

Customers are really weird. Deal with it!

This is the next article in a series on how behavioural economics and 'being human' affects your business.

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I recently got a bad review for a presentation I made at a conference. Of course, bad reviews are just a part of doing what I do. They go with the concept of publicly sharing your ideas and opinions with a group of people in any type of meeting. I can't avoid them.

The review was 1 star and the comment made was as follows: "I came to this presentation because I thought it was going to be Aki Anastasiou. This was not what I expected." Aki Anastasiou is the tech expert you often see on TV. My presentation was titled, "Delight, thrill and excite your customers – and keep their loyalty forever!"

Let me be quite blunt here ... human beings are almost always quirky, whimsical and eccentric, and we should never fall into the trap of thinking that they are logical and rational.

But this is where businesses like yours and mine have a big dilemma. The founders and executives who make the big decisions are trained to be rational and scientific in their approach.

We are trained to win arguments using logic as our evidence. We approach just about everything

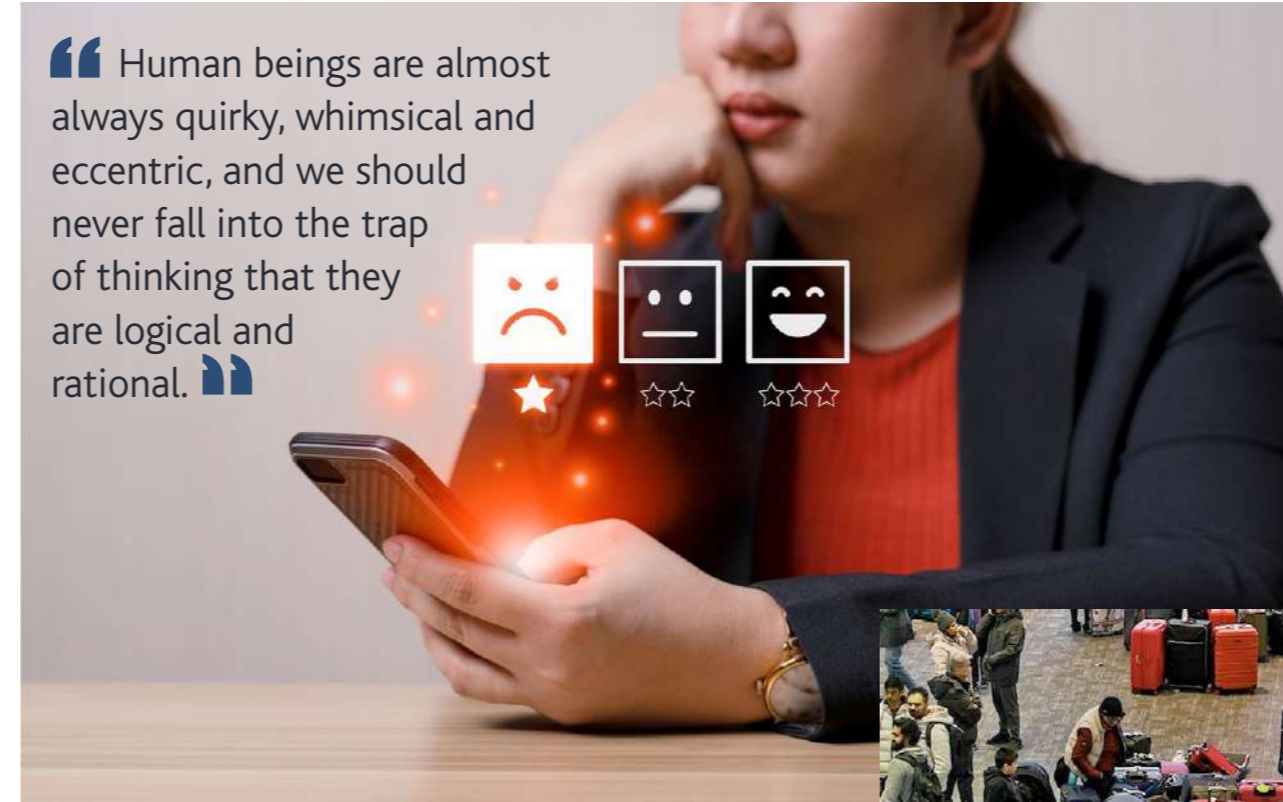
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we do mathematically and 'wisely' so that we don't make mistakes which will embarrass us later in a boardroom somewhere. And these decisions often just don't make sense to people affected by them, our customers and our people. And they don't always solve problems.

Here's a quick example to illustrate. A few years ago at Houston Airport the management team had a big headache. There were a massive number of complaints about how long it took baggage to arrive at the carousel after the flight had landed. A few logical and expensive solutions were tried, including hiring more baggage handlers, but still the complaints continued unabated.

Image by Shutthiphong Chandaeng, www.canva.com



A further analysis revealed that it took passengers about 60 to 90 seconds to walk to the baggage claim from the gates to the carousel ... and then they had to wait for another 8 minutes or so until their suitcases arrived.



Image by Cole Burston, The Canadian Press. www.thefreepress.ca/

One bright young woman offered what seemed to be a silly *counterintuitive solution*: Switch the 'planes to an arrival gate further from the centre, so that the passengers have to walk a little further. **The result:** passengers took a little longer to get to their luggage, spent less time standing around, and there was a lot less grumbling.





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- Companies with a total annual salary bill of over R500 000 and paying a Skills Development Levy for grants.

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The submission includes the following:

- Skills requirements the company plans to address.
- List of academic programmes that lead to full or part qualifications.

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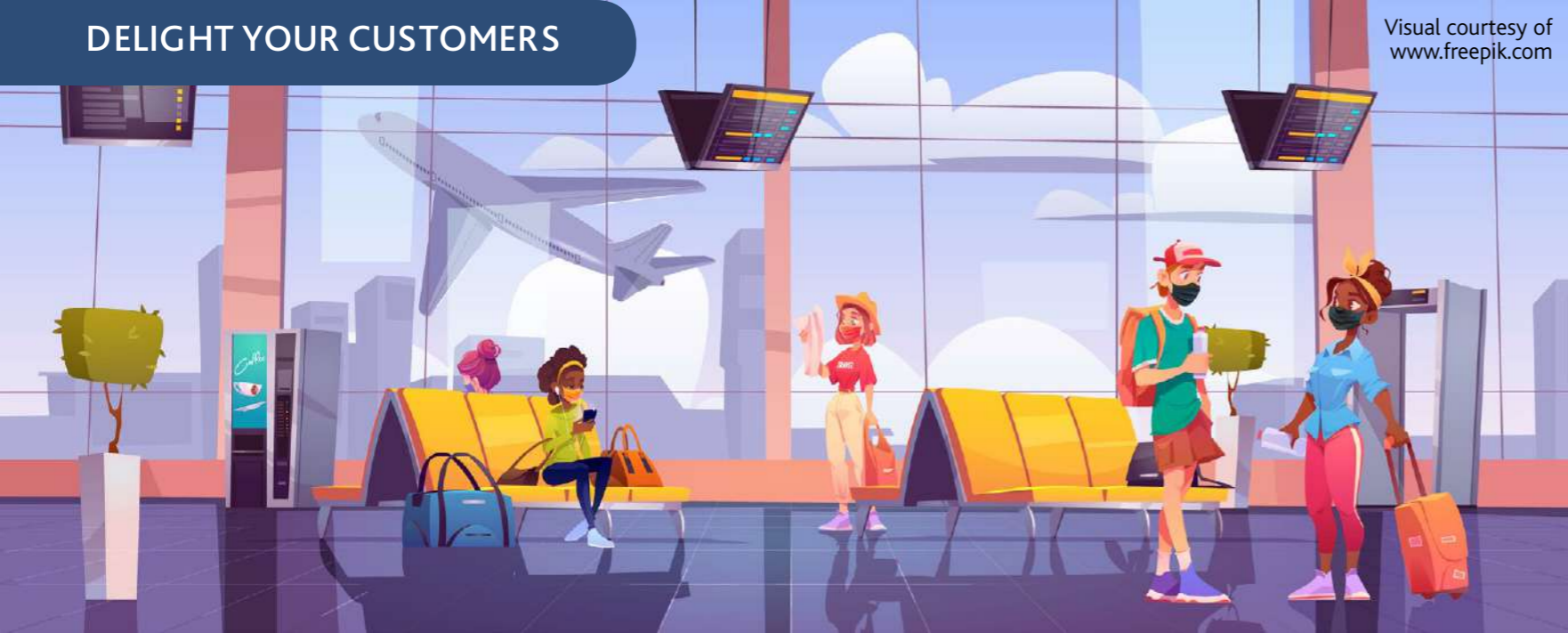


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Still, you can at least reduce the amount of negative feedback you get by leveraging a specific psychological principle.

The airport used customer psychology and insight to reduce the complaints substantially, even though it took exactly the same 8 minutes to actually deliver the bags to the carousel.

Here's another airport illustration that I recently experienced. I recently booked a return flight on Ryanair from London Stansted to Athens and back. Many years ago I had my only previous experience on Ryanair which was pretty awful, but money is tight right now, and I decided to take a cheap flight, expecting the worst.

I woke up in the middle of the night to be at the airport before 6:00 a.m. and eventually made it incident-free to the security checkpoint. But it's here that things went haywire.

I dutifully removed my electronics and all other offensive objects, put them in the trays, and then was asked to also remove my woolly hat. (London is cold!)

I chucked it on top, sent my stuff through the scanners, and made my way through the pat-down search. So far, so good, until I was randomly selected for an additional search of my baggage, at which point I started to get a bit anxious. The line of people was long, but I had built in extra time for this and thought it would be okay.

An eternity later, they got to me and everything was searched, swabbed, tested and finally approved for me to leave. As I finally got dressed again and walked away, I realised my woolly hat was not where it was supposed to be and I rushed back to retrieve it. It took them 10 minutes to find it and by now I knew that I'd have to run. The gate was closing soon!

There was no shortcut to get to my flight, but there was a winding and completely unavoidable path through numerous shops. When I got to the last part of my run/walk, I realised that the walking traveller was broken.

By now I was breathless, every muscle in my body was in pain, and I was lost. In my mind I could see

that movie scene of arriving at the gate, seeing it barred and the 'plane being reversed.

To my great fortune, there was a family about 50m behind me suffering from the same misfortune and we were rushed through at the last second. I collapsed into my narrow Ryanair seat relieved to have made it.

My flight on Ryanair seemed heavenly, even though I had booked it with some trepidation. But what had happened immediately before made everything that came after brilliant.

Us human beings are really funny like that.



The lesson of these stories is that you don't necessarily have to change anything about the way you operate your business, but if you see it from the customer's point of view you may just need to change the way in which you frame your operation. I'm not suggesting that you try this exact same tactic in your business.

If you know that your customers are unhappy with what happened before their encounter with you, are you able to take advantage of that?

Ultimately, people get frustrated because their expectations weren't met. If you manage their expectations, you'll reduce their frustration. If you let them know about problems or barriers ahead of time, you'll get fewer complaints, because

“ I still can't figure out any 'psychological tricks' that will fix human stupidity. ”



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one of the things we hate the most as people is uncertainty.

And even so, some people will just ignore your messages and warnings anyway. I still can't figure out any 'psychological tricks' that will fix human stupidity.

Nevertheless, do whatever you can to handle – or even master – people's expectations, and your customers will love you for it. **SR**



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