The Enforced Happiness of the Pret A Manger Employees

Posted on May 31, 2018

View this essay online:
https://academic-master.com/the-enforced-happiness-of-the-pret-a-manger-employees/

Introduction

The case concerns the enforced happiness of Pret A Manger employees. Here, the employer demands people with specific attributes and capabilities to appeal to and attract customers' senses. Emotional labor or esthetic labor is considered to be one of the essential criteria for the selection of interactive service employees in the retail industry. Appearance, a cordial smile, appropriate body proportion, attitude, and a good voice with an accent are of great importance to the employees (Yee, Yeung, and Cheng, 2008).

It presents an extreme case of emotional labor, which Pret A Manger employees are made to practice while selling cheddar and tomato sandwiches. Emotional labor is conceptualized as a practice that sabotages the employees' rights.

Discussion

Emotional labor is vital for interactive service employees because when they engage themselves in expressing the employer's desired emotions while interacting with the customers, the customers are likely to acknowledge these emotions. However, by performing emotional labor for a long time, the employee is prone to suffer from fatigue and emotional exhaustion, which can, in turn, lead to turnover. Retailers face the significant challenge of keeping their employees committed and satisfied with the organization. It is seen that commitment and satisfaction on the employee's part increase their performance and decrease their turnover intentions. The survey by the "US Department of Labor" shows that the turnover rates are above average and administrative and training costs are increasing, which hinders the achievement of maximum employee performance in the retail industry (Cho, Rutherford, and Park, 2013).

Another impact of emotional labor in the retail industry that is mentioned in the given case study is that females will be given preference for interactive services because of their expertise in managing emotions. It will result in the dominance of women in the service economy. Women show higher sensitivity and politeness in their speech. Their conversational style has been categorized as cooperative, unlike men whose conversational style has been classified as competitive, assertive, and

direct. These traits of female language play an important role in emotional labor. Moreover, unlike men, women are taught to conform and compromise for the happiness of others from their childhood (CLAES, 1999).

Emotional labor will also promote class-based change in the pattern of consumption. As the consumption of luxuries by high-income households is greater than the consumption by low-income households, rich people will set the standard, which will increase consumers' expectations (Aguiar and Bils, 2015). An organization where employees engage themselves in emotional labor, like the *Pret* shops mentioned in the case, will make customers used to the fawning behavior of the employees, which in turn will make other stores, where prices are reasonable, raise their standards and ask their employees for emotional labor (Tsaur, Luoh and Syue, 2015).

In the given case, emotional labor is conceptualized as a tool for an organization to create its hegemony over other similar institutions as *Pret A Manger* has done over the shops in its vicinity without affecting the quality of the product (or food as in the case). It shows that rationality and emotions are interchangeable and are entwined together. Employees are trained to act with predictability to increase the efficiency and productivity of the organisation (Grandey and Gabriel, 2015).

At the beginning of the case, the author explains that the behavior of the woman employee at Pret A Manger is called "emotional labor" because she suppresses her real feelings and attempts to fulfill the emotional expectations of the customers, not because she creates a positive feeling in the customer's heart. Two types of emotional labor are mentioned in the case: the suppression of one's feelings, which is called "surface acting," and changing inner feelings to customer-desired feelings, which is called "deep acting." The emotional phenomenon is widespread and central to the services where employees interact with the customers. It is considered a part of the job (Domagalski, 1999).

The author refers to an essay "Short Cuts for the London Review of Books" by British journalist Paul Myerscough in which he called emotional labor exercised by *Pret*'s employees "affective labor," which is carried out to excite emotions in the customers' hearts by being a hypocrite (Myerscough, 2013).

Emotional labor is conceptualized as a hard practice that demands not only the body and mind but also the souls of the employees. This method dramatically undermines the rights of the employees. They can get fired for just being "unhappy," as an employee got fired because he wanted to start a union, which means that their thoughts are not theirs. They are hired not just to earn money but also to entertain the customers.

The policy of emotional labour is strictly enforced as if it were a policy in the German security service. The organization sends its agent once a month to check whether emotional labor is being efficiently practiced, and the report of this agent depends on the behavior of just the person with whom he interacts.

Conclusion

Emotional labour is justifiable in places like hospitals, funerals, and daycare centres, where there are identifiable emotional needs. Still, it is needless in shops like Pret, whose sole purpose is to satisfy customers' thirst and hunger.

The conceptualization of emotional labor in the given case is slightly extreme. The author appears to be biased against *Pret A Manger*, but the author's stance that there is no need for the person who sells burgers and sandwiches to be uselessly charming and "to create a sense of fun" is right.

References

Aguiar, M. and Bils, M., 2015. Has consumption inequality mirrored income inequality?. *American Economic Review*, *105*(9), pp. 2725-56.

Cho, Y.N., Rutherford, B.N. and Park, J., 2013. The impact of emotional labour in a retail environment. *Journal of Business Research*, *66*(5), pp. 670-677.

CLAES, M.T., 1999. Women, men and management styles. *International Labour Review*, *138*(4), pp. 431-446.

Domagalski, T.A., 1999. Emotion in organizations: Main currents. *Human relations*, *52*(6), pp. 833-852.

Grandey, A.A. and Gabriel, A.S., 2015. Emotional labour at a crossroads: Where do we go from here?.

Myerscough, P., 2013. Short Cuts. *London Review of Books* [Online] vol. 35 no. 1 p. 25. Available from https://www.lrb.co.uk/v35/n01/paul-myerscough/short-cuts[Accessed 4 February 2018].

Tsaur, S.H., Luoh, H.F. and Syue, S.S., 2015. Positive emotions and behavioral intentions of customers in full-service restaurants: Does aesthetic labour matter?. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, *51*, pp. 115-126.

Yee, R.W., Yeung, A.C. and Cheng, T.E., 2008. The impact of employee satisfaction on quality and profitability in high-contact service industries. *Journal of operations management*, *26*(5), pp. 651-668.