

# Serving up smiles

[Business](#)



Television can be depressing. I recently watched this show about this guy who lives just about the saddest life ever.

His parents abandoned him. He works in a fast food restaurant for minimum wage. He can't drive. His house is under water. He even lost an arm.

Who is this downtrodden soul? You may have heard of him. His name is, you guessed it, Spongebob Squarepants. If there's one thing I've realized over the years, however, Spongebob still always grins from ear to ear. In one episode, when Spongebob's Debbie-Downer coworker Squidward ridicules his beaming face, Spongebob responds, "What's better than serving up smiles?" In response, Squidward quips, "Being dead...or anything else." Well, I do love calamari.

Now, Spongebob's smile could be a model for all of us. But nowadays, too many of us are Squidwards, and our problem is far from a cartoon. Amidst a fragile economy, a gridlocked congress, and a multitude of scandals, we've become less friendly, more cynical and more suspicious. We have not only forgotten our smile, but we also dismiss and even condemn its benefits. Now, I get that smiling won't solve all the deeply complicated problems in the world. And we've all experienced devastating moments when smiling would seem insane.

But science has shown us again and again that it can make hardships more tolerable. Psychologist Robin Smith writes, "If our smile is dead, it's impacting lives negatively...[but] by smiling, we have the power to ignite a chain reaction of change." So, let's spongebobify ourselves. Let's soak it all in as we first examine how we don't feel comfortable smiling at others, and <https://assignbuster.com/serving-up-smiles/>

second how we don't comfortable receiving a smile. We'll then find solutions to start serving up smiles.

Absorb this. According to a March 2011 issue of Forbes Magazine, children smile up to 400 times a day, while two-thirds of adults grin less than 20. So what's behind this disappearing act as we age? Well that's our first problem. We non-children are less comfortable smiling at others. Alex Lickerman, who is actually more of a beer guy, soberly explains in a February 2012 Psychology Today article that we are afraid of how a grin might be interpreted. He states, "Smiling at strangers might be taken as an invitation I don't want to offer.

[So] we often guard our privacy intensely and prefer barriers between strangers to persist." You see, we believe a neutral face or a frown offers protection and space. But it's not just a self-defense mechanism; smiling has even become a cultural disadvantage. On July 5th, 2013, The Daily Telegraph reported a study of job-seeking women. The study concluded that "women who looked cheerful were judged to less willing to lead.

... Pride, on the other hand, is positively associated with leadership qualities." And this extends to both genders.

Smiling which would seem key to customer service and a positive business environment, is now considered a detriment. Well, at least it explains airport customer service. Unfortunately, healthcare expert Susan Keane Baker explains that our true feelings tend to conform to the expression on our face. So, a frown actually reinforces and perpetuate feelings of frustration, stress and unhappiness. On the contrary, it's been documented that a simple smile <https://assignbuster.com/serving-up-smiles/>

can lower our blood pressure, improve our immune system, and reduce our stress levels. Yet we ditch positivity to succeed in business.

Wait, isn't a promotion supposed to make us happier? But coming full circle, even the smiles of childhood may soon be under attack. Researchers of the University of Canterbury recently found that since 1989, the proportion of happy faces on Legos—the joyous building block of our childhoods— has decreased, while neutral and frowny faces have increased. The researchers noted, “ We cannot help but wonder how the move from only positive faces to an increasing number of negative affect how children play.” What's next, The Emotional Babbage Patch Kids? But even if we escape our childhood toys, we have another issue with smiling. Which brings us to our second problem.

When others smile, we look the other way. We don't feel comfortable receiving a smile. Just last year, the Moscow Times reported the primary reason for this: we perceive smiles as a facade covering up a darker truth. We become suspicious of their hidden agendas. Leave it to the Russians to see a smile as an act of espionage.

Even so, the smile is the most universally recognized facial expression across the globe. When we refrain from expressing our joy or cast shade on those who wear their smile proudly, we lose its amazing power. On April 6th 2003, Colonel Chris Hughes was in command of the 101st Airborne Division in Iraq. He led his troops inside the city of Najaf to meet with its leading cleric, at the city's mosque. They wanted the city's support to help liberate it from Saddam Hussein.

However, rumors that the soldiers meant harm raced through the city. A mob formed to attack the troops. The soldiers and the Iraqis tried to negotiate, but neither could understand the other. Tensions mounted. And Hughes's first instinct from his extensive training was to fight back with violence. But instead Hughes decided to give an instruction he had never been taught.

“ Soldiers, smile!” When the Iraqis saw the gesture, they put their weapons down... and smiled back. Thousands of lives were able to be saved because Hughes ignored a military culture that instills a fear of receiving smile. But on that day in Najaf, the soldiers and the citizens spoke the same language.

And so can we. But we don't need a war to start speaking it. In his book, *Nonverbal Communication*, author Albert Mehrabian noted that 55% of all nonverbal communication is in our facial expression. It's clear, then, that no matter how many kind words or compliments we may say, they don't mean a thing without a smile. Now, it would be callous to suggest that many of us suffering through this economy, deeply personal problems, or clinical depression should just plaster on a smile and suck it up.

But let's realize that it can be a first step — because at least we have the option. We can lose our fear of smiling at others by imaging what it would be like if we couldn't smile at all. Take the story of Tori Kosempel, a brave little seven year old girl who had a lot to be happy about. Loving parents, siblings, and friends. However, Tori couldn't express her inner joy.

Born with a rare disorder called Moebius Syndrome, the nerves and muscles that moved Tori's face were paralyzed. Not until after a long, risky surgery, Tori smiled for the very first time. Her surgeon, Dr. John Yoo, says that when <https://assignbuster.com/serving-up-smiles/>

she saw him, she gave him the biggest smile he had ever received, something we too often take for granted. As social psychologists Craig Smith and Heather Scott cleverly put it, “ The face has the only skeletal muscles of the body that are used, not to move ourselves, but to move others” And if we encounter skepticism, let’s remember Lupe Fiasco’s song Strange Fruition, “ Hatin’ on your happiness, you hit ‘ em off with laughs; Smile ‘ til they surrender then you kill ‘ em off with glad.

” Second, let’s stop assuming that other’s smiles cover ulterior motives. Instead, they should be innocent until proven guilty. Mikhail Gorbachev, former General Secretary of the Soviet Union, was nicknamed “ a nice smile with iron teeth.” But he was the first Soviet leader who publicly smiled at his people and world leaders. And guess what? He helped dismantle the Cold War. Let’s tear down our own walls and welcome smiles on the other side.

When Nelson Mandela passed away months ago, perhaps missing from most of coverage of his legacy was fact he founded the Smile foundation, a foundation that helps hundreds of facially disfigured children everyday get their smile. And now, a smiling statue of Nelson Mandela stands tall in South Africa, symbolizing his vision of peace that will never be forgotten. So we’ve seen from South Africa, to Iraq, to Russia, to inside our very homes, smiling is something that connects us all. In fact, I recently read a report that we actually begin smiling in the womb. So why stop? That’s a foundation we can all build on. Works Cited Chilcote, Ryan.

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