

# Good old-fashioned customer care tips that will set your franchise apart

 By [Aki Kalliatakis](#)

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There's a great story about how an employee at one of the famous American Trader Joe's stores went the extra mile in terms of service, not because they had to, but because it was the right thing to do.

An 89-year-old man was snowed in at his Pennsylvanian home during the Christmas holidays and his daughter was worried that he wasn't going to be able to get enough food because of the weather. She called several stores and appealed to them to deliver food to her father's home to solve the problem, but they all refused. Then she called Trader Joe's and was told that they also don't deliver, but that given the circumstances they would gladly make an exception and even suggested extra items he may need to fit in with his particular 'low salt' diet. The story doesn't end there though... after placing the order, the employee told her that she didn't have to pay for the goods and wished her and her father a merry Christmas.



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No doubt South African franchisees have similar stories to tell. These aren't simply the 'customer is king' stories, but rather tales that show a genuine heartfelt desire to go above and beyond the call of duty. They're all about showing respect and gratitude for what the customer represents to the business, keeping in mind that customers are people too with problems and day-to-day challenges.

As I see it, the lessons to be learned from the story are:

- The franchise (or brand) achieved massive publicity through the story going viral. This is the incredible power of the internet combined with a 'good news story'.
- This kind of publicity gives the public a permanent association between the brand and the 'good guy' image.
- The entire chain from franchisor to franchisees, service providers and employees gained, not only locally, but on an international level.
- The 'old fashioned customer care' ethic inherent in the franchisee's attitude to their customer was adopted by and reflected in the behaviour and generous offer of the individual employee that paid for the man's groceries.

## What's your story?

Bringing it closer to home, what does it take to get this kind of publicity? To start with you have to have some genuine feel-good stories of your own to share. In order for the entire franchise chain or brand to benefit, a core 'old-fashioned customer care' ethic must run right from franchisor to franchisees, service providers and all employees. I find it hard to believe that the employee in the story would have behaved in the way she did had the franchisee had a 'couldn't care less' attitude. The attitude from the top, along with effective communication, is the key element here.

Next comes training. Franchisees should constantly train staff who are interacting with customers. Training is not a once-off thing; they need to develop a 'customer care' attitude all the time. I also believe that a genuine customer care attitude shown by employers will make staff positive and motivated and happy to be associated with a franchise that really 'cares'. Invite feedback and criticism from your employees; they understand your customers best.

## Tips for training

- Find out exactly what your consumers want. Don't force your personal beliefs on them, deliver on their needs.
- Give customers what they expect and you will have happy customers. Touch the customers' heart and you'll have loyal consumers for life.
- Aim your marketing at the decision maker of the household, but ensure your 'customer service and care' philosophy is aimed at everyone.
- Recognise and respect that in a tough economy, value for money is important to customers, but good service and a sincere desire to go the extra mile is seen as part of that value

Above all, be authentic. Genuinely care for and respect customers. Get to know them, learn and remember names, give them a good experience every time and always thank them.

Don't wait for the old man who is snowed under and in a crisis to do your next good turn, the person you need to go the extra mile for is standing right in front of you.

## ABOUT AKI KALLIATAKIS

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