



Showing Off

Showing off has been variously defined as pretentiousness, exaggeration, posturing, bragging, inflated self-importance, arrogance, bigheadedness, pride, conceit, being full of yourself, immodesty, being vain, haughty, and overweening. Overweening? My goodness! Who, in their right mind, would want to be thought of as overweening? The shame! The horror!

Those definitions are all misguided interpretations of what is, in fact, the most noble of pursuits. Showing off is completely misunderstood and has gotten a very bad rap. What the world needs is not less showing off, but more. If you're not showing off, then what's the point? If you're not showing off, then why even show up? Why go to work? Why play the game?

Showing off, as I define it (which I can, because this is my book), is a good thing. Showing off is about

bringing the best you have to any situation. It's about excelling; exceeding expectations; and experiencing the joy, jazz, and kick of being better tomorrow than you were today. When presented with a problem or challenge, showing off is an attitude that says, "Watch this."

This book was inspired by Leslie, who works at the Kinko's on Hillsboro Road in Nashville, Tennessee, and others like her. Trying to put into words the subtle magic that Leslie works with customers is like trying to catch lightning in a bottle. I can't quite put my finger on what it is about Leslie that is so remarkable, but something about the way she does her job is so smooth and quietly wonderful that you walk away feeling a little bit better about yourself and the world.

Part of it is the gleam in her eye. Or is it a twinkle? No, I think it's a gleam. It's like there's something really cool going on and Leslie is letting you in on it. One aspect of Leslie's quiet version of showing off is that if you have a special request or unusual order, she seems to handle it so effortlessly that it's like watching Tiger Woods make a three-foot putt. It's just what Leslie does.

Then there's her sense of humor. It's always there, just below the surface. Leslie isn't someone that makes me laugh out loud with jokes. She's much better than that. I can't be around Leslie without smiling because her smile is infectious. If you're in a bad mood, I would recommend that you go see Leslie about some copies. The rest of your day will go better.

I don't know Leslie personally. I'm just one of her customers. I haven't even done business with her enough to say that we're acquaintances. But if someone told me to put together a "dream team" of people that I'd want to work with on a variety of projects, I'd pick Leslie to be on the team. Something about her says that she could handle pretty much whatever assignment you put in front of her. Like most really good show-offs, especially the subtle, classy ones, there's just "something about" Leslie.

For the true show-off, work is play. When you watch a show-off do their work, it's like watching a little kid caught up in the joy of making mud pies. Showing off means being in a state of flow in which you can almost stop thinking about what you're doing because it comes so naturally.

In a customer focus group conducted for an auto manufacturer, the participants were asked to relate an example of extraordinary service. A woman told of her experience with a hotel employee in New York who, when she told him that she had left her coat in a restaurant across town that evening, told her not to worry about a thing, that he would take a taxi to the restaurant, retrieve the coat, and bring it to her. An hour later, the same employee appeared at her hotel room door, her coat in hand, which he presented to her neatly folded and wrapped in tissue paper. That's showing off.

The beauty of showing off is that it's probably most effective when done quietly. You know who I'm talking about. It's the coworker who, without fanfare or calling

attention to herself, simply gets things done. It's the guy in operations who, when faced with yet another seemingly impossible task, smiles and says, "I'll make it happen." It's the customer service representative who, when you call with a request that you know in your heart of hearts is probably unreasonable, tells you that it's her pleasure to take care of it for you. And, yes, it's the player who, when the game is on the line, says, "Give me the ball, coach."

At this point, there will be some who will claim their usual role as the "victim" and say, "Aha! I see what you're up to! You just want me to bust my butt and do extra work to make everybody else happy and make my company more money and take advantage of me!" Yeah, right. Cry me a river.

Let's get this straight. Showing off is something you do because it's first and foremost in your own best interest. Showing off is about getting what you want while having one hell of a good time doing it. Showing off is about squeezing maximum fun out of any situation, and having the brains, guts, and creativity to not only make lemonade when life throws you lemons, but also make a lemon meringue pie, a lemon cake with festive lemon icing rosettes, and a lemon "watch this" soufflé.

The wonderful by-product of showing off is that you bring maximum value to what you're doing for whomever you're doing it. The bottom line on how the world works most of the time is that the best way to get what you want

is to be sure the other person is getting what they want. If you don't understand that, then you don't understand the basic fundamental operating principles of business, relationships, politics, or playground dynamics.

Showing off means finding the best way to win—which requires you to find the best way to let the other person win, too. If you doubt that this is true, I invite you to try the strategy of making the other guy lose. Do it. Make sure that whoever you're playing with loses, whether it's your coworker, spouse, child, friend, customer, vendor, or the ticket agent at the airport when your flight has just been cancelled. Go for it. Make that person lose. Then see what happens, Mr. or Ms. Tough Guy.

They won't play with you anymore. That's how it works. If you make people lose, aren't fun to play with, or are just generally a pain in the ass to be around, people will stop playing with you. They will pick up their ball and go home.

Showing off means that when the easy route would be to get mad, be unreasonable, or generally raise hell about whatever perceived injustice is taking place (e.g., the cancelled flight), you completely surprise everyone and remain the coolest person in the room. You handle it. You are the oasis in the desert, the calm in the storm, the cooling rain in the firestorm of raging insanity. When everyone else is screaming bloody murder at the airline ticket agent, you tell him that he's doing a good job, to hang in there, that this, too, shall pass. Then watch when

the ticket agent puts you at the head of the list for the next flight. That's showing off.

If you think that's not the way it works, you're so dead wrong that I can't even find the words to adequately describe it. The idea of winning through intimidation is a myth perpetuated by losers who are bitter about their own lives. Stop screaming and start showing off. Do it quietly and with class. It's magic. It's jaw-droppingly amazing in its effectiveness. Showing off under pressure is elegant. It's a beautiful thing.

Don't think for one second that I'm saying you should be a wimp and let people walk all over you. To the contrary, show-offs never, ever, ever let anyone take advantage of them or have their rights trampled by a bully. It's just that show-offs pick their battles wisely. They use their heads. They're tough, but they're smart.

If I haven't yet won you over to this new way of thinking about showing off, I can only invite you to read on. There are ideas in this book that will, I hope, challenge your beliefs about lots of things. I'm writing this book to be provocative, not pleasant. For many people, maybe even for most people, understanding this completely positive interpretation of showing off takes a little getting used to.

When I told my friend Joy Baldrige the title of this book, she was her usual diplomatic self with her feedback. She said, "I hate it. I don't like anything about it. I don't like show-offs and I don't like this title." Did I mention that Joy is my friend and therefore feels she has an obligation to be completely honest with me? Did I also

mention that Joy is a woman who teaches people how to be more productive while reducing stress? And did I further mention that she is one of the most delightfully outrageous show-offs I have ever known?

Joy does wildly creative live presentations before audiences all across the country. When I watch her work, I wonder how on earth she comes up with the courage to get on stage and do the completely insane things that she does. Doesn't she know the rules? Doesn't she know that that's just not the way it's done? And why do her audiences squeal with such absolute delight? Why do they so adore what she does for them and the value that she brings to them in her own totally unique, off-the-wall, outside-the-box way?

Because she's showing off, that's why. Joy has decided to hell with the way it's always been done. Let's not play it safe. Let's do something meaningful, and let's do it in a way that's fun, inspiring, and amazing. People love her for it.

When I pointed this out to my friend Joy, she said, "Oh, you mean **THAT** kind of showing off! You mean showing off in the sense of 'You go, girl!' You mean showing off as in being your very best by doing what you do better than anybody else. You mean showing off in the way that you're bringing something to the table that makes other people happy and helps them and really contributes to the world!"

Well, yeah. That's exactly what I mean. Whether it's over the top or so quiet and understated that you hardly

even notice it, showing off is about making a positive contribution.

By the way, Joy's logo is a silhouette of herself jumping with wild abandon (jumping for Joy—get it?). It inspired the cover of this book. That Joy. What a show-off. We need more. Keep reading.