

Rousing the Remarkable: 9 Ways to Influence Extraordinary Actions (Even in Your Absence)

by Ann Tardy / ann@lifemoxie.com / dd: 1.855.Ms.Moxie (1.855.676.6943) / www.lifemoxie.com

Sheila from the Radisson Indianapolis Airport Hotel

It was 3:00am when I called the front desk at the Radisson Indianapolis Hotel to beg for ointment for a wound. Sheila answered the phone but had nothing to offer, "I'm sorry sweetie. We only have band-aids down here." Petulantly I declared that I would have to find a 24-hour pharmacy.

Quickly recognizing my excruciating pain, Sheila said, "Let me call the hotel across the street and see if they have anything." She phoned me right back and said, "Good news! They have ointment. I'm going to get it for you."

My grouchiness instantly disappeared. I was struck by her generosity.

After enlisting a colleague to cover the desk, Sheila ran across the street to retrieve medicine. I met her in the lobby where she handed me three packets of ointment and a lot of sympathy as she examined my injury. I have never been so grateful. Because of Sheila, the pain subsided allowing me to finally sleep and saving my entire business meeting that day.

Not in any training or employee manual

We can assume that nowhere in the Radisson employee handbook or in Sheila's job description will we find anything about calling another hotel to find medicine for a guest. I also doubt that her manager trained Sheila to deal with that precise situation. On top of which, her manager was likely in a deep sleep at 3:00am and unable to instruct Sheila on exactly what to do.

So why did Sheila take extraordinary action to help a guest when no one told her, trained her, or instructed her to do so specifically? Initiative.

A dearth of initiative

Sheila's initiative saved my night. It was her inventiveness in the moment that made all the difference. But doesn't her remarkable act sound like an anomaly, not the norm? If we are so starved for initiative, why don't more people generate it?

We have only ourselves to blame

As leaders we have put the fear of unemployment in our people's hearts and minds. We have paralyzed them with rules, regulations, handbooks, and policies. We have told them not to think for themselves. And as a result, they don't. They wait for instruction, color in the lines, stifle their ideas, and resort to, "That's not my job."

Here's the good news! Every leader has the opportunity to shift this imbalance. To support company policies, but encourage flexibility. To follow rules, but not strangle innovation. To ensure jobs are

executed, but cheer for originality. To allow people to make their work matter but withdrawing threats of punishment.

How can we fuel initiative in all of our people?

9 Ways to Drive Initiative and Rouse the Remarkable

1. Inspire it.

A battle cry is always more action-inducing than a mission statement. A battle cry is our own declaration of how we make a difference with our work. I can only imagine Sheila's team has a battle cry that sounds something like, "Make every guest feel like they are a guest in our own homes."

2. Model it.

Social cognitive theory argues that people are watching your actions and reactions to shape their own. They are influenced by what they observe and remember about how *you*, their leader, act and react in every situation. So model the actions you want to see.

3. Catch it.

Catch people being great. Acknowledge them for making a difference in the battle cry and in every day actions. Do this and you're guaranteed to get an encore.

4. Applaud it.

I wrote a letter to Stephen Wright, the General Manager at the Radisson Indianapolis Hotel. I gushed about Sheila and acknowledged his leadership for allowing her to be a great team member. I expect Stephen Wright to turn around and applaud Sheila similarly.

5. Spotlight it.

I posted a rave review on Hotels.com. Sheila's boss has an opportunity to shine the spotlight on Sheila for the world to see. Similarly, AMC Theaters in the NJ Monmouth Mall posts a plaque that highlights the "Difference Maker of the Month." That spotlight shines even a bit brighter than merely "Employee of the Month."

6. Discuss it.

Engage in conversations with your team about how to execute on a battle cry. Discuss simple but remarkable, Sheila-like ways to make a difference in that battle. On my team we regularly talk about how to make the people we work with (clients and vendors) feel important, even in routine emails.

7. Identify it.

Bring in articles and books about other companies whose people are remarkable without specific instruction. Zappos provides an excellent example of a company whose culture enthusiastically welcomes initiative and inventiveness.

8. Practice it.

Give people permission to practice acting boldly and inventively, taking battle-cry-promoting, outside-the-box, remarkable actions. Challenge them to act, even make a game out of it. When we frame it as practice and fun, we free people from the paralysis of perfection.

9. Mentor it.

When people fail, because inevitably they will, mentor them through it. Ask them what worked, what didn't, and what they'll do differently next time. Then share your observations and your perspective of the situation, offering them advice, wisdom, and ideas.