This Quiet Shift Is Helping Founders Build Fierce Customer Loyalty

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Earlier this year, I asked a flight attendant for an extra graham cracker. She came back with three. A small, inexpensive gesture for the airline, but one that stuck with me.

A few weeks later, at my local grocery store, I asked where to find Dijon mustard. Instead of pointing, the employee walked me to the aisle and helped me find the brand I wanted. (Okay, the brand my wife wanted. I'm a yellow mustard guy.) No checklist, no script — just a genuinely helpful human moment.

At a neighborhood body shop, the waiting room was stocked with snacks, drinks and a note on the wall: the owner's personal cell number, with an invitation to call anytime with questions or concerns. Who does that?

These moments, across totally different industries, had one thing in common: they made me feel something. Valued. Seen. Cared for. That's not service. That's hospitality.

Service is what people get. Hospitality is how you make them feel.

As a hospitality speaker, I've seen it everywhere — businesses nailing service but missing hospitality. Service is the transaction. Hospitality is the connection.

I’ve checked into hotels where the front desk agent greeted me with overly rehearsed cheer that felt more like theater than welcome. I’ve flown airlines where crews chirp slogans like “You’re the reason we fly!” in the most robotic tone imaginable. And I’ve walked into quick-service restaurants and been greeted with “Next customer in line!”— when I was the only customer there.

That’s what happens when we confuse process with presence. You can check all the boxes and still make people feel like just another number.

True hospitality isn’t scripted. It’s empathetic. It’s human. It’s the difference between being served and being seen.

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Hospitality isn’t industry-specific. It’s intent-specific.

Hospitality is a mindset. It applies whether you’re running a tech startup, a boutique, or a landscaping company.

On a recent cruise, our server didn’t just remember our names — he remembered our preferences, asked about our day, and even shared a little about himself. Every meal felt personal, like we were more than just table 12. That connection? It elevated the whole experience.

You don’t need to be loud or extroverted to deliver hospitality. Some of the most powerful connections I’ve felt came from people who were quiet but deeply present. It’s not about personality — it’s about intention.

The best businesses don’t just sell — they make you feel something

When I ran Edible Arrangements franchises, I thought we were in the fruit basket business. Turns out, we were in the joy delivery business. The moment I realized that, everything changed.

Drivers became ambassadors of celebration. They didn’t just hand over a product — they created an experience. They smiled, engaged and adapted to the moment. That energy mattered as much as the arrangement itself.

In-store, we trained our team to surprise and delight. A warm welcome. A helpful suggestion. Reassurance that this gift would land exactly the way the sender intended. Those were the magic moments people remembered — and returned for.

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Want to be memorable? Be more human.

People don’t stay loyal to brands. They stay loyal to how brands make them feel.

And here’s the best part: hospitality isn’t expensive. It doesn’t take flashy marketing or big budgets. It takes:

- Hiring people who care
- Empowering them to act on that care
- Building a culture that rewards empathy and presence
- Encouraging the small, unscalable touches that build loyalty

If you’re a business owner or leader, ask yourself: when was

the last time a customer interaction made someone feel surprised — in a good way? When was the last time someone walked away smiling because of the way you engaged with them, not just what you sold them?

It’s not always easy — especially in busy environments. But the companies that do it well are the ones people remember. And return to.

So yes, I speak and write about this. I coach on it. But it’s not just because I love a good guest experience. It’s because I believe hospitality is the most scalable, transferable business skill we’re still underestimating.

Whatever industry you’re in, hospitality is your human edge. And in a world that increasingly feels automated, that edge matters more than ever.

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