

Acknowledge & Empathize – And Set Yourself Apart!

Bob Burg, Co-author of The Go-Giver

While at the new diagnostic center for some blood work I witnessed an interesting and, unfortunately, all-too-common exchange.

An elderly and rather perturbed-looking woman approached the receptionist's desk. Attempting to be polite but assertive, she said she was there "to take another test as your company lost the first one. I can't believe I had to drive all the way back again because of a mistake like that." The receptionist, politely, but without any semblance of feeling or empathy said, "Please fill out this form."



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The woman, dissatisfied and with what was obviously defensive laughter continued, "I tell you, if it happens again, I'm through with this place. Imagine losing someone's information like that!" The receptionist, once again, politely, but without any semblance of feeling or empathy, said, "Have a seat. Someone will be with you soon." The woman sat down, obviously frustrated, angrier than before, and looking about ready to explode.

Why Had Her Anger Grown?

Was she still mad about the lost test results? Probably, but that wasn't the reason for her frustration. Perhaps because she had to take time out of her day to come back in? While that certainly didn't help I don't believe that was it, either.

I truly believe the frustration, anger and yes, escalating rage she was now fighting to control was the very same thing that makes me wonder why "people skills" are not consistently taught to customer, guest and patient contact personnel.

It was a lack of empathy. She wanted the receptionist not just to know *what* had happened, but to also *understand how* she felt about it. And, to communicate that. She wanted her to say, "Oh dear, I'm so sorry that happened. You must be terribly upset. Well, I'll tell you what — I will personally make sure everyone here on staff is aware of it and it won't happen again. I'm so sorry."

The Most Likely Result

I can practically guarantee you that, had the receptionist displayed empathy the woman would've become a big fan and huge promoter of the company. Instead, the politely cold, by-the-numbers, impersonal response only caused greater resentment.

Hey, dealing with patients and customers can be difficult. No employee should be expected to be a doormat. But incidents such as these can be so easily handled it seems like a waste of kindness (not to mention *really* effective marketing) not to do so correctly.

Self-Reflection

When someone voices a complaint regarding something we or anyone within our company has allegedly done...or not done, do we — regardless of the facts — at least let them know we understand they are upset? Do we communicate that a remedial action will be taken? And, do we make sure it is?

Only when this type of positive, customer-focused behavior is held as a high value in terms of company culture will it consistently take place. What an advantage when it does!

How do you rate yourself in this regard?

