

PART I

FIND THE RIGHT FUEL TO INSPIRE ACTION



CHAPTER 1

The Problem with Persuasion

*“There could have been no two hearts so open,
no tastes so similar, no feelings so in unison.”*

Jane Austen

In July 2017, I arrived at a well-known Orlando resort for a conference and stepped right into a hive of construction. Although I passed a number of bellmen and hotel employees, I was not directed through the construction area, nor was I greeted with any hellos or smiles.

When I finally found the lengthy check-in line, the other guests were quick to let me know that it wasn't moving at all. As one woman left the reception desk, she looked back and said, “Good luck getting a room. Nothing seems to be ready!”

After about twenty minutes, it was finally my turn, and as I approached the desk, I glanced at the clerk's name badge. It read: “My name is Ed. My passion is hiking.”

His perfect skin and well-groomed hair were overpowered by his perfect plastic smile. “Ed the Boy Scout,” I thought.

“I guess I picked a busy time,” I said, returning his smile.

“Yes,” he replied, looking even more strained. “And none of the rooms are ready.”

He checked me in and said that they would call when I could get my room. He directed me to the bell desk, where I

could deposit my luggage—alongside everyone else's. José, whose “passion is motorcycles,” spoke through a tight smile advising me to leave my bags, and adding, “We would be happy to bring them to your room when you get one.” He spoke politely, but his smile failed to mask the stress in his eyes. As he addressed me, he glanced back and forth at the growing mountain of bags at his booth.

Just thirty minutes into my arrival, and I was able to predict the level of service that I would be receiving over the next five days.

I went to the restaurant to have a drink while I waited for my room. A manager welcomed me, then stomped over to a waitress and snarled, “You have someone at Table Seven.”

The shift in his body language and vocal tone was so drastic that it seemed like the manager had changed from Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde during the fifteen-foot walk from my table to the waitress station.

When the waitress approached me, I instantly realized that her bubbly warm personality was the opposite of everyone else that I'd met at the hotel. I smiled and said, “I'll have a cup of coffee, so long as you don't have mood swings like your boss.”

She laughed and said, “You look exhausted; you must've just flown in. How about a triple espresso?”

We got along just fine. I do not remember her name tag or her passion, I only remember her cheerful demeanor. She seemed out of place.

Neither Ed the desk clerk nor José the bellman were uncaring people. They just had defaulted to a robotic stance

under a set of rules that left no room for them to be themselves. It was as if management thought that giving them a name tag that stated their personal passion would be sufficient motivation for them to demonstrate passion for their work.

They were all doing the best that they could under the circumstances. As my waitress delivered a second triple espresso, I admired her personal desire to be kind. She was the first employee I'd encountered whose words did not seem pre-programmed. Her ability to snap back from the manager's scolding and walk over to me and treat me with such warmth made her one of those employees that management could point to and say, "Look, if she can do it, so can you."

But that is not effective management. There are exceptions to every situation, and some people are just more capable of operating under adverse circumstances. She is an anomaly, and management tends to underestimate the personal effort that someone in her situation exerts to be cheerful and welcoming.

Despite their efforts, the individual demeanors of most of the staff indicated that whatever passion was printed on the name tag certainly didn't carry over to their jobs. They did not seem to have passion for anything having to do with their work.

I assume the passion listed on the name badge was intended to be a conversation starter, a way of personalizing the employee and opening them up to conversation with the guests. Sadly, someone who is just going through the motions and clearly doesn't feel good about what they're doing isn't someone with whom I'd want to share stories about hiking or motorcycles.

When I was at the front desk checking in, it seemed to me that Boy Scout Ed should have been empowered to offer an explanation beyond “rooms are not ready” or even add an amenity to make up for the delay. While each employee I encountered was polite, it was evident that they were working diligently to keep within a script that wasn’t designed to account for the frustration of trying to serve guests under difficult circumstances. The staff had not been empowered to make guests feel welcome. When you are focused on following a script, you cannot focus on the people in front of you.

This is what you get when management dictates the rules without inspiring the team. The absence of the heart and soul in the staff’s attempts to do their jobs efficiently and happily was not the result of a lack of effort on their part, but the result of management treating them like cogs in a wheel and ignoring the possibility that maybe they could be more. And yet my waitress was an exception. What made her different? I wondered...

As I sipped my espresso, I reflected upon an experience that I’d had in 1985, when I was in my late twenties. I was having dinner with a group of friends, including Ted, a doctor in his early forties with a blond 1970s pageboy hairstyle and wire-rimmed glasses. Ted’s idea of casual wear was a diligently pressed Izod shirt and a pair of creased Jordache jeans. He had an odd habit of speaking to people without ever making eye contact.

As his eyes wandered around the restaurant, Ted complained to the table about the office staff at his practice; “When I have

someone trained, the employee finds a new job, or falls from ‘great employee’ status to mediocrity.”

He was mystified, but I knew the answer. He saw his staff as trainable rather than capable. He had provided his staff with a series of obligatory tasks to perform without giving them the ability to merge their own talents and passion into the big picture. They did patient intakes, they took vitals, or they drew blood. They were assigned individual task after individual task. It was monotonous. He never showed them the big picture, but instead taught them their individual duties with no understanding of the larger contribution they made.

As Dr. Ted monopolized the conversation, I tried to listen without rolling my eyes. I think we all wanted to yell, “Hey, Ted. Maybe the problem is you!” We glanced at each other and just listened until I interrupted by joking, “I’m sorry, I couldn’t figure out if you were talking about people or puppies.”

Ted stopped his rant, looked at me and said, “That’s rude. Why did you say that?”

I smiled as someone else giggled and said, “You sound like you would be happier if you hired people who jumped through hoops and sat on command.”

In the discussion that followed, it became more and more clear that, to him, the people he called his team were merely cogs in a machine. Fundamentally, he saw them as office equipment. It was obvious to me that his staff knew he did not care about them; he only cared about how he wanted things done.

At the time, I was a young attorney—not a consultant and trainer—but I knew he was the problem. Even in court,

I realized that if I treated people the way he treated his employees, my successes would be few.

With that story in mind, I took another sip of espresso and chuckled to myself. The staff of this hotel was office equipment. My waitress had risen above it. The rest of them had not.

I received a call that my room was ready. It was 5:45, nearly three hours after I'd stepped in line. No explanation or apology, just a call to pick up my key.

Throughout my stay, I kept noticing the absence of a relationship between the guests and the staff. Only two weeks earlier, while I was staying in a casino in Las Vegas, every single employee I encountered smiled and said, "Thank you for staying at the Mirage. If you need anything, please let me know." Whether the maid was carrying dirty laundry, or the maintenance man was fixing a broken bathtub faucet, it didn't matter. They made me feel like I belonged. There was no script. Each spoke as if from the heart.

At my current hotel in Orlando, the lack of the promised "magic" was palpable. Since I knew the destination hosts over sixty million visitors per year, and boasts its luxury status, I expected a much warmer feel during my stay.

On the second day, I met Barbara. Barbara's name tag read, "My passion is family." She was one of the two housekeepers responsible for cleaning the scores of rooms on my floor.

One morning, I placed a decent tip for Barbara on my bed, and I left the room to get a cup of "not hotel room" coffee. When I returned, Barbara greeted me with her head down

and said, “I’m sorry, there was money on your bed. Did you drop it?”

I looked at her in amazement. “It’s your tip. Don’t people in this hotel tip you?”

In an unexpected burst of honesty, she replied, “People don’t feel good about this place because of the management, and they take it out on us. So, no, we don’t get many tips.”

I was struck by her candid and direct response. She told me they had fewer than 150 members on the entire housekeeping staff. Realizing that the hotel had approximately 1,500 rooms, I did some quick math. Assuming that only a percentage of those were actual housekeepers or maids, they were under a lot of pressure.

Barbara continued. “The bosses don’t understand what is being asked of the employees. We don’t have enough help. They count the rooms we clean, but they almost never check our work.” The hotel measured performance based on the quantity of rooms cleaned, not the quality of the work.

After a few moments of discussion, Barbara asked why I was so interested in the housekeeping. I told her that in my observations as a traveler, the attitude of the staff was a good barometer of the overall hotel operations. If the staff was not happy, my experience at that property would not be happy. I said, “The housekeepers are the face of the hotel, the first face I see when I leave my room.”

Barbara’s face lit up. “I never thought of my job as making me the face of a hotel. I’m just a housekeeper.”

I told her, “I only see the front desk staff when I check in. I see the bellmen when they bring me my luggage, and I see

the doorman when I come and go. But if I am in the halls of the hotel, it's the housekeeping staff that I see most."

Barbara surveyed my organized and neat hotel room and said, "I wish more guests were like you, because people leave their rooms messy and in disarray, and because they get bad service in the restaurant or at the front desk, they take out every little complaint on us!"

Barbara's honesty was refreshing. But at the same time, I noticed an exhausted look in her eyes, which were heavy and slightly red. She told me she was ahead of schedule, and time wasn't a problem, but she kept looking under a towel on her cart at her phone. I felt that there was more to her demeanor than just being overworked. I asked Barbara why she looked so sad. She told me that her daughter was on vacation in Belize that week, and she was concerned because she had uncharacteristically failed to call for four days.

As Barbara left, I gave her an additional tip for her time. Glancing back to her nametag, I said, "I know that family is your passion. I'm sure you'll hear from your daughter soon. She's probably just having fun."

Barbara's comments confirmed the perennial truth of an old Italian adage: "The fish rots from the head." While the staff may be stressed out and overworked, the problem lies with management who either hasn't given them the infrastructure they need to do their jobs or hasn't found a way to influence them into infusing their work with passion.

Initially, both Doctor Ted and the restaurant manager could push their employees into action to do what needed to be done, but they would never be loyal or self-motivated. They

simply jumped through the hoops without having even an inkling of a larger goal.

To their deficit, management focused on numbers and volume without influencing the staff to create an excellent experience for their guests. They didn't empower their people to do anything beyond repeating the management's rote commentary.

It's up to management to inspire a passion for work in the hearts of the staff. Instead, management reserved all their kindness and concern for their interactions with the guests. And none of that kindness seemed to flow in the direction of the employees. The employees were just pushing the cart uphill to avoid being labeled as part of the problem. Their efforts to please management had consumed any attitude of kindness or sincerity they could muster with the guests. As a result, their attempts to care seemed fake. They were disengaged at work because management was disengaged from them.

It was clear to me that Dr. Ted in 1985 and the restaurant manager in 2017 had made the same error. Both failed to recognize the humanity and the personal need of each staff member to feel valuable. Later that day at the resort, I returned to my room and found a case of water and multiple bags of coffee sitting on the counter. I had acknowledged Barbara's humanity, and she showered me with the only gifts that she had access to: water and coffee from her cart.

The following morning, as I prepared to check out of my room, Barbara ran down the hall and hugged me saying, "My daughter is okay. Thank you." And she went back to work.

As I wheeled my luggage down the hall, I heard Barbara and her partner shouting “Good Morning!” to all the guests as they passed. Feeling important in the big picture is empowering. Feeling good about your contribution to the big picture is contagious.

I thought back on my career as both a businessman and an attorney. As a courtroom litigator, my success or failure hinged on my ability to persuade. Whether I was dealing with a client, a judge, a jury, or other lawyers, it was my job to persuade people to do as I asked. But I also recognized that the true art of persuasion required people to feel good about taking the action I requested. If they did not feel good about taking one action I asked for, they would never allow me to persuade them again. They would second-guess everything I said. Even the worst druggie-snitch witness in court needed to see a personal benefit before he would testify.

Coercing people to take an action is at the base level of influence. It is always possible, yet never produces better than mediocre results.

Moving others to take *inspired* action is the cornerstone of effective management. It is the cornerstone of sales. It is the cornerstone of any action that you take when you want others to follow your lead. Persuasion, when done effectively, leads to inspired action—action that people take as a result of an internal motivation to move closer to *your* goal because it is closer to *their* goal.

But if you hope to get inspired action by ordering people around or offering short-term incentives such as bonuses and other tokens of recognition, you'll be disappointed

every time. While it motivates in the short term, it's not sustainable. Each reward (which is basically a bribe) will be followed by a demand for an even bigger one. Bribes are not what inspires people to extraordinary action or excellence. Believe it or not, humans are more noble than that.

Persuasion, when done effectively, leads to inspired action—action that people take as a result of an internal motivation to move closer to your goal because it is closer to their goal.

When I was a teenager, I worked in a fast food restaurant. Every week, the manager offered a five-dollar bonus for the best employee on the grill. I was sixteen. I was excited by the challenge. Living at home, rent-free, a five-dollar bonus meant I could buy an extra movie ticket or a jumbo popcorn. Plus, I liked winning. I worked as hard as I could to move burgers and win the coveted “Best Grill Person Award.” For the first three weeks, I won and got my five dollars. As the fourth week began, I thought about Carson, the man who had come in second place for the past three weeks. Carson was in his early thirties, living alone with bills to pay.

I felt bad knowing that by winning, I was making life harder for Carson. I slowed down so he could get the five dollars. Shortly after his second victory, the manager reprimanded me for not working as hard. I laughed and went back to work. I