



the **awesome**
service awards
...saluting inspirational business service

The business case for passion and compassion

By Grant Woolliams

2009. The Chinese Year of the Ox.

A bullish year? Not if one links bulls, china (shops) and the January collapse of the 250 year old Waterford crystal and Wedgwood china businesses. The elements don't fit well together. They are, you might say, Ox-ymoronic, and 2009 is shaping as a tough year for bull owners and morons.

Equally 2009 is likely to be tough for business owners and their staff who in the "good times" thought customer service meant simply (and in due course) answering the phone or arriving (in due course) at the counter and taking an order. It will likely also mean bye-bye to the tradesmen who promised but didn't deliver (even a quote), and shout "see-you-later" to price gouging, opaque-billing "professional service providers" (an often acutely oxymoronic business description).

The business cycle worm has turned and the most likely to survive will be those who, even when they were rushed off their feet looked after clients and customers like they were family - with passion and compassion.

What does that mean in practical terms?

One day last year Jeremy Brew was driving into Auckland listening to Newstalk ZB and heard an invitation to publicly acknowledge those in business in Auckland who provide great business service. When he got back to home town Napier he nominated Auckland businessman Peter Jacobsen and his business, Exclusive Suit Hire.

The short story is that Mr Brew hired three wedding suits through Exclusive Suit Hire's Napier agent. Exclusive Suit Hire owner Peter Jacobsen duly (and appropriately) sent the suits via a national courier company. One got there. The other two disappeared. The courier company lost them. So Peter Jacobsen chartered a Cessna 172 and flew two replacement suits to Hawke's Bay to replace those the courier company lost.

In verifying Mr Brew's nomination for an ASB Awesome Service Award some interesting dimensions to this story became clear. For example:

- Mr Jacobsen told me he had his fishing rod in his hands ready to go out on a friend's boat on the Saturday morning

immediately prior to his distant customers wedding. Instead of "what the hell, it's not my fault," he cancelled fishing and spent hours of unpaid time fixing someone else's stuff up.

- He chartered the plane without establishing what it might cost him. Before you run off with the idea that he is a gizzillionair with deep pockets think again.
- Why did he worry when he didn't cause the problem? He was, he told me, uncomfortable that the non-arrival of the suits might ruin someone's special day.

Does news about great service get about? You bet.

- The Auckland Chamber of Commerce sent out a story about Exclusive Suit Hire's ASB Awesome Service Award win. Newstalk ZB ran it in a national news bulletin (and without any self serving mention about it being a supporter of the awards).
- In a telephone conversation with the marketing manager of the Christchurch Press I mentioned the Exclusive Suit Hire



The ever-expanding Awesome Service Award's winners gallery

Zac De Silva: Barkers Mens Clothing
w. barkersonline.co.nz

Nicole Wrigley: Haydon Optometrists
p. 489 5232

Diane Mackie: Digitalmax Photo Processors
w. digitalmax.co.nz

Warren Fitzgerald:
Avondale Mowers and Chainsaws
p. 828 9438

Kirsten Wolfram:
Oliver Young Communications
w. oliveryoung.co.nz

Mele Kaivaha: The Link Bus
w. linkbus.co.nz

Robyn Henry: The Conference Centre
w. aut.ac.nz/techpark/conference_centre/

Dave Lewis: Junk 2 Go Junk Removal
w. junk2go.co.nz

Steve Sealey: Airways Panel and Paint
p. 275 3335

Raewyn Elsmore: Callander Electrics
w. callander.co.nz

Peter Jacobsen: Exclusive Suit Hire
w. exclusivesuithire.co.nz

Lisa McPherson: K9 to 5 Doggie Daycare
w. K9to5.co.nz

Ben Schon: Vodafone Takapuna
w. vodafone.co.nz

Rose Gribble: Action Plan and Print
w. actionplanprint.co.nz

Ron Wood Auto Electrical
p. 846 4410

Tosca Waerea: Manukau Libraries
w. manukau-libraries.govt.nz

Nomeneta Tuaitau: Metrolink Buses
w. metrolinkbus.co.nz

Jonathan Lowther: Rebel Sport Albany
w. rebelsport.co.nz

Tree Total Arborists
p. 412 7283

Linda Hepden: Albany Village Care Chemist
p. 415 9676

Khalid Jatoi: Ventura Inn Auckland Airport
w. venturainns.co.nz

Rebecca Smith: Contacts 2 Go
w. contacts2go.co.nz

Faris Alshamsi: Harvey Norman Mt Wellington
w. harveynorman.co.nz

Bagel Love
p. 379 3764

Diane de Jong: House of Travel Orewa
w. houseoftravel.co.nz

example of inspirational service. When I had related the story he said "I have heard about this twice now. One of the staff here was at the wedding." So a complete stranger in Christchurch had already heard about great service provided by an Auckland company in support of a customer in Hawkes Bay! How many degrees separate New Zealanders?

Other examples of great business passion and compassion can be found in the "Winners Gallery" at www.awesome-service.co.nz.

And the dispassionate and uncompassionate?

Tempting though it is to name the courier company, the Peter Jacobsen story and the Awesome Service Awards are about inspirational service, not woeful customer care (in the end the courier company simply put the answer phone on and went home as Peter Jacobsen tried to find out where the wayward suits were).

It is however interesting that a number of people I have related this story to have spontaneously guessed the identity of the courier company.

Is it possible to make staff passionate (energetic and responsive) and compassionate (empathetic)? Certainly owners and managers can create a service culture within their businesses, and organisations such as KiwiHost provide excellent service education.

But the key ingredient to ensuring awesome service is obvious: only employ genuinely nice people, and only deal with businesses that do the same.

Ah, were life and business that simple.

The writer, Grant Woolliams, helps administer the Awesome Service Awards which are supported by the ASB, the Auckland Chamber of Commerce and Newstalk ZB.

To nominate someone deserving go to www.awesome-service.co.nz.

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