

You've got to give to get...but the best gift  
is the one that comes from your heart.

# Everyone Matters

**O**ur lives will never be the same again. Lots of people said that after the September 11th attacks, and it was true. Lots of people said it again after the economic meltdown earlier this year, and it was just as true.

Back in 2001, we were scared and angry, and for good reason. Today, we are just as scared and angry, but for different reasons. When we were attacked seven years ago, it was with violence, by outsiders. This time the attack was with avarice, and it was an inside job.

Then, as now, nobody is exempt. We're all in this mess together.

The good news is that, as a result, many of us are re-considering our lives. Some of us had most or all of our savings wiped out. Others lost their jobs. Many have hit bottom. It's only when we hit bottom that we really wake up, start looking around and re-evaluating our lives and our life strategies.

Once again, we're reminding ourselves about what really matters, whether our lives really have been all that meaningful. We're thinking about whether we really were that happy in the first place. There's a search for validation. Many of us are older now and thinking about our legacies. We're thinking about whether — and how much — we matter.

That's healthy. We all want to know that our lives have a purpose that's larger than ourselves. The more I think about that, the more I realize that the real issue isn't about how much *I* matter. It's really that *everyone* matters. No matter what.

This is just as true in business as it is in daily life, but you'd never know that by watching what's happening out in the marketplace. If most businesses

were truly going through the kind of self-examination that most people are going through right now, we'd be seeing something new and different. We'd be seeing companies transformed by the idea that their role is to serve us, and not just to sell to us.

Instead, we're seeing more of the same old thing. We're seeing advertising campaigns ostensibly meant to comfort us. Was anyone ever comforted by an advertising campaign? No, because the ads really aren't about us and our discomfort; they are mostly about their brands and their images.

We're seeing huge sales offering 50 percent — or more — in discounts. Is it because these retailers care about us and understand our needs? Maybe a little, but it's really more about solving *their* problems, not *ours*. The message they are sending certainly isn't that everybody matters. It's that *they* matter, but we really don't.

If these retailers really believed everyone mattered, and wanted to let us know that we mattered, what would they do differently? Not too long ago, my daughter purchased a new outfit from Express for an event that evening. When she got home she discovered the checkout clerk had forgotten to put the belt in the bag. After calling the store to explain the error, the manager personally drove out to our home after she got off work at 6:00 p.m. to deliver the belt. No questions asked.

Just this week, I was looking for an accessory to complement an outfit I already owned but Macy's didn't have what I needed. The sales associate went 'on break' and walked with me to their competitor in the mall to help find what I was looking for.

Most likely neither of these two good deeds were



written in store policies. The employee was motivated by a sense of human giving... to me, a stranger! I was so grateful for her help, but even more for the feeling that I mattered.

Too many corporate leaders forget the ancient adage, “you got to give to get” in their daily business decision-making. Yet ironically, they probably live by that adage when they go home to their personal lives. Somehow there is this separation that exists between business and personal values and morals—the Corporation is saying “legal entity” while their personal life is a “human endeavor.”

Henry David Thoreau said that corporations don’t have a conscience, but a corporation with conscientious employees is a corporation with a conscience. Perhaps that suggests a powerful strategy for marketers to win customer loyalty and competitive advantage. We should take a page from the 2008 Presidential election and start a bottom-up movement—one consumer, one employee, one investor, one supplier at a time.

All the stakeholders are in it together, just as our whole country is in it together. It doesn’t require a

complex strategy or a massive budget to treat us like we matter. It is so simple to do and yet, for the most part, it never happens. This isn’t just about putting a “green” gloss on new products or services. It’s not a matter of borrowing equity from a charity or cause.

That has its place, but it’s not the same thing as what I like to call creating a *deep soul connection* that brings meaning and purpose to others. Every ounce of my being believes that the greatest opportunity for brands is to help us live better, more purposeful lives. Treating us like we matter is a huge step in that direction and sometimes it’s as simple as looking us in the eye and being yourself.

Humanity is all it takes. ■



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