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I was fortunate enough to win the Rising Star Award last year. The impacts of which I felt almost immediately, when the sheer weight of the award resulted in knocking over my glass of red wine spilling its contents on the other occupants of my table.

To be honest with you, the last two years have seen incredible changes in my career and life, which I can directly attribute to the attendance of my first SOCAP Symposium.

Like a lot of people, I had a rough upbringing, it's a story we all hear all the time. After attending my first Symposium it made me question myself, questions like.

What makes a person choose one path in life verses another? Is there something we can do to help other get back on track? The answer is yes, yes there is.

When I considered my upbringing I thought I knew how to do my job and show compassion. I believed I was great at my Job. But then I came here and heard stories that resonated with me it made me reflect on myself.

I heard stories about how organisations fail to take into consideration people with Disabilities and the different approaches that need to be considered.

The NSW Ombudsman's did a session on handling complaints in which he recognised that there are times when we receive unreasonable behaviour from our customers, Where he provided us information on how to handle these types of situations.

Then I heard that there are customers out there who cannot afford their \$90 electricity bill. It broke my heart and I knew that I needed to change my approach.

I walked out the Symposium with all this information wanting to change the world truly inspired.

It resulted in me reflecting on what made me change from the path I could have taken, the path I was raised which was a path of self destruction.

What made me not follow this and it boiled down to the fact that I was shown a different path and that I had always wanted to be like this person.

My neighbour Annette was the person I strived to be like, she was the person who believed in me and showed me how life could be if you worked at it.

She showed me compassion and understanding and still does to this day. Annette showed me what family life is like and unwittingly I was instilling this into my everyday life.

I now realise that she had shown me a different way and because of this I know that I changed my path because I was shown an alternative an alternative that I wanted and inspire everyday to achieve.

This is further supported by the fact that my husband and our children moved to Brisbane, where we made the choice to have young adults with drug problems come and live with us and see what a family life could be like.

To sit at a table together at dinner time sharing stories with one another, showing support and being there were things that these people have never experienced. The changes that these people made were inspiring and now I needed to see how I could apply this into my role when dealing with my customers.

It was clear to me that I needed to show customers an alternative. By this I mean the response to our customers cannot be a flat out no, there needs to be reasoning.

Educating you customer in a respectful manner is part of the solution.

I refined my process, simple things like not typing my notes when speaking with the customers, Instead I wrote them down circling certain words, or phrases that appear to hold importance to my customers.

Then I would repeat my understandings of their concerns, I stopped becoming fearful of asking the scary questions. I asked them with dignity and respect.

Customers need to feel that they have been heard, and sometimes they are not saying exactly what they mean, which is why asking the scary questions is imperative.

I always keep in the back of my mind that if I am the last person that this person speaks with, that I ensure that they have been heard and that I have been respectful.

This change has seen immediate results, where I receive more compliments despite the complaint.

I am lucky I work for an organization that empowers me to make my decision and apply common sense without having to run around the circuit board. We are fully supported by our Managers. This is imperative to success of customers feeling that their thoughts and opinions are not only heard but valued and they should be valued.

Upon winning the Rising Star Award, my self confidence has grown, this has resulted in me obtaining a promotion to Technical Case Manager. This role gave me the opportunity to share my approach with other case managers, driving the changes in other.

It has also resulted in me being part of a trial with our customer where we aspired to resolve our customer's concerns within a shorter time frame. This trial was successful resulting in becoming a business as usual process.

It is a win for us and a win for our customers.

More recently I have been given an opportunity in the role as an Executive Relations Specialist. This role allows me the ability to provide guidance on how to effectively communicate with other people within our organisation.

The last 12 months have been incredible, the challenges, the changes and the opportunity is there, you just need to reach out and grab them.