

WILL WORK FOR MEANING

More than 9 of 10 U.S. employees would forgo some pay in exchange for consistently meaningful work. In fact, people said they would trade 23% of their lifetime earnings, on average—more than what is typically spent to buy a home.

"9 Out of 10 People Are Willing to Earn Less Money to Do More-Meaningful Work,"
by Shawn Achor et al.

RETAIL

The Downside of Attentive Service

In theory, energetic customer service is a good thing: a mark of a luxury hotel or an upscale restaurant. But a new study highlights a drawback to service that goes the extra mile—and finds that perceptions of what is “too much” vary from culture to culture.

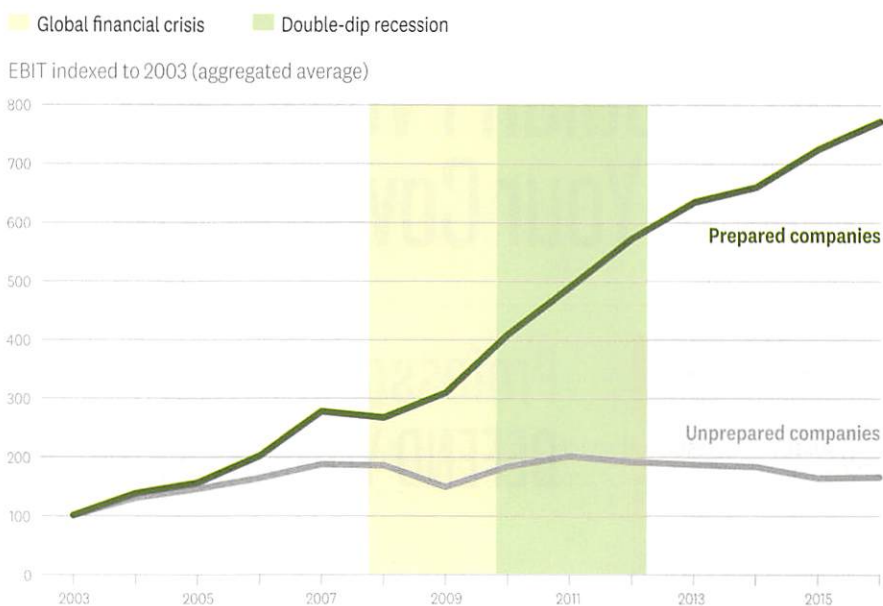
The researchers interviewed consumers in China and North America in a variety of service contexts: hairdressing, telecommunications, and computer repair. From this work they constructed a definition of what they call high service attentiveness: service that is perceived to be “excessive in frequency, overly intensive in warmth, or providing unsolicited care and information.” They noted that just one of these factors can put customers off, often leading them to suspect that the provider has an ulterior motive—is angling for a larger tip, say, or trying to upsell a product or service.

In a subsequent experiment, Chinese and U.S. participants read a scenario in which a hair stylist was either matter-of-fact or especially solicitous; some were told that the stylist received commissions, others that he worked purely on a salaried basis. After reading the script, participants rated their likelihood of obtaining a membership card to the salon and described how they felt about the stylist, his services, and his motives. U.S. participants reacted negatively to the highly attentive stylist only when they believed he was paid on

SALES

Get Ahead of the Next Recession

A study of 3,500 companies found that those that took companywide measures to prepare for a downturn saw earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT) grow sharply during and after the event, unlike companies that didn't prepare. In sales, those measures included tactics like ditching marginal accounts, bolstering low-cost channels for small clients, automating account management, streamlining back-office functions, and using data to set prices.



Note: A double-dip recession occurs when GDP becomes negative after at least one quarter of growth. EBIT is not adjusted for inflation.
Source: Bain analysis of S&P Capital IQ data.

commission, but their Chinese counterparts reacted negatively and voiced suspicions regardless of the compensation system—and negative feelings about the stylist affected both groups' interest in a membership card.

“Our findings provide useful guidance to international service managers,” the researchers write. “High service attentiveness does not necessarily result in increased customer satisfaction or patronage intention,

[and] service employees need to be more tactful and sensitive to consumer needs and refrain from being overly warm or effusive, particularly in East Asian markets.” ☺

ABOUT THE RESEARCH “Consumer Responses to High Service Attentiveness: A Cross-Cultural Examination,” by Maggie Wenjing Liu, Lijun Zhang, and Hean Tat Keh (*Journal of International Marketing*, forthcoming)