Imagine working in a busy book store. Your managers constantly insist that you ‘serve with a smile’, believing that displays of happiness and enthusiasm can boost sales. During training, you were told about research (conducted in 2002 by Wei-Chi Tsai and Yin-Mei Huang) suggesting that customers see shop workers who show positive emotions as more friendly, leading them to spend longer in the store and to be more likely to plan on returning¹. Smiling clearly seems to be an important part of your job of selling books.

Now imagine you have just started your day’s work. You remind yourself to keep displaying positive emotions as you deal with customers’ queries about where to find books, when new books will be in stock, what an author’s name might be (such as “could it start with an ‘O’?”), and so on. So far, so good. The first hour goes by, and you remember to keep smiling as you deal with 40 consecutive customers. After another 2 hours (‘keep smiling’ you tell yourself), you have a lunch break with colleagues (smiling optional), and then it’s back to the shop floor. You think about the 4 long hours of forcing yourself to keep smiling at your customers that lie ahead of you.

How would you feel after 7 hours of being required to display positive emotions towards people you barely know? Remember that this would be your typical routine, day after day, week after week. Would you feel exhausted
and end up never wanting to smile at a customer again? Would you feel down and depressed by the end of the working day? Or do you think that the requirement to smile and display positive emotions would actually help to put you in a positive mood? Each of these reactions is possible (for example, see the chapter, ‘Can I make myself feel better just by smiling?’), depending on how you deal with any conflict between your actual and expressed feelings towards customers and on how great that conflict might be in the first place.

**When You’re In The Mood**

As we know from personal experience, our moods and emotions at work fluctuate over time. Let’s consider those occasions when you are in a good mood while performing your work in the book store. At these times, your feelings will match the ones you need to express to customers, making your smiles authentic\(^2\). Because your expressions are activated automatically, they require little cognitive effort\(^3\). Further, other people – such as your customers – will be able to tell that you are smiling naturally and without effort. Experiments conducted by Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen in 1975 showed that when people crinkle their eyes while smiling (known as a *Duchenne* smile), others see the smile as a more authentic expression of happiness\(^4\).

The authenticity of an employee’s emotional expression can contribute to customer satisfaction. This was demonstrated by Alicia Grandey and colleagues who conducted an experiment in which participants watched one of four videos involving customer service\(^5\). Each video showed a hotel receptionist checking in a hotel guest. The
actor playing the receptionist either showed an authentic positive emotional display or a faked positive emotional display, in combination with competent or incompetent service. Participants made ratings of the receptionist’s authenticity, competence, and friendliness, as well as their own likely satisfaction with the encounter. They rated authentic displays as more competent, friendlier, and more satisfying than inauthentic displays, and authentic and competent service as the most friendly and satisfying. Authentic displays may have this effect because customers ‘read’ such displays as signals of the employee’s intentions to help and as indicating that the employee is likeable and trustworthy.

But how might authentic displays of positive emotion affect the well-being of the employee rather than the customer? Two routes have been proposed. First, expressing authentic displays is not emotionally exhausting because it requires little effort. Second, customers respond more positively to authentic displays of positive emotion, leading to reciprocated positive feelings. Such positive interactions can, in turn, help to maintain an employee’s well-being and enhance feelings of self-worth (e.g., believing that one is doing a good job). The second route was demonstrated in a study by Barbara Zimmerman and colleagues, who asked employees in German car dealerships to complete a short questionnaire before and after interacting with a customer. Employees experienced an improvement in mood when they perceived that the customers provided support during the interaction.
When You’re Not In The Mood

Now let’s consider those occasions when you are in a bad mood while performing your work in the book store. You may have had an argument with your partner; you may be upset about a comment made by a co-worker, or you may have had to deal with a very difficult customer. Critically, this means that the emotions you are currently feeling do not match those that you are required to express as part of your work. When this happens, one option is simply to express the emotions you are feeling. However, this might lose you a sale or earn disapproval from your manager. Alternatively, you might try to change your expressed emotions so that they match job requirements. But how?

‘The Managed Heart’ by Arlie Hochschild is a classic study of how flight attendants manage their emotions at work\textsuperscript{10}. Hochschild found that employees typically used one of two strategies to achieve the required emotional display; a process she called emotional labor. One strategy – surface acting – involved altering the outward expression of emotion to produce a faked emotional display by, for instance, ‘painting on a smile’ or trying to adopt an enthusiastic or calm tone of voice. The other strategy – deep acting – involved altering one’s felt emotions in order to produce the required authentic emotional display. Subsequent research has expanded on the different techniques used in deep acting, such as reappraising the causes of your current mood, e.g., trying to view a situation from a customer’s perspective as a means of reducing feelings of anger toward that person, or distracting yourself with thoughts about pleasant things in your life such as your last holiday or an upcoming dinner with friends\textsuperscript{11}. 
Emotion Regulation And Well-Being

Although surface and deep acting represent different ways of regulating emotions at work, differences between them have significant implications for well-being. First, it has been suggested that deep acting requires less cognitive effort than surface acting. One reason for this is that deep acting ‘fixes’ the underlying problem (a mismatch between felt emotion and the required emotion state), thereby enabling the person to produce authentic emotional displays with little effort. In contrast, surface acting does not address the underlying ‘mismatch’ problem and requires sustained attention and effort to ensure both that the correct emotions are displayed and that the true underlying emotions do not ‘leak out’. Second, deep acting produces authentic displays of emotions and is therefore much more likely to lead to positive customer interactions than is the case with surface acting which produces unappealing inauthentic displays of emotion.

So surface acting involves more cognitive effort and is less likely to lead to positive customer interactions when compared to deep acting. As a result, we might expect surface acting to be much more problematic with regard to employee well-being than deep acting. Indeed, there is empirical support for this idea, as shown by Ute Hülsheger and Anna Schewe, who conducted a meta-analysis of ninety-five studies of emotion regulation at work. We first came across meta-analysis in the chapter ‘Which moods can give me that Eureka moment?’ Recall that it is a research technique that uses the data from lots of studies to estimate the strength and statistical significance of the relationship between things. As the findings are
based on many studies, we can be more confident that the reported relationship is not just due to a bias in one particular study. Interestingly, Hülsheger and Schewe’s analysis demonstrated that surface acting has a negative relationship with well-being, but deep acting has no overall relationship with well-being. Deep acting may have little relationship with well-being effect because its costs (e.g., some cognitive effort) are compensated by its benefits (e.g., positive social relationships).

To conclude, serving with a smile only appears to hurt your well-being when the smile is faked. Inauthentic displays of emotion appear to have a high cost with regard to well-being, as they require a lot of cognitive effort, using up energy resources which, if not replenished, can lead to feeling burned out and exhausted. Surface acting can also lead to more difficult and less rewarding encounters with customers, which in turn are likely to have a negative impact on well-being. In contrast, authentic smiles that reflect your true emotional state appear to be good for you and for others around you.

**Practical Tips**

- *For employees.* When you perceive a mismatch between how you feel and the emotions you are required to express, try to engage in deep acting by reappraising your situation, looking at things from the customer’s point of view, or thinking about pleasant experiences (e.g., recall the three nicest things that have happened to you in the previous 24 hours).
- *For co-workers and line managers.* Co-workers and managers can play a role in helping to create a climate in which employees are able to express and discuss
their emotions and problems with customers ‘back-stage’. Alicia Grandey and colleagues found that such a ‘climate of authenticity’ mitigated the negative effects of surface acting on employee well-being. This and other research suggests that managers need to provide customer service employees with the resources (e.g., recovery time, social support, customer-handling skills) to manage the demands of the job. Managers can also be sympathetic to the emotional experiences of employees and recognize that it is not always possible to completely hide any negative emotions, particularly with difficult, rude or aggressive customers.

- For customers. Want to get better service? Be nice, be considerate, and try to see things from the employee’s point of view. Such behaviors are likely to put the employee in a better mood, increase the likelihood that the employee will be authentic in dealing with you, and increase the efficiency and effectiveness with which you are served.

Further Information
