

Forbes

The Magic of Serving with Radical Generosity



Sharing a favorite toy. Getty Images

by **Chip R. Bell**

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An extended consulting project in Boston placed me weekly at the Marriott Long Wharf Hotel. The service was always excellent, and the waterfront hotel was within walking distance from my client's corporate office. One Sunday evening, I arrived at the hotel late to check in. On this occasion, my stay was for only a single night.

"I have a special room for you," the front desk clerk announced gleefully. "Because you are such a loyal guest and are only here for one evening, I have assigned you Room 500. I'll be at the front desk in the morning, eager to get your reaction to this room."

I realized the experience was about to be unique when I got off the elevator on the fifth floor and noticed Room 500 was at the end of the hall with double doors. I was stunned. The 1400 square foot penthouse suite had a giant living room with a grand piano, two bedrooms, a full kitchen, and a panoramic view of the Boston Harbor. I immediately thought, "Who do I know in Boston who can join me for a late-night party!" It was radical generosity—a gift without a hitch.

What is Radical Generosity?

Customer service as radical generosity is not conditional but selfless. It is service emanating from the inner joy of service as a magnet. And it has a magical aspect to it. It works only when there is no expectation or requirement of a response in kind. Yet, it evokes a deep loyalty and bond from the recipient that typically yields a response in kind. Reciprocity is the effect or result when reciprocity is not the intent or objective.

When I later asked the Marriott Long Wharf hotel front desk clerk what led him to upgrade me to the fancy suite since I was already a loyal fan, he said, "I thought about the fact that you were getting in late and might enjoy a special treat. We had the room available. And frankly, it was worth it just to see your reaction the next morning." There was no ploy, plan, or strategy, just a "from the heart" magnanimous gesture. It frankly took my loyalty to a whole new level. And I felt freed to express it from the heart and not from guilt, duty, or obligation."

Abundance Is an Attitude, not a Tactic



Everyone, regardless of faith or theology, knows the story of the Good Samaritan. The focal point of the parable centered on a man who stopped to give aid to someone who hated him. However, there was a radical generosity side to the ancient story. Before stopping to help his "neighbor," the Samaritan had just walked from Jericho to Jerusalem, thirty miles uphill on challenging, rocky terrain populated by thieves. The route was called the "Way of Death." Despite intense exhaustion and anxiety from his journey, he stopped to help his enemy, transported him to a nearby inn, and covered his costs. It was more than a random act of kindness; it was a bold and deliberate sacrifice.

Abundance, like grace, is an act of unbridled compassion bestowed entirely without judgment. As a relationship purifier, it alters the acidity and caution of interpersonal connections to surface well-being and trust. "I've learned that you shouldn't go through life with a catcher's mitt on both hands," wrote renowned poet Maya Angelou. "You need to be able to throw something back."

Generosity Elevates, Radical Generosity Transforms

"You make me want to be a better man." These were the most quoted lines in the hit movie *As Good as It Gets*. It was Jack Nicholson's awkward "terms of endearment" directed at his new girlfriend, Helen Hunt. His words capture the power of a generosity orientation—helping customers source their higher self. And, in challenging times when so much in customers' lives pulls them down, generous service can help them pursue their best.

A generosity attitude has a magnetic impact on customers. It attracts them because it conveys to the customer the unconditional positive regard that characterizes relationships at their best. Customers like how they feel when dealing with service providers who demonstrate such an orientation. They feel valued, not used. They enjoy relationships with value and substance far more than those encounters that are functional but hollow.

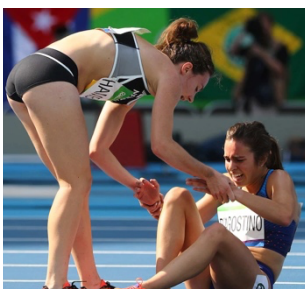
Radical Generosity in Action

So, what does this mean for business in general and customer experience in particular? We could "gift" ourselves into bankruptcy. We'd all feel great—until the creditors started repossessing our furniture! Business, after all, is not a voluntary, charitable organization. Stakeholders don't generally invest in a business because of its philanthropy; they invest in it because of its potential for a positive ROI. The very existence of a business is tied to bottom-line results, which implies clever bartering and hard-nosed negotiating.

Does it? Or have we just made up that tit-for-tat paradigm? What if an enterprise looked for ways to give to customers in an expressive, unbridled way? Not foolish. What happens in other relationships when you give with an "other" focus? How are other relationships in your life altered by beneficial gestures free of a "What's in it for me?" component?



Tom's Shoes donates one-third of its profits to organizations focused on mental health and ending gun violence. Bombas gives away socks to at-risk people; Warby Parker donates glasses. Scooter's Coffee sources its coffee beans from shade tree plantations, thus saving two square yards of rainforest in Latin America for every cup. When Houston-based Hilcorp Energy made a challenging corporate goal, all 1380 employees got a performance bonus--\$100,000 each, regardless of position. Generous service takes more than routine effort or everyday contribution.



In the 2016 Rio Olympics 5000-meter heat, Abbey D'Agostino of the USA fell, causing her to trip up Nikki Hamblin of New Zealand, a runner she did not know. D'Agostino could have regained her composure and continued toward the finish line. Instead, she worked to help Hamblin to her feet. But D'Agostino's injured legs buckled in the attempt, and Hamblin returned the favor, assisting D'Agostino. Neither runner resumed the race until both could successfully run. Because neither was at fault for the fall, both were allowed to race in the finals.

"It is a moment," said Hamblin, "I will never, ever forget for the rest of my life." The cheering fans who watched the generous gesture are not likely to ever forget it either.

About Chip Bell



Chip R. Bell is a renowned keynote speaker and the author of several award-winning, best-selling books. Global Gurus in 2024 ranked him for the tenth year in a row in the top ten keynote speakers in the world on customer experience. He is also the founder of the Chip Bell Academy, an alliance partner with On3.ai that specializes in mobile based, AI-driven field learning programs with high level transfer of learning and retention. He can be reached at www.chipbell.com.