

Sorbet's Ian Fuhr hits the nail on the head when it comes to brand loyalty

 By Jessica Tennant

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With over 265,000 loyalty members to date, Sorbet Group's CEO Ian Fuhr recently shared insights on the subject of developing brand loyalty at [Business of Design](#) in Johannesburg, where he explained why Sorbet's service culture is its competitive advantage in an industry that is first and foremost about the customer.

"I often get asked, 'How do you motivate thousands of people?' The answer is servant leadership. "Servant leaders create a working environment that's conducive to people motivating themselves.

"You have a big boss, a subservient staff member and a customer." The subservient staff member puts the customer first and is rewarded as a result, and he refers to the opposite as an 'I' specialist – someone who is more concerned about what they will get out of the client. He told Entrepreneur Magazine earlier this year, "They don't care about guest needs and wants, and see only walking commissions.

"Serve the people that are serving the people", he says, going as far to say that the purpose of work is to serve. Most people would probably say that it's to make money, but Fuhr believes that if you serve the needs and wants of people well, that will take care of itself.

A 'no-policy' return policy

The cost of losing a guest, in Sorbet's case, isn't worth going into business for the wrong reasons. The average guest spends R5,000 per annum and over five years that amounts to R25,000, so make sure you never lose even one single customer. "Always look at the long term, never argue, and *never* use 'company policy' as an excuse."



Ian Fuhr

His daughter, Jade Kinkel, who heads up the marketing team, had a hard time at an international clothing retailer when all she wanted to do was return a pair of pants, after which she wrote Sorbet's return policy or better put, its 'no-policy return policy':

'You've changed your mind, that's ok, we still love you.

Bring it back, no fuss, no slip, no ID, no passport, no unabridged birth certificate or mother's marriage documents, even if it's empty, damaged, half used, not your vibe anymore, need the money for movies, the packaging clashes with your bathroom, or you just made a terrible mistake.

Bring back anything... especially your business!"

Although this might not make business sense to some, they've worked it out: "If you give your customers that R500 refund, they're likely to spend R25,000 with you over the next five years."

The stats just go to show that they must be doing something right. Sorbet currently has 165 stores on which 158 are franchised (they open about three stores a month); they employ nearly 2,000 staff and perform over 200,000 treatments per month. Group sales amounted to R525 million for the year ended February 2016, with estimated sales to February 2017 at R660 million (by 2019 they expect this to be over a billion rand); and they get an average of 10 franchise enquires per day. Sorbet is the first South African beauty chain to expand internationally, with two stores in London and another two to open by the end of the year, and no store closures thus far. So it's a successful business alright.

However, for Fuhr, true success has come to mean making a difference in people's lives (even if that means fixing someone's broken nail at close of business), and customer loyalty is just the top coat.

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