



Positive Messages and Stories to Inspire You

Written By Keith Ready

'A truly successful leader in any business or organisational endeavour is exemplified in their ability to galvanise and engage the support of their greatest asset . . . people'

Keith Ready



Inspiring you to be the very best at what you do in life

Keith Ready lives in Sydney, Australia and is married to Debbie. They have two sons, Simon and Tom.

Keith has years of practical and hands on experience in sales, marketing, human resources and general management primarily in the health care, FMCG and retail industry sectors.

He is the publisher of InspirEmail and his website A Gift Of Inspiration both have the aim of providing positive inspirational messages to refresh the spirit and boost the emotional bank account. In recent times he has become known both in Australia and Internationally as Mr. Inspiration due to his passionate commitment too inspiring everyone that he comes into contact with, to be better at what they do in all levels of their life.

Keith is also an accomplished professional presenter and trainer having conducted in excess 1600 keynote presentations, seminars and workshop programs.

Keith has had many of his inspirational stories published in international e-newsletters and websites including - Achieve, Insight, Starfish, Story Time Tapestry, Sermon Illustrator, Heart Catchers, Motivateus, Heartwarmers, Our Echo and Positive News.

We trust you enjoy reading the following inspirational stories written by Keith Ready and you can e-mail your comments and feedback to Keith at info@agiftofinspiration.com.au and you are welcome to visit his website.



A Gift Of Inspiration offers you a sensational selection of inspirational messages, stories, quotes and images to refresh the spirit and boost the emotional bank account. Whilst visiting the website you are welcome to subscribe to InspirEmail, a fortnightly inspirational e-newsletter.

www.agiftofinspiration.com.au

A Special Message from the Publisher

This e-book is made available to you with my compliments and at no cost, all I ask of you is - if you have enjoyed the stories and value the inspiring messages they offer then make a diary note for the next thirty days to apply the learning out come from my story - '**Glowing and Growing with the Appreciation.**' In doing so, not only will you have rewarded me for publishing these stories, but you will have also rewarded yourself and those who benefit from what you do in applying the acronym of A.C.S.D.S.R.

Be inspired and best wishes

Keith Ready
July 26, 2008

'The sad part about life is we tend to comment only on those who do it wrong and neglect to balance it with praise for those who do it right'

Keith Ready

A Different Perspective

I am a great fan and admirer of Cirque Du Soleil and over the years have been very fortunate to see a number of their absolutely sensational shows.

At each of these shows, I have joined thousands of other people in the circus tent to reflect in total awe on the amazing and seemingly impossible acrobatic feats in each performance. When this is coupled with the larger than life sense of theatre that engulfs everyone, it leaves you inspired and full of appreciation for what you have just seen.

Just recently I had the opportunity to see the same Cirque Du Soleil show for a second time within a space of about a month. At the first show, my wife and I were seated about thirty rows back from the stage, so you could imagine it was not easy to see all the expressions on the faces of the performers or for us to fully appreciate the passionate effort that they put into their individual performances. However, what we were able to enjoy was the wonderful panorama of the overall performance.

At the second show, we were fortunate to be seated in the second row just a couple of metres from the stage and we could now see close up the performers and their expressions. Equally, having seen the show before, we both looked forward to seeing our favourite segments for the second time.

Driving home after the second show, we talked about which of the two shows we enjoyed the most and also whether it was better to sit close to the stage or further back. We agreed that both shows were equal in terms of their spectacle and enjoyment, but from two totally different perspectives. In seeing the show for the second time, our appreciation of the absolute brilliance of Cirque Du Soleil was significantly enhanced and without doubt will always be remembered.

In the days that followed it occurred to me that there are some parallels between the experience we had at the two Cirque Du Soleil shows and what happens in our every day lives when we deal with the many challenges that face us.

How often do we make a decision about something important to us based on one single viewing of the facts or act just on what are our first impressions of the situation, without taking the time to gain a better feel for things. By way of example, when we read a good book or watch a movie for the first time it is so easy to believe that we now have a full understanding of all that we have just read or seen. Then at some later point, if we read the book or watched the movie for a second time we are almost certain to discover lots of other important things that we missed the first time around.

Whilst we often don't have the opportunity to consider an important challenge or situation for a second time before we make a decision about the course action we will take, we should always endeavour to make time to stand back and view things from afar in order to gain a perspective of the bigger picture, and then be able to revisit the challenge or situation close up to see the finer detail and further improve our understanding.

In the light of the different perspective that a second viewing can provide to us, we would then be in a better position to make a more balanced and considered decision about the action we should take. I am sure if we all strived to do this, the outcome may very well be as enjoyable and uplifting as my second visit to Cirque Du Soleil.

Inspired by Varekai presented by Cirque Du Soleil and the two different perspectives of the same sensational performance and written by Keith Ready

A passionate and rewarding journey

On February 3, 2003 the first issue of InspirEmail was published and now just six weeks short of four years, it has reached a milestone - the 100th issue. When I started out on my journey with InspirEmail, I never contemplated that during the next four years my mailing list would grow into the thousands and that I would launch a website.

During this time I have come to know many wonderful, caring people who have written to me to express an opinion about what I have published, share with me a story or quote to include in InspirEmail or to simply say thank you for making a difference in their life at that time.

In recent months I have also met with a number of these wonderful, caring people who subscribe to InspirEmail, all of whom wanted to find out a more about me and share a little about themselves. At one of these meetings I was asked why I produced InspirEmail and at the time this was one question I could not easily answer. After some deliberation, I responded by saying it was 'a labour of love', however, after the meeting and as I reflected on what I had said, I realised that this was not what I really meant to say.

What started me on my journey with InspirEmail and subsequently the launch of A Gift Of Inspiration was a deeply personal experience that I had in the late 2002. In October 2002, my mum at the age of 91 - passed away after a long period of illness. During the last two months of her life, I was fortunate to be able to spend a great deal of time with her, in fact much more time than I had spent with her over the previous ten to twenty years, although we always spoke on the phone every couple of days and saw each other at least once a week.

This time with my mum was made possible by a wonderful boss who allowed me time off from work so that I could be with her and to this very day he has remained a great friend who I deeply respect for his compassion and understanding, as well as his business acumen.

In the last weeks of mum's life, I lived with her and spent nearly every day and evening doing what I could to make her comfortable and happy. Most evenings, we reminisced about her life and all the wonderful things that had happened during her 91 years. Despite her failing health, she had a wonderful memory and a great sense of fun, so our discussions were always about the events and good times, which always brought smiles to our faces. On reflection, I believe my mum was sharing all these stories of her life with me to prepare me for the journey I would make after she was no longer around.

Then and even now I marvelled at how positive and upbeat she was through those last few weeks of her life, and my love and deep admiration for her was only strengthened by being in her presence. In the weeks and months that followed her passing and in the lead up to Christmas 2002, I didn't talk much about my mum and I confess that by then I had internalised many of my feelings and for me and many others who loved her, it was a very sad Christmas not having her around to enjoy the fun and festivities.

With the start of the New Year, some of my sadness had diminished and although I deeply missed my mum, I was buoyed by the memories of our evening discussions prior to her passing away, as well as all the times we had had together from my days as a young boy through to manhood and then married life. As I now look back to February 2003, I realise that it was that time with my mum in her last few weeks which lead me set out on this now passionate and rewarding journey.

InspirEmail has given me great pleasure and enjoyment over the last 100 issues, and although it is work in that I have to make time to source or write the stories, it is also a pleasure to do it.

I now know that each time I sit down at my computer, my mum is always around and most likely looking over my shoulder to keep a watchful eye on what I am preparing to publish - to make sure that it is something that has a positive and uplifting message.

I wish you a very happy festive season and wonderful start to 2007 and early in the New Year InspirEmail will continue its journey in providing you with more positive messages to uplift your spirit and refresh your emotional bank account.

Be Inspired and Best Wishes

Keith Ready

Below is the first issue of InspirEmail which I trust you enjoy

InspirEmail No 1 - February 3, 2003

Tonight I came home to the news on TV of the nearness of war in the Middle East, the biggest loss in corporate business history, the continued devastation caused by bush fires across three States of Australia and a train crash in Southern Sydney which has taken the lives of nine, with injuries to a further 40 odd people. How depressing it is that there is no good news or something uplifting to balance out all this sadness.

Having just downloaded my e-mails and written some replies, I took a few minutes to look in more detail at an e-mail sent to me a few days ago by a very good friend and colleague. The short message he sent to me said . . . 'this is really beautiful and you should have a look at the attached link' ... so I did and for me it is just as he had said.

Below is the message that appeared when I activated the link and if you would like to see the visuals, then click on the link at the very end of this e-mail.

I trust you enjoy the message and the visual, if you activate the link, I recommend that you start tomorrow, next week or when ever you read this, by applying some small element of this message in your daily life, I did just a few minutes ago by sending it to you and it makes the world of difference - it also helps to get you out of the 'sads'.

Have a great week and remember this:

'People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel'

and

'Life isn't measured by the number of breaths we take, but rather by the moments that take our breath away'

P.S. My father once said to me when I was a young man - 'son, never talk politics or religion with people unless you know and understand them very well and they have the same understanding about you, for you will most assuredly offend people somewhere along the line.'

So please appreciate that it is not my intention to push any religious beliefs or philosophies, just to share a wonderful and uplifting message that you may well value.

An Interview with God

I dreamed I had an interview with God.

'So you would like to interview me?' God asked.

'If you have the time.' I said.

God smiled. 'My time is eternity. 'What questions do you have in mind for me?'

'What surprises you most about humankind?'

God answered ...

'That they get bored with childhood, they rush to grow up, and then long to be children again.'

'That they lose their health to make money ... and then lose their money to restore their health.'

'That by thinking anxiously about the future, they forget the present, such that they live in neither the present nor the future.'

'That they live as if they will never die, and die as if they had never lived.'

God's hand took mine and we were silent for a while.

And then I asked ... 'As a parent, what are some of life's lessons you want your children to learn?'

'To learn they cannot make anyone love them. All they can do is let themselves be loved.'

'To learn that it is not good to compare themselves to others.'

'To learn to forgive by practicing forgiveness.'

'To learn that it only takes a few seconds to open profound wounds in those they love, and it can take many years to heal them.'

'To learn that a rich person is not one who has the most, but is one who needs the least.'

'To learn that there are persons who love them dearly, but simply have not yet learned how to express or show their feelings.'

'To learn that two people can look at the same thing and see it differently.'

'To learn that it is not enough that they forgive one another, but they must also forgive themselves.'

'Thank you for your time,' I said humbly.

'Is there anything else you would like your children to know?'

GOD smiled and said, 'Just know that I am here ... always.'

<http://www.theinterviewwithgod.com/popup2.html>

Inspirational Quote

Happiness is a healthy mental attitude, a graceful spirit, a clear conscious, a heart full of love and friends

Author Unknown
On the occasion of Betty Ready's 80th Birthday

Acknowledging a Special Treat

Going to see a movie has always been a very special treat for me and in more recent years perhaps it is the wide screen, those very comfortable lounge style chairs, the sensational surround sound, the larger than life images of the characters on screen and even the chance to indulge myself in some popcorn and a choc top that makes it even more of a treat.

I also have some wonderful memories of the days when I was a young boy and my mum took me to a Saturday matinee. I will never forget that she would often buy me a packet of chocolate Jaffas to eat during the movie. I would always discretely drop one or two onto the timber floor during the movie and then giggle quietly as they rolled all the way down to the front of the theatre making a clattering noise on the timber floor. I am sure this boyish prank upset many of the older members of the audience, as well as my mum.

Even to this day there has always been a ritual that I go through once I get seated in the theatre which involves looking around to see if I know anyone, then as the lights dim I will dig into the box of popcorn or devour that choc top whilst watching the customary advertisements and trailers of movies that are about to be launched. As the lights fully dim and the screen expands to full viewing size I always settle back into that comfortable seat in anticipation of what is to follow over the next one and a half to two hours.

In the majority of cases I enjoy the movies I go to see and usually have just a hint of chocolate on my mouth and the remains of spilt popcorn, sprinkled all over my lap as the lights come up and the credits roll. I always sit there for just a minute or two reflecting on the movie and its message, often with a hint of a tear in my eye if the movie has had a very sad or touching ending. Then up I get and return to the reality of the outside world where I can further contemplate what I have just seen or discuss it with my family and friends.

I have always liked to watch the movie credits so that I could see the names of all the cast that I don't know or to find out the name of a particular song that I enjoyed. I have never really stopped to think very deeply about the importance of the movie credits and what they really mean, however, at the end of the last movie I went to see I sat engrossed in the credits which lasted for around two minutes and as I got up to leave, I realised that there was not one person left in the theatre except for my wife and myself. All of those people we had joined to watch the movie had quickly got up and left, some as I recall, even before the credits had started.

Often in life the enjoyment of the moment or the event is all that matters and we can be guilty of quickly moving on and forget to take a minute or two to reflect on and acknowledge those who have made all that enjoyment possible. At that instant, watching those credits meant more than just looking out for that cast members name or song title and the following quote from Samuel Goldwyn had a new meaning for me . . . **'When someone does something well, applaud! You will make two people happy'**

Even though I was not applauding as I watched those movie credits, at least I was taking time to acknowledge and pay my respects in a very small way to all those talented and hard working people both in front and behind the camera, who have given me my two hours of movie enjoyment, as well as a special treat. Hopefully my silent acknowledgement will make them happy, as it did for me.

Inspired by [The Worlds Fastest Indian](#) and written by [Keith Ready](#)

Writers Note

Choc tops are a delicious range of flavoured dipping compounds for Soft Serve or Scoop Ice Cream cones which leave a thin, flavoursome and crackley coating on the cones.

Jaffas are a small round sweet consisting of a soft chocolate centre with a hard covering of orange flavoured and coloured candy. Jaffas have often been sold in movie theatres and have gained iconic status because of the noise made when they are dropped (accidentally or deliberately) and rolled down sloping wooden floors.

After the applause, make time for words of praise!

Any form of presentation, speech or address no matter how long or short it is can be challenging and nerve racking, particularly if you are not use to standing on your feet and talking in front of an audience. I am very fortunate in that I have been doing presentations and conducting training programs for many years, so I have got use to the challenge and nerves or butterflies in the stomach that always emerge and swell up inside of you in the days, hours and minutes before you speak.

The challenges, nerves and butterflies are always a good thing for me in so much as it gets my adrenaline working and allows me to channel my energy and enthusiasm into what I want to say and the message I have been asked to deliver. However, I have never really thought very deeply about how much of my energy it takes to do any form of public speaking.

Just recently I had the pleasure of speaking at a conference about the key success factors in business and as usual in the weeks and days prior to my presentation I spent considerable time researching and reviewing what I wanted cover, as well as preparing the structure and content of what was an hour and a quarter presentation.

When I was young, my mother and father regularly said to me that 'the early bird catches the worm', so as I have always done, I arrived early at the conference centre so that I could make sure that everything I needed for my presentation was on hand and check out the venue, as well as prepare myself for my presentation. This completed, I then had time to speak to a number of the delegates who had also arrived earlier than the scheduled starting time of my presentation.

I have always measured the level of success of my presentations by the applause and comments that I receive from those people in the audience. On this occasion I spoke in the session leading up to the morning break, so after the applause had ended and the MC thanked me, I had the opportunity to personally speak to nearly all of the delegates.

The last delegate I spoke with greeted me by taking my hand, shaking it and saying how much she enjoyed my presentation, and that she had got of lot of helpful and practical tips to use in her business. For some reason as we continued to talk she did not let go of my hand and then placed her other hand just above my wrist and increased the pressure of her hand shake, whilst gently squeezing my arm with her other hand.

She went on to say that I had put so much of myself into the presentation that she hoped that my energy levels would not suffer for the rest of the day and she wanted in some way to return the energy I had given out. She smiled at me whilst she said this and then let go of my hand and went to join her colleagues for morning tea.

Usually an hour or so after any presentation that I give, I feel quite exhausted and I know that this is directly related to what I put into what I do and the up shot of using a lot of nervous energy, however, on this occasion, the opportunity for me to receive the words of thanks from the delegates gave me a genuine lift and recharged my batteries. The icing on the cake that gave me an even bigger energy lift was the words of support and encouragement from the delegate with the very firm handshake.

This experience at the end of my presentation also made me realise that what we give out in life can come back to us and equally, we all need and value receiving positive feedback and praise when and where it is warranted and deserved.

A business associate who works in the field of leadership and people development refers to the word 'Praise' as an anagram, although some may consider it to be an acronym for - **People Really Are Into Sensational Efforts**, and he goes on to say that all people need is regular praise and encouragement for them to reach new heights in all aspects of their personal and business life.

As I drove away from the conference I reflected on how fortunate I had been to receive all those words of appreciation and praise for what I had done that morning and how refreshed and energised I felt.

Inspired by a firm handshake and all the genuine words of appreciation and praise. Written by Keith Ready

Keith Ready © June 2006

All just part of my job!

Recently, a business associate and I went to call on a retail customer, and we experienced one of the real challenges in visiting a very large regional shopping centre that is over 2 kms long, with in excess of 300 shops spread over three shopping levels. How do find a store when you haven't been to this shopping centre for some considerable period of time?

Well when we first arrived at the centre and had parked our car, the first thing we did was look for a centre directory or the customer service desk, but without any success. As we weaved our way past a host of customers and shoppers who all seemed to be well aware of where they were going, out of the crowd appeared one of the shopping centre security officers. He was as you may well expect dressed in a black suit, white shirt and dark tie, with the shopping centre logo emblazoned on his jacket. He was holding a two-way radio hand set with an ear piece and remote microphone in his ear, which obviously allowed him to speak to other security officers working in the centre at that time.

Seizing the opportunity to seek some assistance from someone who would no doubt know where the store was located, I approached him and asked for directions. He smiled at us both and indicated that the store was on the next level, only some 75 metres from where we were standing.

Before we could thank him, he added.

'However, please allow me to show where it is.'

We thanked him, but said that there was no need, as we would now be able to find it with the help of his directions. His immediate reply came as a real surprise to us both.

'No not at all, please follow me, it is not very far and it is all just part of my job.'

Almost without realising it, we were walking with him and moved onto the travelator that took us to the next level of the shopping centre and the short walk to store. As we walked, he asked how our day had been and then added that it was a very busy day in the centre, mainly because it was school holidays. When we reached the store, we both thanked him for his courtesy and asked for his name.

He replied with a grin on his face, 'my name is Rob and I suppose you could say that it is not such a great name, given the work that I do here as a security officer.'

We both laughed at his zany sense of humour and once again thanked him for his courtesy and great customer service. As he moved away, he replied for the second time, 'it is a pleasure, all just part of my job.'

The visit to our retail customer lasted about 20 minutes and then we head back towards the car park, only this time we were more certain which way we had to go.

As we walked along the shopping mall level we came across the customer service desk which we could not find on our arrival at the shopping centre, so we stopped to speak to the customer service attendant at the counter. We asked if we could speak to the centre manager and was quizzed in a friendly manner about why we wanted to see him - our answer was that we wanted to give some feedback about a positive customer service experience we had just had. Sadly, the centre manager was not available; however, the customer service attendant suggested we could speak to the duty manager in charge of centre security. So we decided that we would go down to the security office located on the loading dock on the first level of the centre.

On arriving at the security office we were greeted by the duty manager who had a very apprehensive look on his face, which we concluded was due to the fact that when similar contact was made with him by members of the public, it was to lodge a complaint of some sort. When we told him we wanted to give some feedback about a great service experience offered by of one of

his team members, his face changed to a positive expression as we went on to praise Rob for making our visit to the centre an enjoyable one. We asked him to pass on our thanks to Rob and make sure that the centre manager was made aware of what he had done for us.

As we left the office and walked back to our car, we both discussed the likelihood that our expression of appreciation would make its way back to Rob and to the centre manager. We agreed that whilst it would have been great if the praise was passed on to Rob we realised that he would have no doubt been the recipient of many other expressions of appreciation from other customers just like us, who had experienced Rob's all part of my job attitude to his work. Whether other people would have taken the time express their appreciation to his boss as we did - is a matter of speculation, the fact that we did express it to Rob and then to his manager, was all that mattered to us at the time.

There is little doubt in my mind that people like Rob don't walk their talk selectively, it just isn't in their nature to be obligingly beyond expectations to one or two people as he did with us and then not do the same with others. I am sure Rob's job as a security officer is full of daily challenges with lot's of not so good things to deal with, so no doubt doing what he did for us and I am certain many others, is more than likely the part of his job that makes his day just that more enjoyable and rewarding.

There can be nothing better in life than to offer caring and genuine service to others and not expect anything in return, however, I am sure that the praise you receive for a job very well done will never go astray - will it!

Inspired by Rob - the dedicated, customer service focused security officer and written by Keith Ready

Keith Ready © August 2007

Attention to detail pays handsome dividends!

A few years ago whilst working on the south coast of NSW, I stayed for a couple of nights at a hotel booked for me by my client and on my first night, I checked in around midnight.

The registration clerk who greeted me at the reception desk offered to collect my bags from my car and then showed me to my room. During the couple of minutes that this took, he had found out a little about what I did and he was also aware that I was feeling hungry after a long and very busy day. Unfortunately room service had closed, so there wasn't much that he could organise for me, other than suggest that I could grab a snack from on top of the bar fridge in my room.

He mentioned that the hotel's air-conditioning had been playing up, so he had put a small fan heater in my room about a half an hour earlier, so that the room would not be cold. I thanked him for his courtesy and after putting my bags in the room; he left and would not accept the customary tip.

After unpacking my bags, I then went to look at the snacks on top of the bar fridge but nothing was appealing, so I prepared for bed. A couple of minutes later, the phone rang and it was the friendly registration clerk to say that he had checked to see what restaurants were open in the area, and he could organise a pizza or some pasta and salad to be delivered to my room in about fifteen minutes. Again I thanked him for his courtesy but told him that I had decided to go to bed.

Before he hung up, knowing from our discussion when I arrived that I had an early start the next morning, he asked would I like a wake up call. This being organised, he then said those genuine customer service words that we all love to hear, ' Thanks for staying with us Mr Ready; I hope you have a great nights sleep '.

Now I know that a story such as this always sounds much better when you hear it spoken rather than in print, however, I am sure that you can gain a feel of how this story exemplifies the importance of first impressions in business.

My story doesn't end there. My great first impression was progressively undermined over the remaining two days of my stay; by such things as a leaking toilet, a room that was very poorly cleaned and maintained, a lack of warmth in the room, a towel hook that hung from the back of the bathroom door, plus a level of service in the restaurant best described as 'memorably forgettable'. To top it off the desk clerk on the day shift was the complete opposite to his counter part that greeted me on my arrival. My excellent first impression had suddenly become a never-ending list of examples of poor customer service.

At the end of my stay I asked to speak to the manager to let him know how great the service was on my arrival and also how bad it got from there on coupled with the lack of response to my requests to have the problems fixed. As he was not available to speak me I left a message and my contact number for him and then made a point of calling the evening desk clerk that evening to thank him for his great service.

To this day, I have not heard from the manager of the hotel and I am sure that I never will. Despite the goodwill created by the registration clerk who greeted me and offered me great service when I first arrived, I won't stay in that hotel again and my custom has been lost for good.

In absolute contrast to this experience of poor customer service, let me share with you how genuine service and attention to detail has turned me into a powerful advocate for another motel.

A year or so later, I was conducting a series of customer service seminars in the New England region, and once again my client had booked a motel for me to stay at in Glen Innes. Everything about the service I received at this motel was beyond what I could ever have expected. I was greeted on arrival, welcomed with a handshake and a friendly smile, and shown to my room. At 6.00 a.m. the next morning I enjoyed a country style breakfast and as I checked out the owner of

the motel thanked me for staying with him and gave me a crisp, fresh, red apple to eat as I drove on to Inverell.

The Central Motel in Glen Innes is owned and run by David and Rosemarie Bryant and is one of some ten motels in the township and since that first visit, I have stayed at the Central Motel on several other occasions. However, the most significant fact is that in the course of that time I have conducted over 1000 seminars and workshops for over 70,000 people. At nearly all of these seminars and workshops; I have told my story about how the great service at the Central Motel and the little extra touch of the crisp, fresh, red apple on my departure encouraged me to stay again.

I have no vested interest in the Central Motel, other than being a delighted customer who likes to tell the story of how well I was treated. My story also reinforces that word of mouth endorsement and unsolicited publicity (which is often the hardest to obtain), will follow in abundance if you just treat your customers with genuine courtesy and respect.

If one thing can be learnt from my experience, it is that attention to detail pays handsome dividends when it is coupled with genuine and sincere customer service. It also reaffirms that most often it is the little things that count in business if you want to create and build long-term customer loyalty. These little things are the Moments of Truth in customer service that makes you say WOW - wonderful oooh wonderful, and cause you to spread the word.

Let me finish my story with a question. If you had occasion to stay overnight in Glen Innes, which motel would you choose? I am sure that the answer is enough to verify that we all need to look for the apples in our business ... then deliver them to exceed the expectations of our customers.

Written by Keith Ready and inspired by David and Rosemarie Bryant - The Central Motel in Glen Innes, New South Wales, Australia

Since this article was written, David and Rosemarie Bryant have sold the Central Motel to Trevor and Michelle Staunton and I gather that they have continued to deliver the same level of extra-ordinary customer service.

Keith Ready © April 2005

Broken Eggs and Shattered Glass

. . . with my sincere thanks to those late night pranksters!

On a recent Saturday evening at around midnight, my wife and I were just about to turn out the light and go to sleep when we heard the sounds of a group of people talking in the street, outside our home. Then out of the blue came two loud thuds above our bedroom window, followed by the noise of laughter and people running away down our street.

We both jumped out of bed, I turned on the external lights and rushed outside unsure of what had caused the two thuds or what damage I could expect to see. The silence of the night was broken by the distant sound of people laughing and at that moment I was of a mind to chase after them, however, running bare-footed on the road in the dark is not a very wise thing to do.

I could hear dripping noises on the driveway and the flood light above our garage helped me to identify just what had happened. Our home had been the victim of an egg bombing!

Being faced with the prospect of cleaning up this sticky mess in the early hours of the morning was not a pleasing thought, on top of which I was less than impressed that we had been singled out for this annoying prank. I decided that it was too late to clean up the mess, as it would disturb our neighbours, so it could wait to the morning.

Early next morning with a bucket of warm water and scrubbing brush in hand, and with the extension ladder placed on the front wall, I was now ready to wash off what was now two dry yellowish, egg grit impregnated, 1 metre long patches above our front bedroom windows.

My task was made even more challenging by the two large canvas awnings which protect our bedroom windows from the heat and glare of the afternoon sun. My annoyance with the late night pranksters was again building to the level of the night before.

After retracting each of the awnings, something we rarely do except when there is are very high winds, I then climbed the ladder to clean up the first patch of egg stain and then move the ladder to clean the second patch.

As I climbed the ladder for the second time, I noticed that the glass in a small window just under the roof line was very badly cracked. On closer inspection the crack ran around over half of the outer edge of the window pane. As the awning protected the window, it was clear to me that the damage had not been caused by the egg bombing. As I carefully placed my hand on the glass, I discovered that the pane of glass was very loose and had the window been closed with any force, it would have most likely shattered and the glass dropped to the drive way, some seven metres below.

Just a few metres away, we have a basketball ring and on most days of the week there are up to six young people who play in the immediate area, including both my sons. My thoughts immediately turned to what could have happened if the broken glass in the window had gone undetected for much longer and then suddenly shattered. The likelihood of my two sons and their friends being seriously injured was extremely high.

After quickly washing the remaining egg stain off the front wall and with the help of Tom, my youngest son, I got to work with some heavy duty masking tape and secured the cracked window as best I could. Within 24 hours the cracked window had been replaced and all was back to normal, except for the small bits of egg shell I kept finding on the front drive way and stuck to our garage doors.

Over the next few days, I realised that had our home not been bombarded by those eggs late on that Saturday night, I may not have discovered the broken window pane before it shattered and came down all over our drive way.

Even though it had been an annoyance at time, the broken eggs and the stains were cleaned up very quickly, however, the pain that could have been caused by the shattering of glass would never gone away and would have haunted my wife and myself, forever and a day.

The cold shudder that ran down my spine when I first discovered the cracked window and the thought about the consequences of someone being seriously injured or even killed, made me realise just how very lucky we had been.

Frequently in life, the small things that happen to us may have a negative impact and cause some form of pain, sadness, discomfort or personal aggravation. It is often said that we should not 'sweat the small stuff' and always look for the positive outcome or the silver lining in those dark clouds of the current circumstance, even though at the time that is not always an easy thing to do.

My personal experience with the egg bombing on that Saturday evening reminded me that in most cases there is always a flip side to everything that happens to us and that often the flip side can provide a positive outcome or an even greater benefit, if not now, then at some time in the future.

From now on whenever I see or break an egg, I will think of the egg bombing incident and say a thank you to those late night pranksters. Equally, I will always be reminded of Jean-Paul Sartre's quote:

'What is important is not what happens to us, but how we respond to what happens to us'

Inspired by some late night pranksters and written by Keith Ready

Keith Ready © July 2005

Dancing with Friends

Just recently I was invited to attend a function to celebrate the 25th anniversary of a business owned by a very good and special friend.

I first met him when he started his business and have had the opportunity to provide my services to his company over those twenty five years, and in between I have stayed in touch with him on a regular basis.

The day of the celebration arrived, however, due to a business appointment running over time I knew that I was going to late, so I phoned to let my good friend know. I arrived 20 minutes after the function had started and my good friend came to the reception to welcome and greet me, acknowledging that he was delighted to see me and had held off starting the official part of the celebration, knowing that I was on my way. I am sure you would share the same feeling as I did at that time, that there is nothing better for your spirits than to be welcomed and acknowledged in such a way. As he had always done in all my dealing with him over those twenty five years, he made me feel a very special and important person.

As I joined the other guests I could feel a wonderful sense of friendship, warmth and happiness in the room, as they mingled and chatted away. Sadly, I had very little time to speak to more than a couple of people before the official part of the celebration commenced.

In his speech, my good friend welcomed all the guests on behalf of his family and team members, and then individually thanked the majority of the people who were gathered in the room for their business support and friendship over the last twenty five years. This in itself is something you rarely see or hear at events of this nature - normally what you do hear is all about what the company has achieved over the years, followed by acknowledgements to a few key people and then a blanket style thank you to everyone else who has attended.

During the course of his thank you speech, he referred to a quote which reflected his overall approach towards both his business and personal life ... 'Always dance with the person you took to the dance'.

He then went on to talk about the importance of remaining loyal to those people who had supported him from the beginning of his business and through all the highs and lows of the last twenty five years. He also mentioned that during this time many people had offered their services and even sometimes provided a very tempting and perhaps better business arrangement for his business. However, he had no issue in saying 'thank you, but no thank you', as what was and still is important to him, is to always remember what people have done and continue to do, and this is always paramount in all of his business and personal considerations and decisions.

His warm and genuine acknowledgements were to those people who had offered more than just their services, support and loyalty, it was about a deeper level of professional and personal friendship which in the end, makes our lives all that more enjoyable and rewarding.

As I drove away that afternoon, I reflected on how lucky we are to have people in our lives that stick by us through all the highs and lows and mostly importantly are good friends.

What a great honour it was for me to continue to go to the dance with such a good friend who possesses such a unique and high level of integrity and personal values.

Inspired by Stephen Webster - Managing Director, Nature's Sunshine Products of Australia Pty Ltd and written by Keith Ready

Keith Ready © May 2006

Encouraging High Achievement

It was the end of the school term and my son Tom had less than three months left before he would finish his six years at high school. During this time he had developed a passion for basketball and may I say as a proud and some what biased father, he is energetic, skilful and plays a key role in the three different teams that he plays for each week.

Sadly, due to my work commitments over the last twelve months, I had only been able to attend a few of his games, however, I was determined to get to his last game for the school term which coincidentally would see him play in two back to back finals; one for his school and the other with a team he and his mates had formed, so that as he put it, 'he could get some extra game time and improve his basketball skills.'

I arrived just as Tom's first final was about to start and joined a small crowd comprising the team's school friends and a few parents, to watch what would end up being a nail biting finish to his first final.

Tom's team came out in the first 10 minutes with a burst of goals which saw them leading by just over 20 points at the end of the first half. At this level of the game teams play two 20 minute halves and I could see that the coach was well pleased with their efforts, so much so, that he hadn't called a time out in the first half and had made only a few substitutions.

The second half took on a totally different complexion as the opposing team quickly played themselves back into the game. They were on a role and three pointers came thick and fast as Tom's team dropped their intensity and started to miss an increasing number of shots and rebounds. Their lead was cut back to only a couple of points with less than two minutes to go. It was at that point that the coach called his first time out.

As I sat some three metres from where the team and coach were gathered together, the surrounding noise of the spectators became muted as I was drawn into what was happening, as the coach spoke to them. He had the team standing a half circle and squatting down was looking up at them giving some very calm and clear instructions on what they needed to do in the last couple of minutes. As he stood up to allow the team to return to the court, I saw him give some further words of encouragement to all them coupled with a pat on the back for those going onto the court and also to those who would sit on the bench for the last couple of minutes.

As I watched this and what unfolded over the next 2 minutes, it struck me as to just what the coach had done in that critical time out. You could see that he knew that the team was fighting to save the game and that he needed to re-focus them and lift them up. By squatting down he placed himself in a position where he was talking up to them, rather than down or at them and as the players went back onto the court his words of encouragement and that pat on the back, served to lift their energy and spirits.

Well Tom's team went on to win the final by 5 points and it was a great game to watch, particularly as the team had started so strongly, then lost it's way until the very last few minutes of the game, when they lifted to win. The win was due in the main to the on court efforts of all the players, however, much of the credit must go to their coach who in that last time out had by his actions literally placed them on a pedestal, restored their confidence and lifted them up.

When the players and coach had finished congratulating each other and celebrating their win, I went over to the coach to thank him for the work he had done with the team throughout the year, which had lead to a finals win. I commented on what I had seen him do in that last time out and he seemed surprised, however, acknowledged that by squatting down he felt less inclined to give them a blast about what they were doing wrong, but rather focus on what they needed to do to win the game.

As I drove away on that evening I thought about his comments and a couple of parallels came to mind about what can happen to us all in our everyday life. Firstly, we may think that what we say

has the most influence and impact on people, when in actual fact it is just as much or perhaps even more about our actions and how we make people feel.

Secondly, we should always focus our attention on talking about what needs to be done in a positive and enthusing way, rather than dwell on the negative aspects of what we didn't do right. One of my favourite quotes is about the half filled glass of water - 'is it half full or is it half empty.' Like the teams coach, the answer to this quote all depends on how you look at things and act.

On that night I was privileged to watch, hear and see a young coach who focussed on being half full and then some, and who clearly possesses those all important soft skills that we may talk about as being important, but so rarely put into practise in our every day life.

As a postscript to the evening, Tom's second appearance in a final did not see the same result as the first final, perhaps if the team had a coach this may have been different, but then again I would rather not dwell on the loss and remember the great win.

May there be many more positive experiences for Tom and his mates, in their life beyond school.

Inspired by Ben Rowse - a young man with natural coaching skills and a feel for what is important in encouraging people to achieve more and written by Keith Ready

Keith Ready © July 2007

Enjoy Your Nectarine

and remember genuine service and quality product builds a great business

I live in an area where there a number of what can be described as the traditional family run corner store. From my perspective, the success and viability of the corner store business is totally dependent on good product, good service and convenience combined with great people working behind and in front of the counter. In recent years there has been a resurgence in the corner store business, mainly because many of us are now extremely time poor and need convenience when we shop. Enough of the background, now to my story.

Within walking distance of my home is a unique corner store business. It is owned and run by a local family and it offers a variety of general groceries and convenience items, plus some really great 'cooked on the premises' food that you can take home, heat up and eat plus a sensational selection of really good quality fruit and vegetables.

For the last three years I have been a regular customer and mainly for one product - fresh red apples, which I have then given away at the conclusion of training and workshop programs I have conducted on delivering exceptional customer service. Over that time, I estimate that I have purchased in excess of 1500 apples from this corner store because they always have fresh, crunchy, quality red apples with no bruises and dints in them. I am sure you would not be surprised when I tell you that in all that time, I have not had a bad apple.

What has always amazed me about this business is that often just as I am about to leave, the father who the business is named after, presents me with a fresh piece of fruit, such as a nectarine. Just before this happens, I usually see him out of the corner of my eye go over to the fruit section - pick out a piece of fruit, give it the once over and an affectionate polish on his apron, then with a big smile on his face - he offers it to me with his compliments. Now call this what you wish, I see this gesture as a simple expression of appreciation for my business and that he wants to make his customers feel good. The pay off is that I keep coming back to shop not just for the great apples and the free piece of fresh fruit, but because he makes me feel extra special and appreciated.

Nick's Quality Fruit Supply in Narrabeena is owned and run by Nick (the father), Maggie (his daughter) and the other members of the family. They always smile, acknowledge and talk to their customers in a warm and friendly manner and as you would expect they know most of their customers by their first name, including me.

I am sure that Nick, Maggie and all the family also know instinctively that if you treat your customers with genuine courtesy and respect, do the little things very well, appreciate them, offer them the best quality product and are always pleased to be of service - you will create a very successful business and they have.

So what is the message behind this story - when you have your business running with all the right ingredients in place and working well, you have time to do the extra little things that make your customers feel special and talk about you!

Put simply, when we get it all going right, then we can deliver the nectarines in our business

Inspired by Maggie and her family and written by Keith Ready

Keith Ready © July 2005

Genuine and Caring Leadership

It was a warm, humid and very still Saturday morning in early January, typical of the weather you expect in Sydney in the middle of a hot Australian summer. I was out of bed early as the first task of the day was to take my car to my local tyre service centre for a routine wheel alignment, rotation and balance, which normally takes about an hour to complete.

It is one of those tasks that do not allow you enough time to go and attend to other duties; you simply have to wait for the work to be done, unless there is something major that needs repair or replacement. Having parked and booked in my car ready for the service, I headed towards the customer service waiting area armed with my morning paper, ready to take some time out to catch up on the news of the day and week.

As I crossed the courtyard to the waiting area one of the owners of the business arrived carrying what appeared to be some household grocery shopping that he had done before work. We both stopped for a moment to say hello and exchange belated season's greetings. I commented with a smile on my face that it was good to see him doing the grocery shopping, he laughed and replied . . .

'Keith, this is not for home - it's breakfast for the guys', then he disappeared into the office.

During the 15 years I have been dealing with this business I have got to know the owners quiet well and have always appreciated the great service they offer in what is a competitive and discount driven market. I guess you could say that I am one of those people who remain loyal to a business when the service is great and the relationship is strong, besides who really wants to quibble over a few dollars when your personal safety is at stake.

About five minutes later the owner joined me in the waiting room for a chat and we talked about business in general, then we got onto the subject of breakfast for the guys. He mentioned that every Saturday he buys eggs, bacon, cheese, tomato and a loaf of bread - then cranks up the barbeque at the back of the office and cooks the Aussie breakfast icon - the bacon and egg sandwich, for all of his team who are working on the Saturday morning shift.

He went on to explain that some time ago a few of the team had suggested that first thing on Saturday and before their day got busy, they should go to the local café and buy some take away bacon and egg sandwiches and coffee for breakfast, but he had discovered that this was both time consuming and quiet expensive, when you have up to ten people to cater for. So now he buys all the ingredients on his way into work, turns on the barbeque and puts his cooking skills to the test.

He then excused himself and was off to cook breakfast for all the team.

Now I suppose it would be fair to say that cooking breakfast for all his team is not such a big deal, after all he was saving both money and time, however, setting aside the commercial aspects and productivity for his business, I viewed this as a guesture that was certain to build staff morale and make his business a happier place to work in.

As customers we have an expectation that we will always receive good service from any business we deal with, however, what determines the quality of the customer service we receive is the attitude of the people who work in the business. As employees our attitude towards what we do at work is influenced by many things not least of all is how our employer or boss treats us. What he was doing is rarely seen in business today, he was being of service to his team and setting an example by cooking breakfast them.

This simple and caring act is no doubt great for morale, work place relationships and friendship. During my short chat with him I could see that he also enjoyed his weekly chef duties and did not view it as anything more than doing something to make the work day all that more enjoyable for his team.

Some may say that this boss could do far more productive things to add value to his business, however, the value can easily be seen in the way in which his team go about their work. In every

way it is a perfect example of genuine and caring leadership, something all bosses should consider as a number one priority in creating a work environment where people are happy, look forward to coming to work and enjoy what they do. The pay off is not just in the job well done, but in the many satisfied customers who remain loyal to the business.

Much to my delight my car was ready well inside the allotted hour with no major issues to be fixed. As I drove away, I could see a number of the team enjoying their Aussie icon breakfast along with the early morning cup of coffee. I was certain with a hearty breakfast cooked by a caring boss; that they would be well prepared for the challenges of the day and most importantly the continued delivery of great customer service.

Inspired by Ken and Mark Rickard, the owners of Abel Tyre Service - Brookvale, Sydney and written by Keith Ready.

Keith Ready © January 2008

Glowing and Growing with the Appreciation

The fact that I had taken time to congratulate him for his efforts was a seemingly small gesture from my point of view and took less than a minute to say, however, it had a big impact on his day, as he smiled and his face lit up in response to my short but sincere comments.

It was clear to me that the personal and internalised pride he showed in a job very well done was something that was very important to him and I am sure he really had no expectations that I would take time out to say what I had just said.

My words of appreciation was something I felt privileged to say, simply because I was impressed with what he had done and it was a measure of someone who was and is prepared to put in that little bit extra to make a very big difference in his business. Immediately after my comments he thanked me, then asked me did I see anything he could do to improve and if so, how could he make it a reality in his business. I must admit at the time I was not focused on what could be improved, so I guess my answer that I could not see anything he needed to improve, other than to keep doing what he was, doing was of little help to him - but it was an honest not a dismissive answer.

As I left him to continue on my day of business appointments, I realised that not only had I made a difference to his day by what I had said, but the positive comment had also encouraged him to seek out ways to make his even business better. In addition to this it had also lifted my spirits and I felt great that he responded so positively and valued my feedback. So often we find that our business and personal life is punctuated with reviewing what went wrong or what needs to be fixed that we miss the opportunity to lighten up and be uplifted by giving and sharing some positive feedback, even if it is to a relative stranger.

I am reminded of the very wise comments of an old friend, trainer and business mentor who said, 'always look for the opportunity to find the positive in what people do, then give them genuine praise and watch them glow and grow with the appreciation.'

He loved using acronyms in his work, as it allowed him to shorten phrases or groups of words and as he put it - 'anchor and reinforce his message in the minds of those he trained and mentored.' His acronym for his work in training people to value and appreciate what others do and help them to glow and grow was - A.C.S.D.S.R.

A bit of a mouthful I suppose, but it has stayed in my mind all these years even if I have from time to time forgotten about its importance and to use it. I am sure you are wondering what it means, so here is the full version - Always Catch Someone Doing Something Right.

I can see him now, standing in front of a group of managers sharing with them his formula for not only getting the best out of people and helping them to grow, but also for making your day just that little bit better. As he talked with them about the value in doing this, many would respond - 'but what do you say if they do something wrong.'

His reply was such a simple but profound one - 'everyone does something right, you just need to look for it, let them know you value and appreciate it, then it is much easier to address what they may have done wrong and the solution to correct it.' In addition, he would encourage everyone that he trained or mentored to use A.C.S.D.S.R. constantly in order to enjoy the personal lift your get from doing it.

It is good to be reminded of this wonderful acronym which I know needs to be maintained as part of my daily life and not just used occasionally. This is something I have now remedied today, by making a daily note in my diary for the coming month to act on it. After 30 days of A.C.S.D.S.R. I am sure this rewarding and enjoyable part of my life will again become a positive and ongoing habit.

Love and music in their hearts

For many years as I went about my weekend routine of doing all those chores around our house I would regularly hear the sound of a piano playing and singing in the background. One of our neighbours has always had a love of music and obviously the family enjoyed gathering around the piano on the weekend. The music and singing was never something that was hard to take, in fact I often found myself humming or singing away with a song that I knew well.

Living in a fairly relaxed and quiet suburban area does have many pluses, however, this little bonus of weekend enjoyment was something I looked forward to, although at the time I never realised that I did.

Around three years ago the music and singing stopped and it wasn't until our neighbours told me of the troubles that their teenage son was dealing with that I came to realise why, the family was no longer a happy one where the sound of music and singing could be heard.

Being a parent is a wonderful thing even though it is full of lots of highs and lows, however, when the lows hit it can be a challenging and very saddening experience. As I was to discover over the following months our neighbour's son had got involved with a group of other teenagers whose lifestyle included late night partying, drinking, drugs and doing lots of other anti-social things. This was something I found hard to comprehend as their son used to play with my two sons and the other boys who live in our street, but suddenly he was off hanging out with another crowd of young people doing things that were not consistent with what I knew about him. Such is peer pressure I guess, however, it didn't make it any easier for my two delightful neighbours who had always been such wonderful parents and who had brought some weekend enjoyment to me as I went about his household chores.

Over the last couple of years I have often spent time with them in an endeavour to be of some assistance to them in the time of trouble. I also had a couple of conversations with their son but nothing seemed to be working to get this young man back on track and his family, personal and schooling life suffered greatly.

Just over a year ago things started to change for the better and this young man who was now almost out of his teens started to come out of the horror period in his life. He went back to school to complete his high school studies and has now gone to commence studies to become a naturopath. From afar and as a neighbour it is great to see that at last everything is back on track for this young man and his parents.

From time to time all our immediate neighbours get together to celebrate those special yearly occasions and there is an informal sort of rotation system with these events which see us all move from house to house year in year out. Just recently our neighbour with the son who had gone through this rocky period and come out the other end back on track, invited us and a number of other families over for lunch to celebrate one of those special yearly occasions.

During the course of a relaxing and enjoyable afternoon I sat on the piano stool in front of now silent piano. I am not sure of the brand of piano, however, it is one of those upright models with a highly polished black finish. I could not help but notice that there were some words and some images scratched onto the front of the piano, immediately above the keyboard.

The words said 'I Hate You' and they appeared they may have been scratched onto the piano in a fit of rage as they were very rough and fairly deeply etched into the surface of the piano. An attempt had also been made to cover up these three words with a series of scratches crisscrossing over the top of the words.

Immediately underneath this crudely written and very sad statement were three images spread across the front of the piano. The images were three stick figures, two large ones and a slightly smaller one, followed by the shape of a heart and then a flower.

As I sat there I felt the urge to find out what these three words and three images meant, however, I did not feel it was appropriate to ask for fear that in some way it related to past

events that were best forgotten. The answer came without me even having to ask as our neighbour and mother of the young man saw me looking at the front of piano and came over to sit next to me on the piano stool.

She explained with just a hint of tears in her eyes that her son had scratched the words onto the piano during a fit of anger as he struggled to come to terms with the pressures he was facing at one of the lowest points in his life. She also explained that they had then endeavoured to remove the words themselves but to no avail and could not afford the high cost of repairing the panel. Equally, at that time they did not know if he would do it again and so decided to leave it there.

She went on to tell me that some months later, both she and her husband came home one afternoon to find that the three words had been scratched over in an attempt to cover them up and that the stick figures, heart and flower had been added, and they both took that as sign that their son had come back to them in both spirit and body. She then smiled at me in a way that said we are okay now and then went off to speak to one of our other neighbours.

There is no doubt that for many months these three words etched on the piano would have created significant distress and sadness for my two neighbours as it was clear that they had been directed at them. My admiration for them as human beings had now moved to an even higher level, knowing that it takes a lot of guts to face up to something like that day in day out.

What their son had done was unforgivable and had hurt them both so deeply, however, I found myself understanding why and that perhaps he had come to realisation of what he had done and what it meant to his parents during that low period in his life. I thought at that very moment that he may have decided to make a statement which said I am sorry and the only way he could do that was with the three images. It also occurred to me that perhaps his first message may not have been directed at his parents but rather himself.

I am reminded of a well know quote 'People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel'

What that young man said and did in writing those three words may over time be forgotten, however, what he did and said when he etched those three images into the piano made his mum and dad feel something that will never be forgotten - it was a visual expression of the love of son who had returned to them.

Their family life seems much more settled and happier now even if the sound of music and singing does not punctuate the weekends as it did before, however, this neighbour can live without that in the knowledge that there is again love and music in their hearts.

Inspired by Alex, Jim and Gerard and written by Keith Ready

Keith Ready © April 2006

Reflecting on the Good Times

I had arrived at the airport about 30 minutes before the required check-in to catch an early flight home. It had been a very busy three days for me on an interstate trip with lots of meetings, business to do and new customers to meet. So I was glad to have the extra time to make my notes on what I needed to action when I got back to my office the following day. Equally, it is always a great feeling when you complete your 'to do' list, as well as the sense of control that comes from getting it out of your head and onto paper, or should I say into the laptop.

Then came the announcement that I am sure all air travellers loath to hear - the flight had been delayed indefinitely due to a technical problem with the plane. As I sat in the departure lounge I could see a group of technicians and ground staff rushing about, obviously endeavouring to fix the problem with the plane. I watched and listened as many of the passengers sitting near me shared their frustration about the inconvenience and why couldn't the airline just wheel out another plane or put us on another flight. A steady stream of passengers lined up at the departure desk only to receive the expected up date from the customer service attendants that they can do very little other than ask us all to be patient and that as soon as they can get us away, they would call the flight. The mobiles phones were working over time throughout the departure lounge as passengers left messages for business associates and loved ones to update them on our predicament.

As I sat waiting for the announcement which would no doubt bring cheers from all of my fellow travellers, I reflected on my last meeting for the day. It was not a business meeting but rather a very enjoyable and all too brief lunch with an old business associate and friend I had not seen for over 12 years, and who I had worked with for nearly 15 years prior to us losing contact. I had been given his contact phone number by a customer I had visited on the first day of my trip, so I called him out of the blue and made a time for us to meet.

Our lunch was spent recalling times gone by and as well filling each other in on what had happened in our lives over the last 12 years. Our conversation was punctuated with statements such as 'remember when we did', 'whatever happened to' and of course the one we all liked to hear 'you know you haven't changed one bit, except for a few more grey hairs.' We both laughed and smiled as we recalled the good times and the great experiences we had shared over the 15 years we had worked together. Each event we discussed triggered another recollection and everything we talked about centred on the good times and only served to energise each of us during the course of our lunch. Almost simultaneously, right at the end of our time together, we both said how much we both enjoyed it and that we must do it again. We agreed to catch up when I was next in town, then said our goodbyes and I was off to the airport.

So as I sat waiting for the announcement that my flight was finally ready to depart, it was great to have this additional time to revisit and replay in my mind all that we had talked about. I realised at that moment just how important it is to have regular reminders of the good times in your life and to be able to take the time to reminisce, for so much of what we have done in our lives, shapes us and makes us who we are today and beyond.

Sandwiched in between the busy time of my trip and the focus on getting business done, I was fortunate enough to have had the chance to take a short break and reflect on the good things that had happened in my life over 12 years ago. It was somewhat like looking at an old photo album that you have found stored away in a cupboard in your house, there before your eyes are lots of wonderful memories in print that take you back to that time and place, and most importantly to those people who are in the photos. It also made me realise when you get caught up doing what has to be done in the moment, how easy it is to forget the people you have met in your life who have made a positive impact on and enriched you, often in only the smallest of ways.

My flight home was finally called nearly three hours later and yes as you would have expected many of the passengers cheered when the announcement was made. I smiled as I boarded the plane and realised that I was not at all upset about the delay in the flight departure, as I had been able to spend much of my time reflecting on the good times from days gone by and I eagerly look forward to many more opportunities to reminisce.

The Perfect Partnership . . .

. . . 30 years in the making



It was a warm, humid and somewhat overcast Saturday afternoon with just over an hour left to play in the day, as I sat watching from the side line as my eldest son Simon opened the batting for his cricket team. Simon has played cricket for just on fifteen years and for many of those years he was an opening batsmen, but in recent times he has always preferred to bat lower down the order, so to open the batting is now very much out character for him. However, on this day his captain had asked him to do it and he said yes.

He and his batting partner played very well and the team got off to a flying start scoring nearly 70 runs by the end of the days play. As he left the field, I could see that he was very pleased with his efforts and I was also very proud of him.

One of the spectators sitting with me during the last hour of play made a comment about the age of Simon's bat and almost without thinking I replied that it was over thirty years old and still going strong. He replied that they don't make bats like that any more, implying that there was a certain quality about a bat that had stood

the test of time.

At that very moment my mind skipped back over the years and I recalled snippets in the life of the bat, an SS Perfect Club Model made from English willow by Stuart SurrIDGE. I had purchased it when I was a young man playing afternoon park cricket, and at that time most cricketers used the bats that their cricket club supplied in the team kit. So you can imagine how proud I was to have my very own perfect bat, equally, I had saved up to buy it, so it became a treasured possession.

The perfect bat came with its own special carry bag, complete with a small instruction booklet attached to the bat handle which included advice on how to care for the bat, the need for regular oiling with linseed oil, and the obligatory cleaning of the batting surface with light grain sandpaper to remove the red cricket ball dints and marks.

For over four years I used the perfect bat with moderate success, then work and family commitments took over and my cricket playing days came to an end. My perfect bat remained in the carry bag for around eight years, until I returned to play the indoor cricket, a shortened version of game played under lights. My perfect bat had now entered its second decade in its cricketing life and still looked as good as new, once it had been sanded, oiled and had a new batting grip.

During this time Simon was born and as he grew older he started to play sport, which included junior cricket and I either coached or managed every team he played for over the next twelve years. During the latter part of his junior years in cricket, Simon always had his own cricket bat, so my bat remained safely stored in the carry bag, only coming out on the rare occasion that I played a game of social cricket.

When Simon was old enough to play senior cricket, he and I had the chance to play together in an afternoon competition for our club and it was time for my perfect bat to be taken out of its carry bag, lightly sanded, rubbed down with linseed oil and have a new batting grip fitted. Only this time Simon was using it when he batted and I used his old bat.

I can remember asking him if he wanted me to buy him a new bat, but I was quickly told that he would like to use my perfect bat, as long as I didn't mind. How could I possibly mind, my son wanted to use my perfect bat which was older than him and had been used by me on and off for well over twenty years. The fact that Simon did want to use it has always amazed me, given that the majority of our team mates all had the latest and most up to date bats available on the market.

It was about this time that Simon changed the way he batted. He became a more attacking batsman who enjoyed his time at the batting crease and many good scores were the order of the day in the innings that he played. The great delight for me was that I was playing in the same team with him and either watching him from the side lines or on the odd occasion batting with him. On one occasion when he did not play, I had the opportunity to use my perfect bat and made my highest score of my cricketing career. As you can imagine the perfect bat got a liberal sanding and the customary oiling after that innings.

I can still vividly remember one innings that Simon played on an extremely hot, humid and very windy Saturday afternoon in February 2003 and he came very close to scoring a 100 runs, which is better known in the cricketing world as a century or a ton. In the end exhausted from the heat, he was out just short of the score all cricketers strive for every time they bat, however, it had been a wonderful innings. Sadly on that afternoon our capital city was hit with the worst bush fires that you could imagine and hundreds of people lost their homes and all their possessions.

Coincidentally, it was in the light of Simon's wonderful innings with the perfect bat and in the shadow of the bush fire disaster that launched my on going passion for inspiring and uplifting stories and messages.

So now the perfect bat has been around for over three decades and it is still going strong, it once was mine but now in every way it belongs to Simon, although I still make sure that it is sanded and well oiled at the start of each cricket season, and a new batting grip is fitted, whenever it is required.

When I first bought the perfect bat, little did I know that one day it would be used by my son and that I would have the honour and great pleasure of not only coaching and watching him play, but also playing with him and see him make lots of runs.

At the start of this cricket season, Simon decided to join another cricket team, but still play with the same club. Loyalty to his club has always been important to him whether it is cricket or soccer, which is a very rare quality in today's world. So as I left the cricket ground on that Saturday afternoon, I reflected that whilst I was not playing cricket with him this season, it was both timely and very appropriate for him to be playing with all his friends and mates. Over the last fifteen years we have had many days together on the cricket field and how lucky have I been to have such an experience, as I am sure that there are very few fathers that have the opportunity to play a competitive sport like cricket with their son.

After watching him opening the batting, I also now know that each time that he goes out to bat; he takes with him not only my best wishes, support and thoughts, but also a perfect bat that once was mine, but is now his.

I have decided to rename it Simon's Stuart Surrige bat and for me the triple S also stands for three decades. It is my greatest wish that this perfect partnership will continue well beyond his first century in cricket, and into a fourth decade.

Inspired by Simon and the perfect bat, written by Keith Ready - a very proud father, now retired cricketer.

Keith Ready © October 2006

Post script from an even prouder father

The Perfect Partnership was written on Sunday October 23, 2005 and the next week Simon went on to score 75 runs and along with his batting partner set a new team record for an opening partnership of 165 runs.

On Saturday December 10, 2005 Simon scored his first century with his beloved triple S bat. I had the pleasure of watching him score every one of his 120 runs not out. If you know something about the game of cricket, you will identify with the fact that he scored his runs in just under 2 hours and hit a six over mid off to bring up the first of what I am sure will be many more three figure scores.

Unexpected Lessons

Being on the road at 3.15 a.m. to drive 450 kms was not in my plans for the weekend. I had been looking forward to a relaxing couple of days to allow me to recharge my batteries in readiness for the busy week ahead that lay ahead of me.

My eldest son, Simon and a group of his good friends were heading off for a week at the snowfields, however, due to last minute issue with their transportation; I willingly offered to help out and provide the extra car that was required to ensure that everyone got to the drop off point near the snow fields, so that they could then enjoy their weeks break snow boarding and skiing.

As I set out on my early morning journey the only thing I could think about at that time was that no sooner had I arrived and then said my goodbyes, I would be on the road again to make the trip back home, in total a round trip of 900 kms in just on 10 hours. Although I was only to happy to make the trip, the thought of such a long drive in one day was a daunting one, particularly as I was looking forward to that much required time to relax.

Over the years I have come to realise that in life often events happen to challenge you and that they often don't reveal their real purpose at the time. As I was to discover over the next 10 hours, this was not to be the case on this occasion.

The drive to our destination was punctuated with the mandatory refresher and comfort stops, an early morning breakfast in a highway petrol station that could be best described as filling but far from nutritious, the dawning of a new day, coupled with patches of fog, mist and light rain which typifies a winter's morning as you get closer to the snow fields.

As we drove, Simon and I talked a little about his week's break and a host of what may have seemed unimportant and rather minor subjects, however, it was great to have this time with him as we very rarely spend five continuous hours in each others company, other than in the days when we played Saturday afternoon cricket together.

As I left to make the return trip back home, I had a strange sense of loneliness which quickly disappeared as I concentrated on driving through some very heavy early morning fog. Within an hour I was through the fog and had a clear open road ahead of me, so I engaged cruise control and spent the next four hours listening to some of my favourite CD's.

When I was younger I did a lot of country driving on my own and I often used this time to think about big picture stuff as well as issues and challenges I had in my business or personal life, many of which would be clarified and to a certain extent resolved, during these lengthy times of solitude inside my car.

On this day, I rekindled something from those years of driving long distances on my own, for by the time I had reached home I had developed and set out a plan of action in my mind for one very important issue I had to deal with in the week ahead. Surprisingly after my long trip home I was mentality refreshed and energised, even though I was physically tired and knew that I would sleep well that evening.

I am reminded of the quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Life is a succession of lessons which must be lived to be understood.'

What this unplanned trip to the snowfields had given me were two unexpected but very timely lessons, the first being that we all need to and benefit from spending quality time with our family, loved ones and friends. The second lesson was that a change in your environment, no matter how temporary, can in itself provide you with the opportunity to look at something from a different perspective and come away with a resolution, as well as be refreshed and energised.

I look forward to my next unexpected event and many more opportunities to spend quality time with those who are important to me and make my life more rewarding.

Inspired by a half day trip to the snow fields with my son and the need for some refreshed thinking - written by Keith Ready

Yusuf - He's My Brother

Just recently I flew from Sydney to Melbourne for an early morning meeting followed by a series of additional meetings, all in the same office. It was one of those 'down and back in one day trips', so fortunately I only needed to carry my brief case so I could go direct to the express check in, saving myself up to half an hour in a queue.

Upon arriving in Melbourne at just after 7.15 a.m. - I headed straight for the taxi rank to pick up a cab. As I walked out into the morning light I was greeted with a skyline filled with dense smoke, the product of the most recent horrific bushfires in Victoria. As I gazed in amazement at this scene and compared it in my mind to my last visit to Los Angeles, a voice broke my preoccupation.

'Good morning sir, do you need a cab' came from a Yellow cab parked at a slight angle to the curb just in front of me, the window was wound down and a bright smiling face look out at me. I said yes in a flash and jumped into the cab.

When I told the driver where I wanted to go - his eyes seemed to brighten even more and he asked, 'sir, what time do you need to be there?'. I replied by 9.00 a.m. for a series of meetings and he nodded, turned on the meter and off we drove. Within minutes he said that it was a very long drive, probably an hour and half and he would do his very best to get me there before 9.00 a.m.

I knew my destination was a long way from the airport and had opted for a cab, because I was not sure that if I hired a car I would be able to navigate my way to the destination and still get there on time at 9.00 a.m. As I settled in for the long trip, the driver and I began to talk about the bush fires, the business environment, his family, his love of Australia plus a whole host of topics and issues. Needless to say he also got to know a lot about me, including the fact that I was in Melbourne for the day and would be returning to Sydney on a 6.30 p.m. flight. As you could expect by the end of the trip we were on a first name basis.

We arrived at my destination at 8.50 a.m. I signed my charge docket, which was big enough for me to think that Yusuf may have to ring American Express for a credit clearance. As I was about to get out of the cab, Yusuf handed me a Yellow cab card. He indicated that his mobile number was written on the back and that if I gave him a call around a half an hour before I needed to leave to catch my flight, he would come and pick me up. I thanked him and headed off for my meeting.

My day was a busy one and by 3.15 p.m. I had completed my meetings and was ready to make the long trip back to the airport. So I gave Yusuf a call on his mobile and he said 'thank you Keith, I will pick you up in 30 minutes' and guess what - he did.

On the way back to the airport I spent the first half-hour picking up a number of phone messages and returning calls. When I had finished Yusuf and I talked about his day working the area. He told me that after he had dropped me off, he had decided to spend the day in the area, knowing that at around 4.00 he could well have a fare back to the airport. He mentioned that it had been a good day for him with lots of short fares to keep him busy.

As we got closer to the airport, Yusuf said to me 'you seem to know a lot about business, can you suggest how I can be a better cab driver'. I looked at him for a moment, then said - 'Yusuf, just keep doing what you are doing'.

He looked back at me as if to ask for further explanation of what I had said. I went on to say, 'handing me your card and offering to come and pick me up, tells me that you already know how to be a better cab driver and you are doing it'. We chatted for the next forty minutes and then it was time for me to sign the cab charge docket and again think about the need for a call to American Express.

As I was about to get out the cab on the departures level at Melbourne airport, two ladies came rushing up and asked if could Yusuf take them to the city, as they were in a hurry to get there. Yusuf said yes and they jumped in.

Now I knew from my discussions with Yusuf that I had been his first fare for the day and that he was due to finish his shift at 7.00 p.m. He had also told me that he lived very close to the city. So this fare would take him close to home and he could finish the day at 7.00 p.m. and get home early enough to spend some quality time with his wife and six children.

Before embarking on his fare to the city, Yusuf got out of his cab and said ' Thank you Keith - my brother, the next time you are coming to Melbourne, give me a call the day before and I will come and pick you up '. He smiled as he jumped in his cab, then he was on his way in the still smoke filled Melbourne atmosphere.

The moral in this real life experience

The more time you spend with your customer, get to know them personally, talk and listen to them and treat them with genuine courtesy and respect; the more business they will give you. Very often that same customer will also lead you to even more business of similar quality.

I still have Yusuf's card and the next time I am travelling to Melbourne, you can be sure that I will give him a call. That is the second part of the moral in this story - satisfied, happy customers become return customers and they tell lots of other people about their experience . . . And I just did.

Inspired by Yusuf and written by Keith Ready

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