

Happy Employees Create Loyal Patients and Sustainable Profits

A Review of the Book: *Why Everyone is Smiling? The Secret Behind Passion, Productivity and Profit*

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When was the last time you approached a business and encountered dour, disengaged, or bitter employees? Would you say they served you well? How likely were you to return to that business or recommend it to others? Experts say that a business' reputation is built on first impressions—employees who consistently deliver the friendly, helpful, and professional experience customers (urgent care patients) expect. Paul Spiegelman, CEO of The Beryl Companies and author of *Why is Everyone Smiling?*, understands this and embraces a “Circle of Growth” philosophy—a belief that happy employees lead to customer loyalty, which in turn drives profitability.

I recently received a post card advertisement for a free screening event at the Baylor University Medical Center near my home in suburban Dallas. When I called the toll-free number to register, I spoke with a courteous operator who recorded the details of my reservation and told me when and where to report. And a few days later, I received a letter confirming the details. If I hadn't known better, such a seamless transaction would lead me to believe I was interacting directly with Baylor's marketing department—but in actuality the entire registration process was handled by Beryl.

Founded by Spiegelman in 1995, Beryl operates a 50,000 square foot call center in Bedford, Texas that provides physician referral, event scheduling, nurse triage, appointment reminders, and post-discharge services for hospitals. While the call center business is typically associated with offshore outsourcing, high turnover, low morale, and a boiler room environment, Beryl is distinguished because of its low attrition, high customer loyalty, and profits reinvested in employees. As a result, Beryl has been able to achieve high margins in a commoditized industry and has been consistently recognized as a “best place to work” by local and national publications.

While business publications frequently cover the tactics that define “good customer service,” Spiegelman's book, *Why is Everyone Smiling?*, provides a unique perspective on building a culture of excellence by exciting and thrilling employees and making management accessible, visible, and approachable to gain employee's respect and trust. Three principles underlie Beryl's business strategy:

- Invest in your product or service so that it is valued highly
- Invest in your people so they can deliver the high-value product or service
- Charge a premium price for your high-value product or service

For urgent care operators, the relevance of the Beryl story is that providers and staff must be engaged in the practice to create the type of patient experience that will drive repeat business and positive word of mouth. To achieve that end, follows are nine salient points from Spiegelman's book:

- 1) Some companies have such charisma that you want to be associated with them in some way
 - Deep connections to the community in which they do business
 - Close, personal, 1-on-1 relationships with customers and suppliers
 - Life and business are both about relationships
- 2) Beryl made a conscious decision to stay small; it didn't think being big would improve its results
 - Turnover rate of 17% (vs. 80%-90% industry average)
 - Client retention rate of 95% (even though they charge a premium price)
 - Successful companies don't grow just for the sake of growth
- 3) If your customers focus more on cost than any other factor, you are a commodity business
 - You don't want to be in a commodity business because prices are driven down to zero profit
 - Low-price providers don't make money and eventually go out of business
 - Premium providers do not compete as the low-price provider

- Define your customers specifically – know whom you want to be a “Client For Life”
 - It’s okay to fire an existing client
- 4) The best model for the future of American business is smart, small, ethical companies willing to make long-term investments in a loyal, local workforce
 - When you treat your people like true contributors, it does the business tremendous good
 - When you focus your business on solid values, it benefits both the community and the economy
- 5) Beryl believes in a Circle of Loyalty: Employee Loyalty leads to Customer Loyalty which leads to Profitable Business
- 6) Building relationships through customer service is your single biggest business opportunity
 - Your customers need to know you will go to any end for them
 - Providing stellar service is a sure path to having leverage in pricing
- 7) To price for profit:
 - Your customers must feel as if they’re getting added value
 - You have to educate your customers about that added value
 - You have to be willing to lose business
 - You end up working only with people who really want to work with you
 - Loyal customers don’t shop around
- 8) Culture is the combination of little things we do that make our co-workers smile - at work and at home
 - Physical environment that reinforces team atmosphere and valued employees
 - Provide lots of personal recognition at a level that shows you know what’s going on in colleagues’ lives
 - Proactively involve all colleagues’ families
 - Preach easily understood values
 - Promote wellness among colleagues
 - Realize that tradition and consistency are critical to the development of culture
 - It’s physical, spiritual, and, for some people, religious
- 9) General management lessons
 - You need a clear vision that everybody understands so they know where you’re going
 - Your words need to be taken seriously, so you must communicate clearly
 - Provide feedback the right way – the way that’s best for your colleagues
 - Maximize the number of channels where employees can provide feedback
 - Walk the floor and talk to your employees regularly
 - Give good, honest feedback, and do it often
 - Seek out mentors and act as a mentor
 - Strive to be the single most responsive coworker in the company
 - *When somebody needs something from me, I want them to get it immediately*
 - *I don’t want to be a bottleneck to anybody*

Which of these points can you utilize to create an employee-centric/customer-focused culture in your urgent care center?

Why is Everyone Smiling? The Secret Behind Passion, Productivity and Profit may be ordered through major booksellers including Amazon.com: <http://www.amazon.com/Everyone-Smiling-Secret-Passion-Productivity/dp/193328580X/>