

Mastering the art of positive communication

When you speak to your employees, your customers, or even your family members, are you making a conscious effort to be positive?

When I think about the topic of this article, I am reminded of a popular quote by the famous poet Maya Angelou. She said, “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” When you speak to your employees, your customers, or even your family members, are you making a conscious effort to be positive? If you aren’t, that’s a problem. Believe it or not, your words matter. They have an impact on your relationships and your workplace.

Some would say that we live in a world that has chosen negativity to be its primary way of behaving. Everywhere people go and everything people see; negativity confronts us all squarely in the face. Negativity is everywhere! Dealing with negativity is a common challenge in

many areas: workplaces, schools, places of worship, governments, communities, and families.

Remember seeing and at times experiencing these negative behaviors when you interact with others or just have others in your sights or on TV: shaking heads, rolling eyes, pursed lips, brush-offs, slamming doors, put-downs, shrugs, grunts, slaps in the face, pointing fingers, and worst of all, language – the words we choose to share with one another. It's unavoidable – you will deal with negativity every day from one source or another. What must one do when they want to keep positivity going and break through the negativity?

Simply put, one must learn how to deal with the negativity that comes from others and attempt to influence the change to positivity. One way to accomplish this is to start with one tool that is absolutely within your control – the WORDS we choose to share with others! Those who choose negativity when interacting with others are not necessarily bad people. Often it's just easier and more comfortable

for some than being positive. The reality is that everyone is designed to look out for their own self-interests – but to be clear, how you respond is a choice!

Interacting with others is vital to our survival as a species. Many times, more is accomplished working together than when alone, especially in the workplace. People interact with each other both negatively and positively every day. Workers, friends, and families that are positive are more likely to contribute and be kind, patient, honest, encouraging, apologetic, forgiving, and caring. On the other hand, people that are generally negative are more likely to be fearful, gossipy, back-stabbers, inflexible, and blamers.

It's clear to see how positive attitudes, words, and behaviors make professional and personal life much easier. It can even positively impact sales performance and customer service in your interactions with customers.

For example, between the two customer dialogues below, which would be more successful?

Dialogue A:

Customer: “Hi, I would like to have my door repaired immediately. Can you do that?”

Locksmith: “No, we can’t do that right now; but we may be able to do it later today.”

OR

Dialogue B:

Customer: “Hi, I would like to have my door repaired immediately. Can you do that?”

locksmith: “Yes, we can do your door repair today; here is what we have available for appointments _____ or you may wait till we can get to you and we will get it done today by _____.”

If you said Dialogue B, most would agree. The point is to be positive and welcoming, not negative and standoffish when dealing with customers.

So, what does it take to turn negative words into positives?

1. **Change your attitude.** You can consciously decide to be positive. Attitude is everything. Attitude is any belief held in the conscious mind resulting in an emotional feeling that the body shares through words or behaviors. If you change your attitude, you can change your actions.
2. **Work on your self-confidence, fears, and insecurities.** Start by doing your work and stop worrying about what other people do. Excel at what you do and say. Choose to be the positive influencer.
3. **Choose words carefully.** This takes practice, but the gist is — *think before you speak*. Ask yourself if what you're about to say will help or hurt the situation. If it's negative, but needs to be said, determine how to make your words constructive.
4. **Help people become more positive and happier.** Recognize it's not always about you. It's also about the other person (i.e., your customer, vendor rep, employee). Albert Einstein said, "One exists for

other people.” If you make good things happen for other people, in turn good things are likely to happen for you.

5. **Develop a sense of humor.** Don’t be so serious. Try to find the humor in negative interactions. Laugh at yourself and smile every chance you can.

6. **Focus on the positive.** Don’t allow your mind to go to the dark side. Instead focus on what you like in a person, place, or situation.

7. **Shut down all negative dialogue.** If you’re having a negative discussion, change the tone with positive language. Redirect a negative discussion with positive words and transitional phrases that allow you to change the subject, such as “wow, really...” and “now let’s get back to the ...” You do not have to participate in a negative conversation if you don’t want to.

8. **Give positive feedback.** When sharing feedback that may be perceived as negative with a person or group, remove the “no, but...” statements and replace them with “yes, and...” Or “yes, and what about.....” statements. Keep your feedback positive and encouraging

by using positive words. Other language you can use to provide positive feedback includes “I like the ...; a concern may be; and a suggestion may be...”

9. **Seek out other positive influencers.** Surround yourself with people who speak positive words and display positive behaviors. Back off the negative – limit your time with negative influencers.

10. **Hold yourself accountable.** Own what you do wrong instead of blaming others. Focus rather on personal accountability, solving the problem and improving future outcomes.

The technique of changing negative words and attitudes is also beneficial to sales. One of the most-spoken negative words in the world is NO. By the time a person is 18 years of age they have heard the word NO approximately 21,000 times. Wow – how do we learn to say yes at all after that many NOs being driven in our minds. Well, because, all NOs are not the same – just as in sales or influencing others to accept an idea, one must recognize what the reason is behind the NO they are receiving. People get rejected, rebuffed, have negativity thrust upon them for all sorts of reasons. The key is to use

positive words while dialoguing to discover “what’s in it for them,” “what do they want out of this exchange.” Then you will have the opportunity to influence the NO to a YES. Watch out for the negative behaviors that will make it impossible to get to YES. Here are a few undesirable behaviors that thwart getting to YES; apathy, cynicism, poor attitude, lack of confidence, low self-esteem, know it all, and egocentric.

Applying what I covered to be careful with your attitude isn’t difficult or costly, it just requires practice. Not doing so may have consequences that reach far beyond your awareness. As a positive person myself it is painful to observe a customer interaction in a repair going so far to the dark side that I want to step in and try to salvage the situation. The other day I was in a lock shop at the end of the workday. It was 4:53 p.m. and the shop closed at 5:00 p.m. The shop was locked up tight for the night, the lights were off, technicians were changing into their street clothes, and the service advisor was getting ready to close out the day in the computer system. In walks a customer who has a lock cylinder that needed repair. Here is what was said, “Sorry, we are closed for the day.” The customer then said, “It’s

still before 5:00 p.m., can I please get the key cylinder repaired it goes to my front door? The service advisor said, “No sorry, we can’t take care of that for you; we are closed.” The customer then said he cannot leave his house unlocked and had no idea where to go. The customer was furious; what a way to earn a negative review. We all know that news of good deeds spreads more slowly than news of horrible deeds. All that had to happen was some empathy: “Wow, sorry to hear that, let’s see what we can do.” Figure it out and help the customer; the parts were in stock but it would have taken too long (15 min max with two people getting it done) – and remember 10 minutes were spent arguing before the customer . I had a discussion with the owner; the service advisor was coached on how to handle that type of situation – but be real here people. If you are a negative person; this is normal. Being a positive person who influences others in a positive way will never have this situation happen.

It is a CHOICE – be a force of good, be positive, be open, and care about others.