

"First impressions"

I received a request from one of the Pretoria Dealers to write a newsletter about personal hygiene. It seemed fortuitous then that we recently drove down to the Cape and back for holiday and on the 2600 km trip we stopped at 11 service stations in a variety of towns for a variety of reasons.

Often having only a few seconds to make a decision on where to stop it was interesting to realise what the deciding factors were each time. Clean bathrooms were at the top of the list and we left at least 3 sites because the bathrooms were in a terrible state. I remember shouting at my two boys "don't touch anything" a few times. Also the range of snacks in the shop made us turn around and look for another site at least twice.

Another thing that stood out, and became a running comment during the trip, was the variety of uniforms that we encountered. The word "uniform" means "always the same", but that's not what we saw. "Combo" would be a better description. It seemed at some sites that if you wore one piece of approved uniform, such as a shirt, you are considered to be in uniform.

I asked a few attendants if they knew that a uniform is also part of their personal protective equipment (PPE), but the question seemed to be a new one.

Inadequate personal hygiene can give a very negative first impression. It was also notable that the employees at the "clean and busy" sites were always neatly dressed in clean uniforms with "Colgate" smiles.

I know that it is sometimes difficult to instil pride in employees for their work, themselves and their uniforms, but it seemed that some sites completely gave up.

Was it because they didn't have the turnover or fuel volumes so they could employ people who take pride in their work and appearance?

Or was it that employees didn't take pride in their work and appearance and this resulted in lower turnover and fuel volumes?

It seems to me the two things go hand in hand. Granted that employees may have vastly different living conditions. They may not have access to running water or may not have the money to always have toothpaste, deodorant and nail clippers. Their uniform may be the best set of clothing they own and washing it may mean scrubbing it by hand. But, it is our responsibility as business owners to provide our employees with the training and support to do their work to the best of their abilities.

Some Dealers say it is each employee's own responsibility. Some provide laundry facilities at work.

Some do personal hygiene training.

Some give each employee a personal hygiene kit every few months.

Whatever you decide to do, consider the impact of poor personal hygiene on customers first impressions.

BEST PRACTICES:

DO set a standard for personal hygiene through a simple written policy that's posted where all employees can see.

DO identify the problems that your employees may have in maintaining personal hygiene and help them to find solutions for it

DON'T employ people who show a lack of pride in their appearance and themselves, it transfers to how they do the work and how they behave towards customers

DON'T underestimate the motivational power that "pride in yourself, your uniform and workplace" can have on your employees.

QUICK WINS:

Involve your supervisors in finding a solution for this issue. Let them write the personal hygiene standard for the business and manage it. Let them come up with solutions to the problems they encounter and then empower them to take responsibility for implementing it.

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