

By Bill Guertin

The 800-Pound Gorilla

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How Genuine Is Your Business?

Our 7-year-old son, Tyler, is a unique kid. Most people who know him would say the same thing.

There's just a magnetism about him that's irresistible. Talk to him or ask him a question, and he'll say things that you don't normally hear from someone his age. His observations on life are so interesting, he's just a lot of fun to be with.

While driving home from school one day, he was in the back seat listening to his CD Walkman with the headphones on, just singing out loud like there was no one else around.

And then it hit me. The reason Tyler is so fascinating to be around.

He's genuine.

Genuineness is so refreshing today that it stands out like a beacon in the night. When you deal with someone who's genuinely interested in helping you, it is such a pleasure to behold. An engaging smile, a warm hello, great eye contact, and an "I-Can-Do-That"-itude is so refreshing and rare that we're blown away when we experience it.

And when we're not genuine, it can stand out too. The plastic smile on the store clerk. The fake enthusiasm of the salesman on commission. The new telemarketer struggling with a script that's as canned as last week's tuna.

To be truly genuine is to admit to not being perfect. Isn't it interesting, then, that advertising today is trying to sell their perfection to you?

How many businesses use the line, "For all your ____ needs"? How genuine is that?

If I need the front end of my car aligned after the "pothole season" is over, will I be better served at a place that is the best in town at alignment, or the place that tells me they can take care of "all my automotive needs"?

Give me the specialist any day.

Here's the message for business owners: you're not perfect, so don't pretend to be. There's something about honesty that's charming.

Try this on for size instead:

"Here at Matt's Motors, we haven't had time to put in a new waiting room. Truth is, we've been so fortunate to have the referrals of other satisfied customers for our transmission work, we just haven't had the opportunity to do it. So instead of inconveniencing our customers for a while, we've just put off our plans... so that we can deliver the cars you've been bringing to us on time, with the least amount of waiting. We

hope you understand... and for those customers who are happily driving today because of us, we truly appreciate your business. Matt's Motors... where your transmission is our number one priority."

Which one is more memorable?

Tyler was at his most genuine at a recent family function, with relatives we don't see often. My aunt of 85+ years got down to his level, gave Tyler a big hug and said, "Oooo, you're so cute I could just take you home!"

He thought a moment, not quite sure how to react. Was she serious? The thought of it scared him a little. Then he quickly said the most honest and polite thing he could think of:

"But you can't. Is that OK?"

Be genuine. It's lovable, it's memorable, and it's flattering on everyone... especially in business.

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