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Emotional Labor in the Service Industry

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Study Topic: Understanding the employee experience as a means to better support employees' physical and emotional wellbeing, and improve the health of the organization as a whole.

Key Concepts:



Emotional labor is the idea that a personal and enjoyable behavior - a smile - can also be a product available for public consumption in exchange for a wage



Surface acting occurs when workers display the desired emotions required for a job without changing how they actually feel (i.e. "faking it")



Deep acting is an effortful process through which employees change their internal feelings to align with organizational expectations, producing more natural and genuine emotional displays

Method:

Ten semi-structured interviews were carried out with full-time restaurant servers in Austin. Interviewees had worked an average of 12.4 years in the industry, and spoke candidly about personal experiences and the industry as a whole.



Acknowledgements
Thank you to my colleagues, friends, and guests at Houndstooth Coffee. A special thank you to Paul & Sean Henry. Many thanks to John Traphagan and Zach Elkins for their support on this research.

Conclusion: It is crucial for service industry leaders to better understand the full experience of servers and those in customer-facing roles. If we can increase the perception of value and respect felt by employees from leadership, this will benefit the well-being of the employee, improve their work, increase retention rate, and positively impact the health of the organization by saving thousands of dollars annually to replace and train new employees. Most importantly, we take better care of the people that keep our businesses running.



Results:



Understanding the Employee Experience

- Benefits of working in the industry:
- Personal development/self-awareness
 - Strong community/networks
 - Work is challenging, requiring skill, knowledge, and empathy
- Stressors of the industry:
- Financial instability
 - Demoralizing aspect of getting stiffed/undertipped
 - Customer incivility

How can service industry leadership best support their staff?

- Programs and policies that make servers feel valued & supported:
- Health insurance
 - Parental leave
 - Benefits including regular raises, paid vacation, paid sick days
 - HR department
 - Emotional support
 - Leadership modeling behavior

Literature Cited:
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