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"Work ethic is important because, unlike intelligence, athleticism, charisma, or any other natural attribute, it's a choice."

» **Mike Rowe**



Smiling Through it All

I recently read a one-frame cartoon of a masked cashier reciting instructions to a customer to wear a mask, follow shopping arrows, stay away from other shoppers, and stand behind the plexiglass partition when it was time to pay.

The customer's response was, "I'll just shop online...it's so much more personable."

I don't know what it says about me that the person I felt bad for was the cashier.

Even in the best of times, our frontline folks are the ones who tend to hear about anything and everything that customers are displeased with.

They are also our first responders when it comes to resolving problems and salvaging those customer relationships.

That said, most folks who have been dealing face-to-face with customers (behind glass or not) have had a severe customer relationship obstacle to deal with during recent times.

It's hard to see smiles.

The appeal of the human smile is universal.

It cuts across all languages.



What Are You Saving It For?

I came across a video clip this week that brought back memories from about (gulp) 40 years ago.

The video was an interview with a local Houston legend, Jim McIngvale.

He's better known as "Mattress Mack" and his is an amazing business success story. He's also an incredible humanitarian.

McIngvale was a talented high school football player who later made the University of Texas squad. He jokes that his position was "the bench."

A fellow by the name of Frank Medina was a legendary trainer there who made an indelible impression on Mack.

During one practice, Medina asked him, "What are you saving it for, son?"

Mack says that observation really reached him. By UT standards, he wasn't an exceptionally great athlete.

How could he possibly reach whatever potential he had if he were not giving his absolute best effort every opportunity he got?

It bonds people.

And sadly, for so many customer-facing employees, it's mostly been removed from their repertoire.

It's a bigger deal than folks who do not regularly interact with customers might realize.

Researchers have identified the emotional and physical impact of the act of smiling.

The mere physical act of smiling itself releases dopamine, serotonin, and endorphins into our bloodstreams.

Beyond that, smiles are contagious. As opposed to the things we're trying not to spread, smiles are a healthy contagion.

When you smile at others, their brains are coaxed to return the favor. Smiles help form an instant symbiotic relationship.

All that said, at this moment in time, many of us are having to interact with customers and peers from behind masks.

We are largely being deprived of a visual cue that we rely on to keep ourselves and others upbeat, agreeable, and in a healthy mood.

I believe it's important to keep these things in mind when going through our days.

Can you smile broadly enough behind a mask that folks can see it?

Some can. Many cannot without getting face cramps.

That's (mostly) a joke.

In today's world more than ever, be purposeful in bringing humor, compliments, and kind words to your customers and coworkers.

It will help put smiles on faces – even if we have trouble seeing them behind their masks.

We can use them now more than ever.

He's since taken that approach in life, business, and philanthropy. Millions have benefited.

That story had me traveling to my middle school days on a sweltering South Louisiana afternoon.

Basketball season was done and if I didn't want to end up in "regular PE", (for some reason, that was a bad thing), I had to make the track team.

Coach Ledet was the no-nonsense football coach who coached track, as well. He was also my Civics class instructor (and an excellent one at that).

The afternoon of tryouts, I lined up with a dozen or so guys to run a 1/2 mile race. I knew going in who I could not beat, but also who I had to finish in front of to make the team.

As I finished that race behind the leaders, but comfortably in the "make the team" group, Coach Ledet immediately called me over.

He said, "Martin, tell me that joke you told us in class today." I smiled and began to repeat it, and he stopped me.

He then said, "Son, if you have enough wind in you to tell me a joke 5 seconds after a race, you just gave a (bleep) poor effort on that track." He said it with a smile, so that helped.

He then said, "You've got better in you. I better see it next time you line up." I remember that interaction to this day.

Personal growth happens outside of our comfort zones. That's an obstacle because comfort zones are, uh...comfortable. We like it there.

Well, this year has forced most of us out of our comfort zones. We're in a place where personal growth happens.

It's time to show what's in you.

"When you pray for anyone you tend to modify your personal attitude toward him."

» **Norman Vincent Peale**

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