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They Want to Be Appreciated

Jack Mitchell  
Leadership Coach



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# Hug Your People

*They want to be appreciated!*



by Jack Mitchell

**I**T'S SOMETHING I'D BEEN BELIEVING, and yet it jolted me—frankly, blew me away!

Not long ago, a fabulous woman came to work for us at one of our clothing stores in Connecticut. At her last job, she was a real superstar. She worked hard, putting in endless extra hours without complaint. Her customers adored her. She made good money. The fringe benefits were generous.

So we wondered, why did she want to leave New York and join our team?

It was simple. Nobody at the other company ever let her know in a personal way that she was valued. Even after selling a million dollars of merchandise in just one year—and that's an awful lot of shirts and ties—no one, not a single person, ever came up to her and said, "Wow, great job! You're terrific."

Not! Not once! Never, ever! Did her boss ever send her flowers in gratitude? Not a single daisy. And that hurt. It made her job feel like, oh well, a job.

Her experience reminded me of something I've always understood: *Everyone wants to be appreciated!*

I'm the CEO of a third-generation men's and women's specialty clothing business with three stores in the New York metro area. I wrote a book *Hug Your Customers* about how my family and our associates built our business by creating extraordinary personal relationships that exceed expectations.

Many companies say they care about customers, but they don't know how to show it. I thought that by sharing our stories they might learn how we show it by giving lots of hugs.

Giving great personalized customer service has always been the foremost goal of my family—we've been hugging away since my parents Norma and Ed Mitchell founded the business in 1958—and one thing we never lose sight of is that you can deliver great service only if you treat your associates right. You don't give extraordinary customer service in a vacuum—great people give great, personalized service!

Studies show—and the success of our stores are living proof—that when associates are extremely satisfied their

customers are extremely satisfied.

Every company wants successful, loyal workers. Leaders say so, and of course many truly "get it" that people are their most important asset. Some recognize, as we do, that they are in the people business. Yet it appears to me that others focus only on hugging their product and on making a better widget, gold ball, or high-definition TV, or on painting it a different color and putting some new bells and whistles on it. Or when sales are lagging, they focus on price. They lower it and cre-



ate a fantastic deal—never thinking that if they treated their associates with greater personal care, they would work harder and smarter and would go the extra mile to hug a customer because they feel hugged themselves!

I'm not saying you shouldn't focus on building a better product, but positive people power is fundamental to the overall success of any business.

## Becoming People-Centric

These days, there's a serious human disconnect in business. People spend more time at the office than at home and want to feel personal and professional satisfaction from their work.

From my own encounters shopping for groceries or a new car, or traveling on a plane, I see that the need to hug your "huggers" has never been greater. I encounter people with these vacant looks who tell me that they're physically present but mentally elsewhere, because they're not engaged.

Often, the only time an employee hears from his boss is when he screws up and gets reamed out. It's easy to put someone down. Some would say that the tough part is to build someone up. The reality is that it can be the most sat-

isfying work a manager can do.

Of course, it starts at the top. Leaders own the challenge, and set the tone, mindset, and culture. You, too, can be a leader of your actions and destiny if you get the force of the hugging culture. Leadership is everything.

When hugging permeates a company, it becomes a people-centric culture.

## Know What People Want

I continue to hear from others in companies that aren't people-centric that employers barely know the individuals who carry on the work, and they surely don't know about the personal concerns so genuine to their lives.

Companies don't get that it's not enough to have periodic employee recognition programs. It's how they are treated every day. It's the little things, the little hugs. The appreciation and attention that don't cost a dime.

Since people like working with us, our customers enjoy shopping with us. And that gives our family business a great ROI. We've been told by our vendors and bankers that this is one of our secrets of success. Our sales were over \$65 million in 2003, and we have been strongly and steadily growing ever since. But we also achieve something far more enriching—we enjoy a fabulous return on people (ROPE).

After spending a lifetime selling clothing alongside Mom and Dad, my brother, Bill; my wife, Linda; and our four sons and three nephews, I see that five principles guide us in hugging our people: to be *Nice* to them, to *Trust* them, to *Instill Pride* in them, to *Include* them, and to *Recognize* them.

These principles work for us, and they'll work for you! They produce remarkable results. If you succeed in all five of these principles, you will produce loyal and effective associates and the strongest teams. The key is personalization delivered positively with passion. Once you have that magical connection on a personal level, the rest is just focusing with great discipline on consistency and execution and delivery. The world may conduct business in 6,800 languages, but everyone understands and loves a hug.

When Dad woke up each day, he'd say, "I hope I can make a difference to our people today." It's worked for us for 50 years—and it'll work for you. And work will never seem like work again. **SM**

Jack Mitchell is CEO of Mitchell's/ClothingMatters and author of *Hug Your People* and *Hug Your Customers* (Hyperion). Visit [www.hugyourpeople.com](http://www.hugyourpeople.com).

**ACTION: Hug your people today.**