

# THE IN-STORE ADVANTAGE



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Wednesday, May 15, 2024

Volume 29 #697

**"Leadership is a mindset in action. So don't wait for the title. Leadership isn't something that anyone can give you. You have to earn it and claim it for yourself." » Travis Bradberry**

## The Hard Truth on Soft Skills

Over the past weeks, I've been reminded just how crucial empathy and effective communication are for anyone in a customer-facing role.

Indeed, a person's technical skill in their job becomes less significant if they don't possess the inclination or ability to connect with customers.

In this case, my family has been spending a lot of time sitting with an elder family member in the hospital.

After a very precarious few days, she has slowly started to mend, and we're hopeful her long recovery will be a steady one.

I suppose I've been fortunate, because it had been a while since I spent any significant amount of time, much less overnights, in a hospital room.

To be clear, I absolutely recognize and appreciate the stress on the nursing staff on the hospital floor.

It's hard to describe the incredibly diverse demands placed on these individuals.

## Know What I Meme?

It really is amazing how many funny memes get sent around these days that hit the nail on the head.

Many are clips from totally non-business videos that are repurposed with funny messages about business practices, work cultures, etc.

I know I've seen dozens featuring the likes of Pedro Pascal and Nicholas Cage, and that guy from Oppenheimer, Cillian Murphy. (And yes, I had to look that name up.)

I'm reminded of the power of humor to communicate, commiserate, and diffuse otherwise serious topics.

It's like the old Paul Reiser line about being able to get away with saying anything if you just followed it with "Hey, I'm just saying."

In this case, the meme that had many of my banker friends laughing and passing along was from a Katt Williams interview.

He appeared a few months ago on a podcast that has reportedly become the most-watched podcast episode in history.

While 95% of the subject matter in that podcast is not suitable for work, this clip was.

I had forgotten how open most hospital floors are. No screening is required to simply walk onto the floor and stroll around.

These folks deal with any number of visitors in various emotional states, on top of trying to care for patients, not get in trouble with the nurse in charge, and respond instantly when a doctor, who might only visit for a few minutes, gives an order.

That said, it becomes obvious pretty quickly which staff members understand that their jobs require both people skills and technical skills.

The impression left when a question is answered or even a simple task is performed is greatly influenced by the person's outward demeanor and personality.

You quickly learn to trust some people more than others based on their willingness to listen, show patience, and maintain a positive disposition.

To be fair, exhibiting these qualities in stressful environments is not always easy.

However, that's exactly why those who manage to do so quickly become the people you trust and feel good about.

While we may not face the same types or levels of drama, customers often feel stressed and/or vulnerable when dealing with finances, especially during complex transactions or problem resolutions.

Trust and customer preference are built as much on your ability to listen, empathize, and connect as on technical competence.

Take a few extra moments with customers today to earn theirs.

The caption above his head reads, "When my boss asks why I didn't come to them with my issues."

When you press play, Williams shakes his head and says comically and expressively, "Whaaat? Whyyy? You're part of the problem! You're part of the problem."

I'm not sure if anyone out there in leadership studies is measuring the predictive traits of highly viral, work-related memes. And if no one is... to whomever starts... hey, you're welcome.

This particular meme likely hits home with folks for a number of reasons.

But I suspect that one of the main reasons is team members' perceptions that many "bosses" are oblivious to the roles they play in dysfunctional situations.

For instance, some may have shown a "shoot the messenger" approach when a problem is brought to them.

Or it may be some other actions of a boss that create issues. As often, however, it is the inaction of a leader that is the root problem.

Tolerance of poor work habits and/or unprofessional behavior suggests that a leader is either incompetent or unprofessional themselves.

Either way, to an employee seeking a better situation, that manager is "part of the problem."

Your culture is not what you say it is; it's what your team actually experiences, driven by what you tolerate.

Laugh at memes. Just don't become one.

**"You never know what worse luck your bad luck has saved you from."**

**» Cormac McCarthy**

*Dave Martin, author of The In-Store Advantage, has become one of the most prolific writers in the banking industry. His keynote presentations, seminars, and podcasts have an authenticity and humor that brings teams of all sizes and seniority levels together.*

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