

THE IMPORTANCE OF SERVING OTHERS

By Jim Mathis

When I was planning to start my own business years ago, I began looking for ways I could serve people. I was particularly interested in finding an opportunity where outstanding customer service would be welcomed and rewarded. The result was Mathis Photo, Inc, a custom photo lab. We did whatever was necessary to deliver top-rate service, as well as the product we were creating.

Twenty-seven years later when we opened a coffeehouse, I knew that in addition to high quality products, giving outstanding service would be the key to competing with national coffeehouse chains. Most of our staff were young people; for many it was their first job. This gave us the opportunity to show them how to deliver great service and treat every customer with the highest respect.

As the manager, I considered it my main job to provide our staff of baristas and servers with everything they needed to provide the best service for every person who came through the door. This included making sure they had all the supplies they needed, making sure our equipment was up to date and working, and then setting an example by washing dishes, carrying out trash and scrubbing the floors.

The original plan included becoming a music venue. From years as a working musician, I knew the best way to attract good talent was to treat the band with highest respect and honor, with free refreshments and plenty of encouragement. Whenever I have played at a venue where the manager met us at the car, helped carry in our equipment, and offered free food and drink, we would always go back, both as musicians and regular customers.

For many businesses, customer service is what differentiates them from the competition. When they start outsourcing “customer service,” or require callers to go through an endless circle to register complaints or ask for help, they are probably creating a self-fulfilling prophecy of doom.

There is a story in the Bible where Jesus’ disciples were arguing about which one of them was the greatest. Jesus stopped their dispute and gave them a visual aid in humility and servitude by washing their feet. Walking dusty roads resulted in dirty feet, but foot washing was generally the responsibility of lowly servants. Remembering this example by Jesus, for some groups today “foot washing” is considered a sacrament to remind them of the importance of being humble and serving others.

Sadly, it is not always the case, but business leaders and political leaders at all levels should understand the importance of serving and the necessity of providing for those on the front lines of serving customers.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was not above providing humble acts of service to those He encountered every day – from His closest disciples to people in a variety of helpless situations,

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to willingly dying on a cross for our sins. This is why the Bible says, “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

Jesus made the declaration, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28). In light of this, there is no place in business executive suites or any level of government, from the local homeowner’s association to the White House, for arrogant people unwilling to be servant leaders. Such people are missing out on one of the greatest and simplest joys we have of taking care of and serving every person in our sphere of influence.

© 2024. Jim Mathis is a writer, photographer and small business owner in Overland Park, Kansas. His latest book is *The Camel and the Needle, A Christian Looks at Wealth and Money*. He formerly was a coffee shop manager and executive director of CBMC in Kansas City, U.S.A.

Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. When you hear the term, “serving others,” what immediately comes to mind? What types of people do you envision in this role of being of service others?
2. Have you found that examples of executives, managers and other leaders who willingly serve others are common – or are they rare and unusual? Explain your answer.
3. What do you think are the benefits of setting an example of service for others, whether they are coworkers and colleagues, customers, people who report to us, or even our superiors?
4. How would you assess yourself in terms of being a “servant leader”? How can we derive joy and satisfaction from serving and trying to meet the needs of people we encounter over the course of a typical workday?

Challenge For This Week

We sometimes hear exhortations from our culture that we are to put ourselves, our needs, and our goals ahead of all else. Rarely do we hear a call for us to become servants of others. “Who wants to be a servant?” some might ask. This week, if you have not already done so, do a “servant evaluation” of yourself. When was the last time you performed an act of service for someone else, when you put their needs and interests ahead of your own? Who might you meet with this week and discuss how you could encourage one another to become better, more consistent servants of others?

NOTE:

For more about what the Bible says, consider the following passages:
Proverbs 11:2, 16:19, 22:4; Matthew 8:20, 20:27; Luke 22:24-27; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:3-4

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