

** A Message From the CEO **

Nice Is Natural Here at the Club

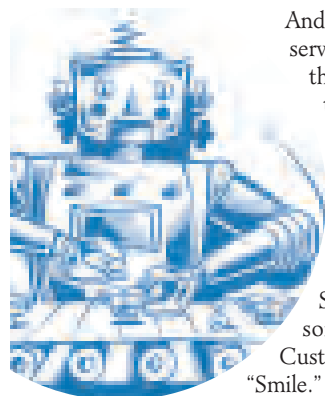
by **John Hawkins**
President and CEO, The Club



Is it me, or are you getting tired of customer service 'robots,' too?

What's a customer service robot? Well, it's the person at the clothing store (take your pick, they all seem to be doing it now) who stands at the entrance for the sole reason of saying "hi" to you as you walk in. If you're lucky, this customer service robot might even look at you when they say it, but usually all you see is a fleeting glance of a fabricated smile that for any normal human would really hurt after a while.

These robots are everywhere. They've even penetrated the strong walls of our local video store (I won't mention any names, but I think they recently got rid of late fees). The first time caught me by surprise because, as I walked in, I heard a very, very loud "hi" from out of nowhere. I wasn't sure if this barreling "hi" was intended for me, but I sheepishly looked around anyway to see if someone I knew happened to be in the store. Nope, no one familiar. Then, halfway to the horror section, I realized it was the worker robot. It was kind of weird because he said it without even looking my way. I tell you, these worker robots are getting good.



And I spotted some customer service robots at the copy store the other day (I won't mention names, but I think they now send overnight packages). At the counter was a list of 15 things management wanted them to do for them to provide "Excellent Customer Service." Number one was something like "Greet the Customer." The second item was "Smile." On and on the list went;

reading the entire thing was painful and tiring. It was so ... robotic. Why does providing excellent customer service have to be so complicated? Why can't the workers simply just be...well, nice?

Lastly, and quite possibly the most bizarre example of customer service robot usage is at a certain large chain of grocery stores. It happens every single time I buy something. After I pay, no matter how small my order is, the robot grocery clerk will always ask me if I need help to my car. The other day I bought a jar of pickles ... sure enough, "Would you like help out, sir?" I thought to myself, are they serious? She's going to help me out with a jar of pickles? That just seemed weird. Can't they program their robots to say something more human, like "Have a nice day" or "Please come again" or "Hey, I really like your beard!"

I say, down with robots and up with real human beings who are just simply nice to people. Instead of a long list of items that workers aren't going to read anyway, how about two simple words to live by. Be Nice. You don't need a robot greeter, a fake "hi," or an offer to help everyone to their car. All you need to do is be nice. Sure, say hi, but mean it, don't do it because it's part of the program.

Here at the Club, we have one simple rule. **Yup, you guessed it, "Be Nice."** We don't have any Monday morning robot mantras where we join hands and scream "the customer is number one" at the top of our lungs just prior to opening the doors and turning on the phone. No, we simply work on being nice. It's easy, simple and highly effective.

Well, thanks for listening to me rant and rave.

Until next month,

JOHN

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p.s. Had any customer robot sightings lately? E-mail me the details and I'll send you two free movie tickets!



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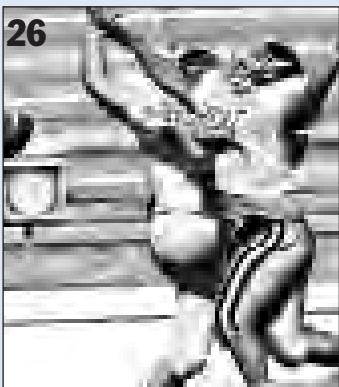
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