



Introduction from Brian Harrison, MD:

Occ Doc in a Box received a heart-warming Father's Day gift this year. My daughter Michelle proved she is truly a "chip off the old Occ Doc Block" by guest-writing a series for me! And I want to share it with you . . .

Dr. Michelle Hammond earned her PhD in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from Penn State University. She then reversed her ancestors' immigration trend to land a position as Lecturer in Organisational Behaviour at the University of Limerick, Ireland (yes, I said Ireland!) in 2008.

Thanks to Michelle and her husband Pete, my wife Nancy and I now also celebrate Grandfather's and Grandmother's Day, ever since they brought Clara Lilly Hammond into the world last year. Clara has the prettiest auburn curls and blue eyes you have ever seen, as you'd expect of a Limerick Lassie!

-Sláinte, as they say in Ireland (translated: Health!)

Service with a Smile: Emotions at Work

Michelle Hammond, PhD

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Most of us can agree that good customer service includes being greeted with a friendly smile. Some argue we should even be able to "hear the smile" through the telephone line. But does that "smile" come at a price? The concept of "emotional labor" suggests that sometimes it is tough work to manage the emotions we display, especially when it does not match what feel inside. Even if you are not in the service sector, you might relate to days when you had to refrain from yelling back to an irate customer/co-worker/boss, fight negative emotions when receiving not-so-positive feedback about your performance, or even remain serious when we find something funny at work.



The conflict we experience when we express emotions that are different from what we are actually feeling can be a source of anxiety, depression, and burnout. It can also be bad for the organisation leading to decreased job satisfaction, job performance, and poor customer service. Just consider the former Jet Blue employee Steven Slater, who after a passenger cursed at and shoved, grabbed beer from a beverage cart before deploying the emergency slide and used it to depart the plane. Obviously, the stress of managing emotions got the better of him. Although these negative outcomes can arise, positive outcomes can also happen, such as feelings of accomplishment or connection with another person depending on the strategies we use to manage our emotions.

So how can we manage our emotions and help others to do so?

- Rethink how we manage our emotions. When we paste on the smile or grin and bear it (called surface acting) we are much more likely to experience stress than when we actually try to feel the emotions we are trying to display (called deep acting). Customers and employees are also quite good at spotting our fake smiles. Trying to think about what is good in our lives and our jobs can help bring out authentic happiness.

- Develop friends at work and encourage employees to become friendly. Even when employees are not able to “control” their customers, having supportive co-workers helps to reduce the negative effects of emotion work. Giving employees adequate opportunities for shared breaks to let off steam, swap “war stories,” or encourage each other can go a long way.
- Count to 10 or take a break! Some research suggests that the “raw” emotions we feel only last a short time, and experiencing them past a minute or two is in some way our own choice. Take a break from the situation if you can, or at least take a deep breath before responding.
- Name the emotion we are feeling. Sometimes simply naming what we are actually feeling reduces the power it has over us.
- Consider emotion-based training in your workplace. Many consulting firms offer training in emotional management or emotional intelligence. After going through good training in emotional intelligence, many people report better relationships both in work and at home.

These are sure strategies to help keep you, your boss, and your customers smiling!