You can tell you are about to meet a joy carrier when a colleague’s face lights up just announcing, “Let me get David for you.” The co-worker’s animated look lodges your eager anticipation somewhere between “you are in for a treat” and “you ain’t gonna believe this!”

Then it happens. You come to face to face with a person who has fallen hopelessly in love with his role!

My business partner and I were staying at a Marriott near Chicago, and had finished a late afternoon hotel meeting with one client and were en route to a nearby restaurant to meet another client for dinner. The restaurant was beyond walking distance but an insultingly short haul for a taxi driver. But the hotel van was available and bell stand attendant David Harris was to be our driver.

Now imagine this. You can “feel” David emotionally long before he shakes your hand. His enthusiasm is so apparent that his style and spirit meet you before he does. The first thing you notice is David’s glowing Steinway smile — like he just unexpectedly encountered two long-lost boyhood friends. The second thing you notice is his gait — a man extremely eager to connect and raring to serve. Finally, you witness how his gusto infects every single soul within earshot with a robust case of the grins.

“You gentlemen don’t spill your grape juice,” David teased as he made a sharp corner just shy of the restaurant. It was obvious he was crystal clear on the contents of our adult beverage cups and was having a blast accommodating our slight departure from customary van rules.

Depositing us at the restaurant he gave us each a two-handed shake and his business card. “Would you gentlemen please call me when you finish dinner? I can be here in five minutes! And, if you want to bring back a few buddies for a nightcap, we would love to take care of them as well.” We literally wanted to rush through dinner just to hurry and get a return visit from the joyful spirit that accompanied David Harris!

Joy carriers are easy to spot. Their countenance is brighter than normal; their customer courtship is more confident than usual, and their connection is more captivating than typical. They parade charisma without “charging admission.” When a politician shows you charisma, you put your hand on your wallet. When actors display charisma, you get your money’s worth. But the charm of a joy carrier is just there for you to enjoy … no strings are attached.

Joy carriers seem liberated from the ties that bind most of us. They are not easily derailed or bothered by people who have turned bitter or cynical by their experiences on the planet. Their freedom is not an expression of rebellion or revolt. They show their joyful spirit because that is who they are, not because they have anything to prove. What is it about this special breed of service providers that turns them into Pied Pipers of sorts, making customers want to fall in line behind them in hopes that some of the joyful spirit might rub off? David Harris provides us a ready-made specimen to dissect, explore, and understand.

**Unconditional Service**

The morning after our “freedom ride” with David, we reflected on the special experience. What had made it so inviting and refreshing? What was it about David that caused us to feel so great about sharing the adventure with him? Was this a serendipitous moment or was this the everyday David? Was this nature, nurture, or the handiwork of some superior leader?
Our first thought was that David was having fun with us, not for us or on behalf of us. He was not a performer in pursuit of applause or a server eager to win a gratuity. He was just enjoying his role for the pure, simple pleasure it brought to both the served and the server. David obviously enjoyed the effect he was having. Yet it was clear he likely would have had a great time just “playing by himself.”

Unbridled Passion

Watching David in action you get the distinct impression that his mother forgot to tell him to be quiet. He likely was encouraged to laugh as loud and as long as he wanted to, which enabled him to grow up without a built-in governor on his joy level. He no doubt developed a comfort and confidence for expressing joy beyond the boundaries that most people stay within.

This mute-free outlook could have come from a significant emotional experience that unshackled him from any “bliss restraint.” It could have been a spiritual arousal, a near-death wake-up call or an unexplained realization that life is better lived when spreading happiness. David’s are not generally coached or tutored into being joy carriers. They come that way.

This unbridled style has a magnetic power on customers. It draws out their higher self. Being in the presence of David-like employees makes customers feel good about themselves. It’s difficult to misbehave or stay cranky in the company of a joy carrier. Few among us want to drag storm clouds into the perpetually sunny skies of such life forms.

Rampant Curiosity

Several weeks after our joy ride with David we encountered him again on a return visit to the hotel. We were waiting for a colleague to join us in the lobby when David walked through the area. His exuberance was just as infectious as we remembered. “You gentlemen going to be here for several days?” he asked, in the same excited manner as if he’d been asking a boyhood friend’s mom, “Can Johnny come out and play?”

Sensing we had time to kill, David turned up the volume on his curiosity. His questions were constructed more from sincere interest than from subtle intention. He wanted nothing more than to understand us. We found ourselves telling him more than we intended.

Joy carriers are like that. Their complete absence of judgment invites unexplained openness and unexpected candor. Because they come from a place that is unguarded and genuine, they invite the same attitude and response from others.

About the Author: Chip R. Bell is customer loyalty consultant and the author of several best-selling books. His newest book (with John R. Patterson) is the award-winning, best-selling Wired and Dangerous: How Customers Have Changed and What to do About it. He can be reached at www.chipbell.com.

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