

# Play Santa - be nice to nasty retailers

 By [Aki Kalliatakis](#)

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Consumers who wish for a customer service revival for Christmas might like to go one better and lead the resurgence themselves.

One way to raise organisational performance is "leading by doing" or "walking the talk". Behaviour is a powerful form of communication and setting the right example may prompt others to follow suit.

Senior managers don't have a monopoly on these techniques. Ordinary people can do something similar in the hope their behaviour will prompt service staff to lift their standards. Don't forget, Gandhi said "be the change you want to see".

## Treat others as you want to be treated

In the context of customer service this is a hint to consumers that they should not simply complain about lack of courtesy and consideration, they should show some themselves.

So, play Santa this Christmas and give the gift of a smile and a courteous response, even to indifferent customer-facing staff members.

In a small way you could prompt the thought that work can be more fulfilling and fun if we all play nice, not nasty.

One challenge facing service industries, including retailing, is that nasty has become trendy.

Outrageous is "in". Rude TV personalities like Simon Cowell on *American Idols* and Gordon Ramsey on *Hell's Kitchen* are extremely popular. They don't seem to care about upsetting people.

Unfortunately, destructive behaviour like this finds an echo in society at large and within service industries. It's cool to be aloof and indifferent.

We need better role models, but mass media are unlikely to provide any in the near future. Nasty drives up the TV ratings. However, in service industries nasty drives down repeat business.

## Turn the other cheek - and try a smile or two

As the Christmas rush enters the final stages, a succession of long working weeks may wear down service personnel.

Alternatively, temporary staff brought in to handle the extra workload may not have the knowledge or training to provide real consumer support.

Experience over decades has shown that getting angry with these staff members rarely leads to significant improvement.

Stressed, tired and unhelpful shop assistants are unlikely to raise their game after being snapped at by justifiably irate customers.

So let's turn the other cheek. Let's smile, not snarl. Maybe, just maybe, they will get the message that there is something to be said for being friendly and helpful and they should give it a try.

Who knows? It just might work. We've tried everything else. Maybe it's time to adopt the Gandhi approach and be the change we want to see.

## ABOUT AKI KALLIATAKIS

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