

Many of my clients called our approach
"The Secrets to Success." It saved them from getting fired!

HOW TO MAKE A



On Relationships, Profits,
Productivity, Retention,
Customer Service, and
Job Security. It Works.
It Costs You Nothing!

POWERFUL, POSITIVE IMPACT

Thomas D. LaBaugh, MBA, Ph.D.

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On Relationships, Profits, Productivity, Retention, Customer Service,
and Job Security. It Works. It Costs You Nothing!**
By Thomas D. LaBaugh MBA PhD

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Print ISBN: 979-8-88531-124-3

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88531-125-0

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

Printed on acid-free paper.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2022

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

LaBaugh, MBA, Ph.D., Thomas D.

How to Make a Powerful, Positive Impact: On Relationships, Profits,
Productivity, Retention, Customer Service, and Job Security. It

Works. It Costs You Nothing! by Thomas D. LaBaugh, MBA, Ph.D.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022912120

Table Of Contents

How to Make a Powerful, Positive Impact! Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Overview: How to Make a Powerful, Positive Impact.	5
Chapter 2: How Do We Currently Manage? How Do We Currently Lead? Poorly.....	7
Chapter 3: Success – Where We Want to Be.	13
Chapter 4: Is It Possible To Change and Make a Powerful, Positive, Impact?.....	19
Chapter 5: Employee Needs. What People Want From Work; The 12 Elements	23
Chapter 6: The Rewards for Meeting Those Needs? You Can Become a Star!	27
Chapter 7: Are These 1999 Employee Needs Relevant Today?.....	29
Chapter 8: Behavior Sense.....	39
Chapter 9: Managers and Leaders. What They Do.....	45
Chapter 10: Be More Than a Manager or Leader. Be a Catalyst.	51
Chapter 11: Do’s and Don’ts of Good Catalyst Behavior.	55
Chapter 12: The Consummate Catalyst-Herb Kelleher, President, and CEO of Southwest Airlines.	59
Chapter 13: Aiming for the Performance Achievement Targets (P.A.T.)	63
Chapter 14: The Four Wins of Change.....	65
Chapter 15: Facilitating the Tangible and Intangible Needs of Employees.....	69
Chapter 16: What Do We Know About the Boss?	75
Chapter 17: How to Work Well With the Boss	81

Chapter 18: Suck Up.....	87
Chapter 19: Don't Just Bring Me Problems, Bring Me Problems with Possible Solutions	89
Chapter 20: Completed Staff Work	91
Chapter 21: How Not to Work with the Boss	93
Chapter 22: Acronyms	97
Chapter 23: C.O.A.C.H.I.N.G.....	99
Chapter 24: C.O.M.M.I.T.	113
Chapter 25: Manage Anger by Making a High S.C.O.R.E.....	115
Chapter 26: Do Something N.I.C.E.	119
Chapter 27: Make An Impression That Will L.A.S.T.....	127
Chapter 28: W.I.N. I.T.	133
Chapter 29: Catalyst Communication is as Simple as A-B-C	141
Chapter 30: W.A.I.T.	147
Chapter 31: Axioms	151
Chapter 32: Those Closest to the Work Know it Best and Support What They Help Create. Also, there is much to G.A.I.N.....	153
Chapter 33: Don't Be Right—Help Make It Right.....	159
Chapter 34: Just Walk On By!	165
Chapter 35: Humble Thyself and Apologize	167
Chapter 36: Behavior Rewarded Is Behavior Repeated	171
Chapter 37: Catalyst Navigators	177
Chapter 38: Surrender.....	179
Chapter 39: Earn Straight A's As a Catalyst	183
Chapter 40: Getting and Keeping a Job: Essential Behaviors	185

How to Make a Powerful, Positive Impact

Chapter 41: The 10 Abandonments (Abandon These Behaviors)..... 189

Chapter 42: There is No Behavior Change Without a Consequence. 193

Chapter 43: Cleansing the Toxic Workplace..... 197

Chapter 44: Summary and Conclusions: 203

Chapter 45: Quick Reference: Find the Tool to Fix the Problem.... 207

Chapter 27:

Make An Impression That Will L.A.S.T.

(This acronym was first seen on a DVD produced by Media Players Corporation)

L=Listen

A= Apologize/Acknowledge/Accommodate

S=Satisfy/Solve

T=Thank

This acronym can be used in two ways:

- 1) Responding to angry or disappointed customers
- 2) Working with staff.

Using L.A.S.T. while encountering an angry or disappointed customer:

L = Listen

Listen actively. Nod your head, focus your eyes on the speaker, and show genuine interest. Do not get angry or defensive. Do not interrupt. Let them finish. The goal is simply to listen, hear them out, and let them vent. Use the same approach to managing customers on the phone. If the anger comes in the mail or through email, use the same tactic. In those cases, use S.C.O.R.E. (Chapter 25) to settle down, wait a day or two, and then respond. Do not react immediately. When angry, you may say something you will regret.

A = Apologize/Acknowledge/Accommodate/Ask

Tell upset customers that you understand their disappointment, and are sorry they had a bad experience. Many people have difficulty apologizing when they feel they did nothing wrong. Think of your apology as an expression of your regret that the customer was not fully satisfied. You are sorry they did not like your product or service and their experience did not meet their expectations. You are right. You did nothing wrong. Your apology is just your expression of regret that the customer was dissatisfied.

Define the needs of the person with whom you are dealing and ask what you can do to make the relationship right. Remember our two-word definition of marketing; “meeting needs.” Marketing is not sales or high-pressure pushing of products or services that people do not want. It is identifying and meeting customer needs. This is what successful enterprises have in common.

S = Satisfy

Satisfying customers or employees means acting on your understanding of their needs. Through your apology or accommodation, you have determined what will make them happy. You might even ask them, “How can I make this right?” Then do it. It might take the form of a replacement, a refund, a store credit, or another service. Your goal is to keep them on as a customer since it costs 13 times more to get a new customer than to keep those you have; a real incentive to satisfy existing customers.

T = Thank

Thank the customer for letting you know they were not satisfied and allowing you to make amends. Invite them back to use your services or products.

Example: Marina owner. I had a boat while living in Michigan where summers are short. Early one season the boat would not start. I took it to a marina and they determined it was a problem in the fuel line. They did not have the parts but would order them and the boat would be ready in a week. I waited. After 10 days of hearing nothing, I called. They said they forgot to order the parts but would do so immediately. Another week went by and I called again. They said that the part had just come in and they would install it the next day. No call for a week. I finally called and found that they had forgotten about it. I next asked to speak to the owner. He got on the phone and I gave him an earful. I was angry and loud and rude and rambled on about the short boating season, the failures of his maintenance staff, and my family's frustration of no water skiing or fishing. I went on and on. He was silent. When I finally stopped, he said, "Tom, you did the right thing by calling. I appreciate it. I'm sorry you had the problem."

What? I was itching for a fight because I was right. He took all of the fight out of me like air out of a balloon. He continued by saying, "What would you like me to do?" I said I wanted my boat fixed NOW! He said, "I understand. I'll get right on it. I'll check with my staff on where they are with the parts and getting it fixed. I will call you in an hour. And, thanks for letting me know and calling me directly. We'll take care of this." He called in 15 minutes (Under promise-over deliver) and said the boat would be ready the next day at no charge.

The moral? He listened. He deflated my anger and eagerness to fight, he apologized, he solved the problem in an hour and he thanked me for my business. He was calm and kind. He ate the cost of the mistake of his staff. And most of all, he kept a customer by making me happy.

Using L.A.S.T. when talking with your staff:

L = Listen

Welcome them when you first meet. If they are in your office, ask if they would like some water or coffee. Be cordial, open, and friendly like you would with a customer since, in a way, they are. Listen carefully. Pay close attention to each individual's presentation. Nod your head and take occasional notes to show your interest. Perhaps say "Uh-huh" to let them know you are listening. Keep your eyes on them. Don't get involved with a second activity (multi-tasking). Don't be distracted looking at your computer or phone. And the hardest? DON'T INTERRUPT! Let them finish talking before you jump in.

A = Acknowledge/Accommodate/Apologize/Ask

Use terms such as "That's a good idea," and "I'm glad you mentioned that." In some cases, you may want to clarify your comments and position. It can sometimes be appropriate for you to "Apologize" for causing a misunderstanding even if they made the error and you outrank them. Maintain open dialogue. Be conciliatory. Often an apology is difficult for managers because they feel they did nothing wrong. As in the case of the dissatisfied customer, the goal is simply to express regret that the employee did not understand what was said or is disappointed about new rules, equipment, or procedures. It is OK for a manager to apologize!

The apology can lead to identifying and meeting the other person's needs. Show them that you sincerely want to work at understanding their thoughts and feelings. Let them know you will do whatever is necessary, within reason, to make them happy.

S = Satisfy

Satisfy the other person's objections or concerns. Remember The Four Wins of Change. Ask questions using open probes: "Tell me more about," or "Please explain that in a bit more detail?"

Look for ways to incorporate the other person's ideas into yours and vice versa. Remember, "Those closest to the work know it best," as we will discuss in Chapter 33. Don't just solve their problems for them. Make them part of the process of finding the answer because chances are they have a major contribution to make. Believe, when you sit down with them, that they have good ideas to resolve your issues.

T = Thank

Thank the person for coming to you to discuss their concerns or disappointments. Thank them for trusting you to help find a solution. Let them know they are not interfering with your work. They are the reason for your work. Invite them back if other problems arise. Thank them for their contribution. You might even consider offering employees some time off, new equipment, or additional staff as a way of showing your appreciation for their contributions.

Example: The Admin needs time off. The front desk person went to see the Office Manager (OM) who asked, "How can I help you today?" (Welcoming). The response was, "I have a sick boy at home who needs to see the doctor right away. I made a 2:00 appointment and hoped I could take some PTO. I hate to do this so suddenly but our childcare person just called and said our son is running a temperature."

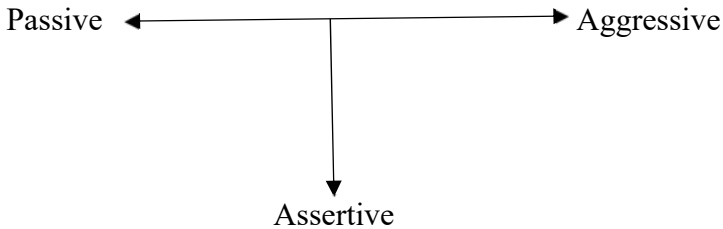
The OM said, "I'm sorry to hear that. You did the right thing by coming in. Yes, you should get your son to the doctor (acknowledge/accommodate). Any thoughts on how to cover your work (ask)?" "Well, Mary said she would cover part of the time and skip lunch. Maybe others could also help." The OM said, "Good. I'll talk with them. Don't worry (satisfy). We'll take care of things here. I hope everything turns out ok."

What happened in this example? The OM was welcoming, listened, accommodated, satisfied, and thanked the employee for coming to her.

Thomas D. LaBaugh, MBA, Ph.D.

She also looked for new solutions and inquired about the personal concerns of the admin (fulfilling one of the 12 elements). The outcome was very positive for all (The Four Wins of Change).

What position is recommended for the Catalyst? Do not be either passive or aggressive. Take a position in the middle: Be assertive.



Lay your ideas upon the altar of good ideas. Let others massage and season them to find the best outcome or solution through consensus.

Catalysts are assertive—not passive or aggressive. They present ideas, concerns, and interests and stay open to new ideas. Assertiveness does not mean taking a strong position, loudly insisting on your way, or insulting others with bullying behavior. That is aggression. That is “Right Fighting.”

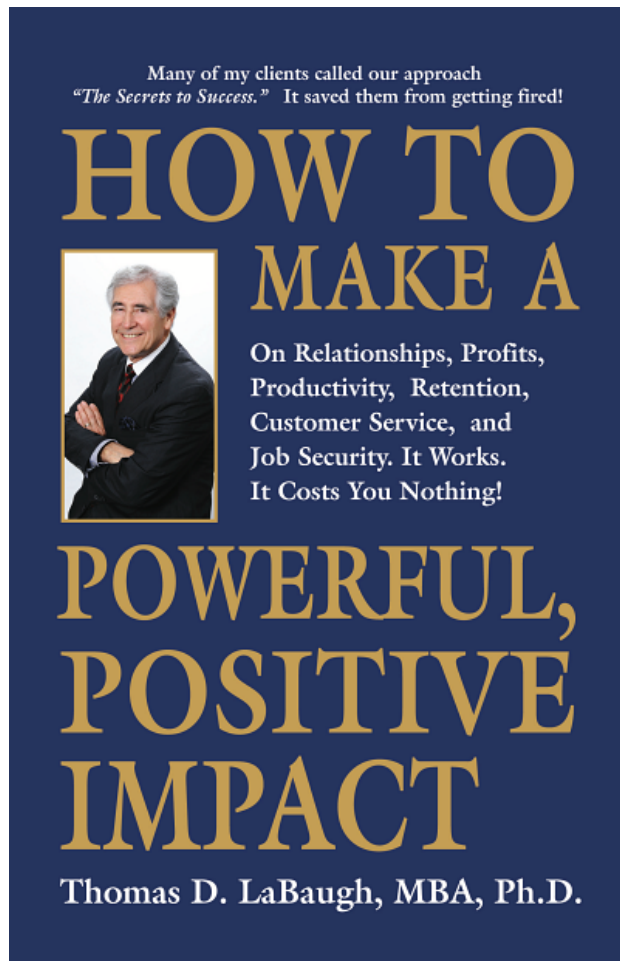
Never get angry, and never close down in disgust. These are mistakes many of my outplacement clients made. When the evidence or the power is too strong, do not go down fighting; just surrender.

If the word “surrender” is too strong, consider the word “investment.” Think of it as investing in the organization. Plead your case as clearly and concisely as possible. Then let the ideas of others, which are also under consideration, take their natural course.

Example: Tier-one VPs. I counseled two vice presidents working for a tier-one automotive supplier. One was in charge of operations which was all of the people and performance in five plants in four states. The other was the vice president of maintenance. He bought the equipment, determined the specs and production flow, and managed shipping and receiving.

These two never talked to each other. They were mad. In meetings, the Operations VP deliberately doodled on a notepad to let everyone know he was not interested in what was said. Sometimes he would push his chair back from the table and look at the floor to show his dissatisfaction with the dialogue and the ideas of others. He became so overt in his disdain that he occasionally would turn his chair around so that the others in the room would only see his back. In the words of another VP, “It was awful.” When the Maintenance VP aggressively attacked the Operations VP in meetings, there was still no movement. Both had shut down.

I interviewed each person regarding the actions of the other and their impact on the organization. After some counseling, both individually and together, the two began to see the damage they were doing to The Four Wins of Change in the organization. Both knew they were being “aggressive” and needed to back off to a position of “assertive” as their behavior was harmful to themselves and the organization. They decided to meet in the coffee room, which both considered neutral ground, on Monday and Thursday at 9:00 am to share company concerns and find solutions. Both had to “Surrender” some of their antipathy and “Humble Thyself and Apologize.” But it worked and helped heal a broken, multimillion-dollar company.



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