

Part 1: My Visit to Australia Gave Me ...

A Whole New Concept of True Excellence in Business

“Lock your doors, take your name out of the phone book, stop all advertising, and get rid of half your customers!”

This is marketing advice from Dr. Patrick Lund (Paddi to his friends) who has the world's most unusual dental business in Brisbane, Australia.

My name is Mike Basch. I have a company called Service Impact, which as its name implies, is a business founded to help people profit by improving their customer service. Prior to Service Impact, I was a founder of what has grown to be a giant US company: Federal Express. At the inception of FedEx, we knew we would have to change the meaning of service if we were going to survive at all — much less thrive. And thrive we did, but that's another story.

For Every Action...

The opportunity still exists to achieve higher profitability and more fun through better service in nearly every industry today. In fact, in this day of the de-personalization of business with mass retailing, voicemail, email and computers, we have done a great job of taking human warmth and passion out of business.

For every action there's an equal and opposite reaction. So, when you make business less human, a huge need is created in people, to trade with com-

panies where the employees really care about their customers and enjoy serving them.

Five years ago I discovered a company whose people care way beyond that which I had thought was possible in business.

I had been searching for a number of years for a really great example of customer service. I had made a checklist and rated those businesses that were really good at serving customers. Scoring out of ten, the highest thus far had been an impressive US business that achieved a seven.

Mike Basch, respected American Business Consultant, travelled all the way to Australia to give his one-and-only '10' service rating to Paddi Lund's dental team.

It took a visit to Brisbane, Australia, a place more noted for its sunshine than commerce, to really open up my eyes ... because in Brisbane I discovered a genuine 'ten'. And, not only did the employees in that business deliver an awesome level of service, but they actually seemed to enjoy doing it!

Even more special from my perspective as a consultant, is that the people in this little business had not always

acted that way. Both the service and their happiness were made possible by a collection of skills that they had learned and systematised.

Systematising Happiness

It's one thing to set up a culture for service from scratch, as we did at FedEx, but an entirely different thing to change the culture of a functioning business. But that's what Paddi Lund did - he moved his business and his life from depression to happiness; from just getting by, to thriving-personally and professionally.

Paddi changed his mediocre dental business to a place where people love to come (if you can believe that of a dental office).

In terms more fundamental, Paddi and his team moved from average dental income to 3 times average income, from a 60-hour week to a 22-hour week, from two months production in debts to negative accounts receivable, and from stress to joy at work.

Paddi's Story

Paddi could tell his story better than I can. I'll simply relate my experience as a complete outsider....

12 years ago, Paddi was depressed. As he began to think about the source of his depression, he realized it originated mainly from his work ...



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Dentistry. In a nutshell, Paddi didn't enjoy his chosen profession!

After some research, he discovered the interesting fact: that in Australia, Dentists committed suicide many, many times more than the average human being. Not wanting to become part of this statistic, Paddi asked himself a simple question that we all need to ask ourselves sometime. Paddi's query was this: "If the goal of life is happiness, why am I spending the prime hours of the prime years of my life in a job that doesn't give me that happiness?" Paddi's answer was also simple. "I don't want to waste my life by being unhappy at work any more."

Rather than leaving his profession, Paddi decided to change his business life. He decided that happiness truly was his goal and set about finding it - in dentistry.

Paddi's vision was an oxymoron for anyone who has spent much time in a dental chair. Instead of smiles, healthy teeth and other things that dentists usually market, Paddi decided to sell ... DENTAL HAPPINESS.

Paddi can tell you how he got there. I'll simply relate my experience visiting the business he created.

Claiming Great Service

As part of my business I speak around the world to all kinds of business audiences. I talk about 'customer service' and more importantly, the type of leadership it takes to get ordinary people delivering extraordinary service—what I call 'legendary leadership'. At many of these conferences at which I speak, people come up to me after my presentation and tell me about the company they have created. They claim that they actually deliver the '10' level of service I talk about. But as Fortune Magazine put it: "95% of the CEO's talk about it, 5% deliver it."

So, I am hard to convince. Until customers and employees tell me about

the great service, I generally don't believe much of what I hear from owners and managers. At one of the conferences, I heard Paddi speak.

It is quite unusual to hear a dentist speak authoritatively about business matters. Some of the illustrations that Paddi chose did push many people in the audience to the edge of their comfort envelope. Stories about death and torture and happiness-in-business, are

It seemed to me that Paddi would just as soon go into the office as on holiday. He didn't seem all that excited about a six-week trip to Europe.

Most interesting was something that Paddi only alluded to briefly. He said that he, "Turned away any customers who were not referred by any but the very best of his clientele."

I shall come back to these points later.

Mike's visit to Paddi's office convinced him that...

- You can work fewer hours per week, and yet make more profit.
- Customers are more impressed by the little, human touches than all your professional skills and technology.
- You can systematise happiness-in-business, and increase your profits by doing so.
- Work can be fun and productive — at the same time. He has really always known that, but Paddi and his team added new meaning for Mike.

And add to that...

- Service is about people caring. The environment that you provide has a great effect on whether your people, both customers and team, find it easy to care.
- All too often today, we only see growth in size as positive. Like many of our accepted paradigms, Paddi challenges this one, too.
- A 'by referral only' business is not only a possibility — Paddi Lund has done it!

rarely heard at this sort of function, but, Paddi spoke at length on these and all sorts of other unusual subjects.

I was very interested by the things that Paddi had to say about his business: 'dental buns' for the clients, 'No Pain Guarantees' for the nervous, and his avowed focus on creating contented customers and building a happy business-team. What he said about his business sounded good, but so do a lot of stories you hear until you dig in further.

A Few Things Impressed Me

Paddi was going on a holiday the next day for six weeks and he was happy to leave his business in the hands of his people for a whole six weeks.

After his talk, I asked Paddi if I could visit his office and talk with some employees and customers — 'where the rubber meets the road' so to speak. Paddi seemed happy to give me permission to visit as much as I liked and to ask whatever I wished of his team. This was my first inkling that Paddi's description may have been much closer to the true state of affairs than I had believed possible. Paddi did ask that I tell him the feedback I gained from talking to his people. Perhaps, at this stage, he was still not sure how the rest of his team saw the path they were treading. As it turned out, he need not have worried.

There was another, seemingly small thing, that Paddi mentioned which I

have come to realize is the core to the life changes he has made.

“I’m going on holiday for six weeks,” he said, “and all I’m going to take with me is this little bag that I can put in the overhead compartment.” Paddi calls it minimalism. And I suspect the lesson is that when you’re truly ready to give up the things in your life that don’t matter, you find the things that do — like happiness.

Back to the Story...

A friend, Paul, who was a client of Paddi’s practice, arranged the visit. I was sent an impressive information book (they call it their ‘Welcome Book’) that contained a wealth of knowledge about their practice and a hand-detailed, colour map to help me locate the building. This was especially important to me, as I was quite nervous driving an automobile on the left side of the road in a foreign country.

Paddi’s business was way out in the sticks (as they say in Australia) in a ‘working-class’ area. In spite of all the garish signs around, on Paddi’s building there was no signage to show that a business was operating there ... just a small, enigmatic, gold apple.

There was nothing to indicate to passing American business consultants that anything remotely related to a Dental surgery was in this building, but thanks to the map they had given me, I had found the practice.

Paddi’s building was intriguingly attractive in comparison to the somewhat run-down shops around it. There was a cobbled forecourt and topiary trees and a profusion of herbs and flowers in the well-trimmed gardens.

The door was locked with a sign near a doorbell saying ‘By Referral Only’. That sign really blew me away. Later I discovered its true significance. The people in Paddi’s little dental office were practising what I had, thus far, only dreamed about — ‘by referral only’ business. (They have since pro-

gressed to ‘By Invitation Only’, but that is another story.)

They had locked their front doors, taken down all their signs, and removed their business name from any phone book. One would imagine this was a recipe for disaster, but instead of failing miserably, they had really prospered. And they did this in spite of a trend in Dentistry to go in exactly the opposite direction — more advertising, bigger signs, and huge yellow pages entries.

I Rang the Bell

A few seconds later, a lady with a truly warm smile opened the door and greeted me. “Hi Mike, I’m Marilyn,” she said. “Welcome to Patrick Lund Dental Happiness.” Simple, but powerful. She not only knew my name, but how I like to be addressed. I was only there to do an interview. I wasn’t even a client!

Immediately I noticed a number of very different things about this dental office. First of all, there was the smell ... like a bakery or a coffee shop, not antiseptic like a dental office or hospi-

tal. Smell is one of the most powerful primal instincts we have. If we smell something that reminds us of a bad experience, we relive the emotions of that experience. We have no control over this response. Paddi’s team understands human nature at that level ... and they work with that nature to give their customers a happy experience.

Merilyn Led Me Through a Lounge Room

It was definitely not a ‘waiting’ room. There were no glass walls with someone busy sitting on the other side or at a desk, making you wonder



There was no indication on the exterior of the building, save a small golden apple, to indicate that this was a dental practice.

whether you need to go up to them or just sit down and wait. Instead there was a large cappuccino machine, an oven and an elaborate tea and coffee service. This was the type of crockery you would see in a home of distinction and the kind of restaurant equipment you would find in an up-market coffee lounge. There was beautiful artwork on the walls. Warm and inviting is the best way I can describe it. Impressive. Stunning almost!

Now I’m not a person who notices a lot of detail, but I couldn’t help but notice the differences between this and most medical or dental offices. It cer-

Paddi’s attention to detail systems worked as intended, so that Mike based his high opinions of the dentistry on the level of Paddi’s hospitality.

tainly wasn’t like any kind of dental office I had ever seen (or smelled) before.

Later, as I recounted my visit, I realised I had begun to relax and feel almost immediately at home with these people.

Merilyn said, “Let me take you to your lounge.” We proceeded to a door with a plaque on it that read, ‘Especially Reserved for Mike Basch’. My name had been printed on a card mounted on the door. (I later found they treated all their customers this way, not just wayward American business Consultants.) We went into the



Patients are offered coffee and fresh baked muffins while waiting to see the dentist.

room, which had three comfortable lounge chairs, a vase of flowers, an oil painting on the wall, a jug of water (with a little sprig of mint) and some fruit and nuts to nibble.

Merilyn suggested I sit in a chair. Excusing herself, she left to get something. As soon as I had settled, there was a knock on the door. A knock on the door! So it was my room, my door and they were knocking. I began to feel special and relaxed in spite of the fact that I had been away from home for some time and was quite tense prior to this visit.

A young woman walked in carrying a silver tray and said, "Hi Mike, I'm Joanne. Paul (that's the friend who was a client of the practice) said you like decaffeinated cappuccino and blueberry muffins. Is that right?" With the question came a warm smile. I agreed, I did indeed like blueberry muffins and decaf cappuccino.

Joanne placed the tray on a butler's table she had carried into the room. On it were a cappuccino that she had made at the long handled espresso machine and a plateful of Muffins she had baked in their oven — baked especially for me. Merilyn joined us, and, I followed her example of silence while Joanne set about serving us with perfection, grace and yes, a sense of joy.

I learnt that they always observe silence during the time they serve tea or

coffee. This 'tea ceremony' was all part of the system that they use to promote a calm atmosphere at their work. That they could pay so much attention to detail was all very hard to believe. I began to understand (and experience) Paddi's success.

Joanne's Story

Jo later told me she was 19 years old and just out of high school. She'd been with the practice just four months. She talked about what this first job was like and how it compared to the jobs her friends had. I asked Jo what her 5-year goals were and immediately she responded: "Well, I want to be married and have children although I don't have a boy friend at the moment. I want to go back to school and become a dental hygienist. But, I guess my strongest goal is to never leave this place."

I asked why? "Because I'm loved here," was her answer, "and believe me, I come from a loving home so I'm not some wayward girl that really needs a lot of love. I know what love is, and I've found it here. I don't want to give it up." I asked Jo if there was a specific incident that caused her to feel this way. There were many she said, but she gave me the one that stood out the most in her mind.

"A couple of months ago in one of our daily meetings, Pat said that I had done something to upset her that day. I felt terrible and asked her what it was. I so wanted to fit in here. But Pat couldn't tell me because she didn't know exactly, and that made me feel worse. I remember going home that night and not sleeping very well. I thought I wasn't going to make it here and that troubled me enormously.

"I came into the office the next morning and went to my station where there was a beautiful bouquet of flowers and a note from Pat,

Dear Joanne,

I know what I said to you yesterday hurt and there wasn't

much you could do with it since I didn't give you the specifics. If I can't tell you why I was upset, I should keep my mouth shut. Please accept my apologies.

Love, Pat.

"I literally ran to Pat and gave her a hug. Pat cared about me, and so, I discovered, did everyone else here. From that point on, I have been committed to being part of this very special family."

Back to My Visit...

I had seen nothing of the standard of dental care they provided but already I had decided that they were very good at the clinical procedures. Because of my systems engineering background I did suspect that Paddi had designed his attention-to-detail systems to create in his clients exactly this feeling of confidence in his dentistry. However, in spite of this insight from my profession, as a potential patient, I just knew that if they looked after the 'little things' so well — the tea, the coffee, the flowers, my name on the door — they had to be good at teeth!

To be continued next issue ...

Dr Paddi Lund has written a book about his journey mixing business, profit and happiness. You will only find *Building the Happiness-Centred Business* in a few specialty bookstores around the world.

It is also available direct from its publisher for A\$29.95 (£15, US\$20) plus shipping. Please call or write to Loretta Cohen at Solutions Press:
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