and Michael Argyle, in *The Psychology of Money*, summarize the complex variety of issues surrounding people's emotional attachment to money: "Money is publicly disavowed, and privately sought after; and simultaneously, is the most important quality in the world, but spoken of as having little value."¹

No one is entirely neutral about consuming.

Consider buying a home. Every real estate broker knows that purchasing a home is invariably an emotional experience for the buyer. Most brokers, as a result, understand that emotional cues can make selling a home a whole lot easier. For example, a subtle scent of cinnamon or vanilla creates a homey feeling, as does the smell of baking bread or chocolate chip cookies. One real estate broker reports, “I had one customer who baked cookies and had three full-price offers in one day.”² Make customers feel good, realtors advise, and the chances of selling a home increase dramatically.

Ask people why they bought something and you will hear such comments redolent with emotions: “I wanted it.” “I needed it.” “I just felt like buying it.” “I simply liked it.” “I figured I deserved it.” “John has one, and I had to have it, too.” “The clerk told me it looked good on me.” “I felt like splurging.” “It was on sale, so I grabbed it at a good price.” Join a travel writer as she playfully, yet seriously, describes what she calls her *emotional addiction* to the *experience* of expensive hotels:

Like most addictions, it is full of pleasure, and like most neurotics I feel I have it in hand. I consider it a branch of art appreciation, but of a particularly subtle, interactive kind: for in my view, a hotel and its guests are engaged in a kind of minuet of mutual inference, each responding to the other’s vibes and gestures. . . . This is the touch of theater that is essential to the nature of expensive hotels. These people are playacting and are tacitly inviting people like me to join the cast.³

Consuming Is an Act of Emotional Engagement

The root definition of *consume* is “to get.” The origin of the word *emotion* is “to move.” When you put the two words together, you have a situation where in the getting, consumers are moved. Consuming is not an act of detachment. It is an experience filled with emotions, some positive, others negative. And each situation elicits different emotions, depending on what the experience means to the consumer. In reality, emotions are always present, as indicated by University of Southern California

In reality, emotions are always present.

Professor of Marketing Jay A. Conger: “In the business world, we like to think that our colleagues use reason to make their decisions, yet if we scratch below the surface we will also find emotions at play.”⁴

Emotions are part of product and service branding. When people are asked what particular brands represent, some kind of emotional identification is almost always made. Scott Colwell, vice president of marketing for Friendly Cafes, which has a strong name recognition in the northeastern United States, describes the essential and emotional part of Friendly’s brand: “It’s absolutely critical for the business long-term to develop a unique relationship with customers through branding. They need to know that Friendly’s stands for quality food and ice cream *in a fun environment*.”⁵

Listen to the emotional richness of life described by Syracuse University Professor of Ethics and Political Philosophy Michael Stocker:

Emotions . . . are found throughout much if not all of our life, not just in more or less discrete and eventlike emotional goings-on. Emotions and affectivity are found in the backgrounds, the tones and tastes of life . . . various forms and levels of interest, concern, and liveliness. [Emotions] characterize and help make up the ordinary, often unremarkable and often unnoticed, flow of life.”

Every great philosopher since earliest times has recognized that emotions are basic motivators for action. In a nutshell, life is about experiencing emotions. Depression, to use everyday language, is a state of flattened or suppressed emotions. In acute states of depression, people will stay in bed all day long staring at the wall, feeling as little as possible. Emotions can become so buried in a state of depression, they barely get out at all.

Emotions are the basic motivators for action.

We suspect some businesspeople would like to do the impossible and remove emotions and passion from the customer experience—perhaps even from the total business experience. A review of a single day of the Money section in *USA Today*, however, reveals hundreds of emotion words to describe business topics.⁷ Emotion words are peppered

throughout headlines, in ads, and by the dozens in article after article of that issue.

In one such article, Apple Computer's new design for iMac is described as finding the "soul" of the computer. "Capture the feeling of the computer," was the guiding mantra of the designer, Jonathan Ives, as he gave "distinctive personality" to the hot-selling and brightly colored iMacs. "To design an object that elicits the reaction of 'I really want that' is enormously fun," Ives boasted. "We design objects that are totally seductive. A computer absolutely can be sexy; yeah, it can."⁸

This approach has worked for Apple. Regarding its predicted death knell, John Sculley, former head of Apple, says, "The turnaround isn't a fluke. It's back to the future. Steve (Jobs) has done an absolutely sensational job of turning Apple into what he always wanted it to be."⁹

The newly redesigned Beetle (once a "soulful" 1960s car), judged the best car of 1998, is described in that same issue of *USA Today* in evocative, emotional terms by head designer Rudiger Folten: "The shape of the car draws on people's emotions. It makes them feel warm and optimistic."¹⁰ Scott Cook, chairman of Intuit, underscores the role of emotions when he describes the high-tech market: "People don't buy technology. They buy products that improve their lives."¹¹

Maine-based Thomas Moser Cabinetmakers puts out a quality product but anchors it into what Moser himself calls "soul." He says, "We don't sell furniture." Rather, he looks at the emotionality in his product. "There's a set of values resident in our furniture that attracts customers. They're not just buying something to sit in, something well made and well designed, or something the neighbors will envy.

These are all motivations, but there is a strong emotional component to the objects themselves that motivates people to buy."¹²

Emotions Imply Obligations

While adding excitement, emotions are also messy to manage and they carry implications. Unethical business practices are easily reinforced

"There is a strong emotional component to the objects themselves that motivates people to buy."

when there is a lack of emotional sensitivity. Tobacco industry executives and employees do not have to feel responsible for the pain of smoking-related illnesses if they are able to convince themselves that the decision to smoke is a choice on the part of smokers, that addiction doesn't occur with nicotine. Executives of companies that pollute don't have to be concerned about human pain and suffering if they can convince themselves that business decisions are merely "logical" and necessary choices in a competitive world. Nor do medical personnel have to get involved with distraught parents if they stay focused on the technical side of a child's health care.

Accepting the fact that emotions play a part in business transactions might make organizations more sensitive to a whole range of issues and actually make them stronger by integrating the human element in daily work. As we move into the twenty-first century, there is growing support for these ideas. The Hay Group's benchmark of high-performing corporate cultures found them very different from ordinary companies. All the high performers recognize the *priority* of a strong corporate culture; in addition, they focus on "team-work, customer focus, fair treatment of employees, initiative, and innovation."¹³ As a result, they attract the best employees. When high-performing company executives are emotionally aware, they are not afraid to add real emotional value to their internal cultures. Indeed, they view it as a necessity.

High-performing companies view emotional value as a necessity.

Keeping consumer and staff emotions positive through emotionally aware managerial practices is the kernel of continuing success for organizations that offer services and products. Keeping moods positive impacts even ordinary, common service problems such as waiting time. Research suggests that any activity feels shorter when moods are positive and that customers will put up with longer waiting periods when they feel good.¹⁴

Positive emotions generally create commitment, excitement, and energy while negative emotions may arouse revenge, disgust, and a desire to never return. Keeping emotions as positive as possible is a challenging

obligation for twenty-first century organization managers and service providers.

Emotions Matter

Emotions are *not* easy to define, especially if you are looking for a single sentence or phrase to do the job. Nonetheless, most of us seem to know what we are talking about when we use the word “emotions.” After all, we experience so many of them so much of the time. Psychologists B. Fehr and J. A. Russell summarize the problem succinctly: “Everyone knows what an emotion is, until asked to give a definition. Then it seems, no one knows.”¹⁵

There are probably as many definitions of emotions as there are different emotions themselves, of which there are hundreds.

There are probably as many definitions of emotions as there are different emotions themselves, of which there are hundreds. (See Appendix A.) One twenty-year-old book lists ninety-two distinct definitions of emotions.¹⁶ Academicians have difficulties defining emotions because each definition carries within it a set of assumptions. As a result, tightly parsed academic definitions of emotions are difficult to apply or even understand in the day-to-day world.

One such definition we found is that an emotion is a “valenced affective reaction to perceptions of situations.”¹⁷ Imagine frontline staff hearing that explanation!¹⁸

What Do Emotions Tell Us about Customers?

A definition of emotions that we think gets close to being inclusive and yet is understandable for most people is psychologist Erik Rosenberg’s: “Emotions are acute, intense, and typically brief psycho-physiological changes that result from a response to a meaningful situation in one’s environment.”¹⁹ Rosenberg’s definition contains three essential elements related to consumers: (1) emotions are about what matters to customers; (2) emotions are relatively brief experiences and provide us with a snapshot view of how customers relate to service, service providers, and products; and (3) emotions are accompanied by body changes. If these

body clues are accurately read, they can tell us how customers will likely behave. In short, emotions are brief, noticeable, and important!

1. Emotions tell us what matters to customers. When customers experience emotion, it is because something important is happening to them. If service transactions had no value to customers, customers wouldn't have emotions about them. In the experience economy, this is a point worth emphasizing. Consider the following example.

A woman we know developed breast cancer and in the process of her treatment came to know other cancer patients. One day she went to see her oncologist, whom she shared with a woman colleague who had recently succumbed to her disease. The oncologist, our friend discovered, had *not* been notified of the death of his patient. In an attempt to sort through her searing emotions about this giant health-care corporation, our friend wrote the following:

If service transactions had no value to customers, customers wouldn't have emotions about them.

By the time I left the doctor's office, I was very upset, although I said nothing to him. He felt bad about Sue's [name changed] death, and his lack of knowledge wasn't through any fault of his own, but rather through the fault of the medical system. . . . Although Sue had been admitted to the hospital on Friday and had been pronounced dead in the same hospital's emergency room on the following Monday, her oncologist who was actively treating her at the time of her death was never notified. It is as if Sue's life, her pain, and her death meant nothing at all to the medical system.

If there is a "colder" example of treatment in medicine, I have yet to hear it. In this age of computers, how difficult could it be for one system to program notification of either your hospitalization or your death to the specialist actively treating you? The answer is that it wouldn't be difficult. The answer is that within this medical system you are nothing but a common animal who pays your premiums and in turn is given an identification number. Sue's story stands as evidence

of the haughtiness, coldness, insensitivity, and materialistic values of this system. To think that a person can live and die while actively being treated and never have their doctor even be notified of their death, THAT'S COLD.

Customer emotions, not always stated so strongly and eloquently as the above example, are a clear statement of what is important to medical consumers. The more relevant a situation is to someone's goal, the stronger the emotion is likely to be. In the case of our friend, her strong goal is to survive, rather than to be another forgotten breast cancer statistic. Is it too much for a medical patient to ask that her personal anguish be acknowledged by her caregivers? After all, her emotions are as much a part of who she is at that moment as is her scarred chest.

Customer experiences, as the above example demonstrates, are stories—small scenarios of experience. And customers show up at places of business with their own unique histories, remembering events—many times without conscious awareness—that influence the reality of their current experience. Service providers are frequently forced to deal with strong customer emotions that have nothing to do with the transaction under way. But any displayed emotions are *related to something that currently matters* to the customer, and service providers need to competently interact with the total customer experience—because that is what is occurring at the moment.

Customer experiences are stories, small scenarios of experience.

Customer emotions are influenced by memories and a wide array of factors, including

- life circumstances (for example, customers wake up elated or they get up on the “wrong side of the bed”);
- expectations already formed—largely based on advertising—before walking into a store, making a telephone call, or seeing a professional;
- perceptions of what is happening around them (what they see when they walk into a place of business or visit an e-commerce site, what

they hear, what they smell [ambient odor of the site], and perhaps what they taste or touch);

- public reputation or what others have told them about a particular organization;
- the first few seconds and the last few seconds of the interaction with representatives of this business;
- personal pride they feel from their choice of purchases or suppliers;
- quality and intensity of the exchanges they have with service representatives and other customers (easy or problem-filled), promises made to them, words of invitation or exclusion, amount of time spent waiting;
- any follow-up activities.

Service providers do not need to psychoanalyze their customers; at a minimum, however, they need to understand that something important is happening to customers when they display emotions—even if customers never state this directly. Consider the difference this awareness could make in dealing with customers. Frontline staff could say to themselves when interacting with an irritated customer, “Something of importance is happening to this person,” rather than “This customer is a jerk . . . or nasty . . . or uptight.” There is a chance of creating positive emotional value when staff are aware of the customer’s emotional state, rather than negatively judging customer behavior.

Something important is happening to customers when they display emotions.

One of the authors called a high-volume-flyers telephone line to order an international business-class airplane ticket. Shortly into the conversation, the ticket agent said, “You can’t do this.” (“This” was an extra loop between two cities the author needed to make.) Actually, passengers can fly any routing they want as long as flights are available; they just have to pay more for the ticket. The author had had a long, hard day, she was prepared to pay a lot of money for this ticket, and she replied to the ticket agent, “We’ll have a lot easier time setting up this ticket if you don’t tell me what I can’t do.” Here’s the response she got in return: “Now,

don't you get an attitude with me!” Clearly, the ticket agent saw an irritated customer who needed to be put in her place, rather than a valued customer who had just voiced something of importance to her. The potential cost to the airline: a \$7,500 business-class ticket and a high-volume customer.

2. *Emotions tell us how customers relate to service providers.* When two people are involved in a consumer exchange, a social interaction is taking place. Because of the brevity of many emotions, social interactions can quickly change directions emotionally.²⁰ By reading emotional cues, it is possible to quickly determine whether the customer and the service providers are sharing a positive experience. If the service provider is seen to be unhelpful, rude, or uncaring—or conversely, eager to help, friendly, and interested—these attitudes matter to customers and they typically respond in kind. In fact, of all the factors that can be measured about how service providers deliver service, the one that most strongly creates negative responses are failures to “meet minimum standards of civility.”²¹

If someone had been listening to the exchange with the airline’s ticket agent described above, it would have been crystal clear that something negative was happening. Interestingly, we have shared this example with many people, and a few think that the author created the negativity in that situation and is, therefore, responsible for it. “Stop blaming the service representatives when they snap back at you,” we were told in

no uncertain terms by a “service expert.” While we agree that it is “nice” to be a “nice customer,” we also believe ultimately *it is the service providers’ responsibility to manage the emotions in service exchanges.* Of course, organizations can always decide that they don’t want to do business with “direct” customers such as the authors represent, and that is their choice.

It’s a costly way to approach customer service, however, and we suspect the airline would rather have had its service representative handle the situation better than lose the sale of that \$7,500 ticket.

It is the service providers’ responsibility to manage the emotions in service exchanges.

3. *Emotions tell us how customers will likely behave.* If customers are angry, they feel threatened at some level and are primed to attack. If customers feel fear, they may be impelled to escape or leave or not come back. If they feel pleased, thrilled, or delighted, they will be inclined to stay longer and return to experience more of that feeling. Emotions, in brief, predict future behavior.

Psychologist Richard Lazarus points out that people are constantly evaluating the situations they experience. An event happens, and then individuals reach conclusions or judgments influenced by internal factors (personality, beliefs, and goals) and by external factors (responses by other people, product quality). These judgments lead to feelings, subjective experiences, reflected in facial expressions or other forms of body language that are available for reading by a sensitive service provider. Along with feelings comes an “action tendency.” This action tendency is something that the person wants to accomplish—a goal, if you will.²²

Psychologist Michael Edwardson, at the University of New South Wales in Australia, has broken new ground in applying cognitive psychology concepts of emotion (as represented by Richard Lazarus and others) to consumer emotions. Edwardson argues that if you can identify the emotion, then you can identify an “emotional script.” An emotional script, an idea well established in research on emotions, is a pattern that goes from event, to thought, to feeling, to action. Emotional scripts all have specific goals.

Edwardson writes, “This sequence of sub-events can happen almost simultaneously and not be under conscious control of the person.”²³ Edwardson, along with other marketing experts, is beginning to map the scripts that are unique to each emotion. Within the field of customer service, this means it will be possible to logically predict likely customer behavior once specific emotions have been identified.²⁴ In Edwardson’s words, “This concept gives us a framework for research into services that focus on developing, for the first time, a catalogue of emotions experienced by consumers.”²⁵

Michael Edwardson’s interpretation of the impact emotions have on behavior suggests that service providers must not only be able to

understand customers' experiences, but they also need to know how to influence emotional scenarios from negative to positive. As Edwardson writes,

Emotional episodes can flow from bad to good or bad to worse depending on the service person. E.g., bad to worse; impatient—angry—neglected—cheated—upset . . . the customer vows never to return: or bad to good; nervous—impatient—encouraged—happy . . . started poorly but ends positively.²⁶

The Link among Passion, Loyalty, and Emotions

Modern academic psychologists believe that the computer is a good model for the mind. Indeed, many academic psychologists describe their work as “mind science,” and in so doing they conveniently downplay the “emotional” part of emotions. These influential psychologists describe emotions as “thoughts” about situations in which humans find themselves. Many businesses, in turn, have largely ignored the role of emotions.

There are exceptions, however, to this collective attempt to ignore emotions, notably in the entertainment industry, which clearly understands the selling of emotions. The movie industry carefully studies the emotional reactions of focus groups to help with film editing, sequencing, and even plot endings. Its sole purpose is to create an emotional impact on movie viewers so that large numbers will return to the theater to see the film over and over again, tell all their friends about it, and then buy a video copy for themselves and every tee-shirt, wall poster, and desk ornament representing the film they can get.

Part of the reason why so many academic psychologists have ignored the “emotional” part of emotions is that they believe thinking is logical (hence, scientific), and emoting is illogical (hence, nonscientific). To get around this scientific problem of studying something that is nonscientific, many psychologists describe emotions as *thinking processes*, rather than *feeling experiences*. Unfortunately, this approach removes passion from emotional experience. This is definitely not good to do when an

organization is attempting to build staff and customer loyalty. After all, if emotions, especially passion, are not at the basis of loyalty, what is?

Human experience tells us that emotions are much more than mere thoughts. We can have a thought about the blueness of the sky, but that in no way compares to the elation we feel standing on a tall peak basking in the twilight blueness surrounding us. Personal experience also suggests that emotions are not always illogical. Indeed, thinking can be illogical, while an emotional reaction can more accurately reflect a situation. Thought and perception, in actuality, can be as highly subjective as emotions are. We look at a red rose and experience its redness both objectively and subjectively. Thoughts, we would argue, are the end result of the processing of unconscious subjective emotional information—just as emotions are.

Humans constantly seek emotional experiences; our behavior is frequently chosen to either enhance or subdue emotional states. We choose to view one movie over another in part because of the feeling state the movie will create. Janelle avoids all scary movies; Dianna loves to be frightened in the theater. Dianna's teenage daughter paid for and sat through two showings of *Titanic*, back to back, because of her emotional reaction to the movie—as apparently did thousands of other young girls around the world. One could guess, as many have, that life without emotions would be life not worth living. It would be boring, without variety. And it would just about kill the modern consumer economy.

If emotions, especially passion, are not at the basis of loyalty, what is?

Valuing the Emotionality in Customer Communications

Customers communicate with their emotions, and service providers must respond. When customers are highly emotional, service providers may try to get them to settle down by saying, “Don’t get emotional.” What they really mean is, “Don’t display your emotions.” Many service staff clearly feel uncomfortable around emotional displays, most likely because they don’t know how to manage such public displays. Frankly, they’re scared.

However, from the customers' point of view, they have just spent time and/or money, and it is difficult for them to not engage in an emotional communication (either positively or negatively) about their situation. When service providers ask their customers to not get emotional, they are telling their customers, "Don't react to the fact that you feel excited, overwhelmed, cheated, used, or mishandled." This is the equivalent of saying, "*Don't get emotional about the emotions you are experiencing.*"

Emotions are part of the total communication experience, and they must be acknowledged.

Customers are expected to be rational about time and money (that is, nonemotional), when time and money almost always elicit emotions—and very frequently, strong emotions. Service providers may think customer emotions get in the way of solving problems. And from their point of view, this may be the case. *However, from the customers' point of view, emotions are part of the total communication experience, and they must be acknowledged.* Very few customers have a positive response to being told, "Settle down, or I can't help you."

Take the case of health care. When patients are scheduled for surgery, they want to be seen as human beings by the surgeon, not "the kidney" or some other body part, which frequently is how surgery patients are described. Part of the reason for this is that the patient thinks of himself or herself as more than "the kidney." Logically, the patient may think that if the surgeon thinks of him or her as a specific individual and not just a kidney, the surgeon might have greater concern and the patient would, therefore, receive better personal service. Unfortunately, because many physicians may not know how to manage the intense emotions frequently encountered in health care, they have a psychological need to distance themselves, and they have many strategies for that, including referring to patients as body parts.

We once heard a medical doctor say about a complaining patient, "I don't understand why he was upset. I saved his leg, didn't I?" This doctor was not acknowledging that his patient was more than a leg to save. Perhaps it is easier for the doctor to merely relate to a leg, but this

approach is limiting if the doctor's goal is to grow a business. Saved legs don't refer other patients.

The way the event is *handled* has as much significance for the customer as the event itself. Positive feelings about service experiences are much more than simple judgments about service outcomes. Customer judgments about how service is “handled” have a great deal to do with consumers' innate sense of justice. If we order a product that is faulty and we return it to a store, our total feelings are about more than just whether we get our money back. Psychologist William G. Austin writes, “Justice pertains not merely to outcome distributions, but also to how the distribution is arrived at *and* the manner by which it is implemented.”²⁷ While not writing for the customer service field, psychologist Michael Stocker puts the idea in a more poetic form: “For the acts themselves, not just their outcomes, are valued.”²⁸ And it is by an emotional assessment that customers largely place their own *value* on the service transaction. If service providers do not grasp this basic fact, then even after treating customers rudely, making them wait, and embarrassing them in public, they will feel justified in making comments such as “Why are they upset? I gave them their money back, didn't I?”

The way the event is handled has as much significance for the customer as the event itself.

In fact, emotions are as good a basis for customers to make solid buying decisions as any other. When events are proceeding positively, customers, in effect, ask for an enhancement or continuation of their feelings. When emotions are negative, customers most likely are asking for the situation to be changed. The reactions customers receive to their emotions have a tremendous amount to do with whether they will return—and in what mood they will return.

Why should customers go back to places of business if they feel negative? Maybe it's for cheap prices or if there are no alternatives or if they are locked into an incentive program. If customers do not feel strong positive emotions, why not check out the competition? They might feel better with another supplier. Many businesspeople, including Marcy

Wydman, owner of a sheet-metal fabrication and galvanizing business, instinctively understand this:

If you can figure out what it is that the customers are passionate about, what it is that's important to them, and respond accordingly, and develop a good relationship that's based on more than just providing goods or service, then I think you're going to develop more loyalty and long-term business.²⁹

When we recognize positive emotional states, it helps regulate emotions and encourages civilized behavior.

And for this reason, even if emotions are difficult to manage and measure, they must be taken into consideration when attempting to build long-term relationships with customers. At a minimum, if we recognize positive emotional states in ourselves and in others, this helps generate more positive emotions and encourages civilized behavior.³⁰ There is plenty of research—and just plain common sense—to support the notion that pleasant behaviors are more likely to produce friendships than impolite, unpleasant behaviors.³¹

When Janelle had her first teaching job at twenty-one years of age, she was not very sophisticated about approaching the parents of her students. She would call the parents and tell them their children were uncooperative and poor students—because they didn't turn in their homework assignments. Logically, it was accurate, but it was an emotionally stupid tactic to take with parents. Janelle learned her lesson after two disastrous telephone calls. When she called the next parent, she began her conversation this way: "I need your help." It was hard for parents to turn her down, particularly when she emphasized how capable and smart their children were. Janelle eventually got 100 percent cooperation from the parents to check their children's homework to see that it was finished before they went to bed at night.

Sensitive interpersonal behaviors can serve as the foundation to becoming emotion friendly for both organizations and service providers who want to improve their "customer" relationships, whether these are paying customers or colleagues. Ultimately, if service providers have no

awareness of or little concern for the emotional states of their customers, they will find it very difficult to manage customer experiences. A healthy way to view emotions is not as problems to be solved but rather as the basis for forming relationships. As such, emotions have inherent value.

Emotions are not problems to be solved. Rather they are the basis for forming relationships.

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Creating Strong Bonds with Your Customers***

by Janelle Barlow and Dianna Maul
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