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"To listen with empathy is the most important human skill." » [Stephen R. Covey](#)

Communicate Beyond Words

I recently found myself sitting in a bank lobby waiting to access our safe deposit box.

Honestly, I got a kick out of that. It's a throwback to yesteryear.

While I sat there, a customer began having what could best be described as a minor meltdown at a teller window.

I thought back to something I told thousands of in-store bankers back in the day: Contrary to popular belief, in-store branches are often more private than traditional branches.

With the noise in a grocery store, it's hard to hear conversations from more than a few feet away.

In a traditional branch, you can often hear everything from across the lobby. This was the case that day.

While I wasn't paying attention to the beginning of the interaction, it was hard to miss the rest of it.

The customer was extremely frustrated with what she was being told by a (to be honest) seemingly detached employee.

I couldn't attest as to whether she was giving useful advice or information.

Her facial expressions, tone, and body language, however, didn't seem very empathetic. She seemed dismissive.

To say we were treated to language not repeatable in this letter is an understatement.

Keep Your Hand Up

I received an email a couple of weeks ago from a state banking organization that brought a smile to my face.

It was from a northern state I've worked in many times, but never for this association.

Now, anytime a group reaches out to ask me to speak at an event, I'm gonna smile. My smile may have been just a bit broader this time because of the message.

The conference director, whom I'd never spoken with before, told me that the head of training of another state banking organization had given her my name and shared nice comments.

We communicated just a bit and I committed to speak at their upcoming event in a few weeks.

My bigger than usual smile came from the fact that I had believed I had fallen off the radar of the conference organizer who recommended me.

I'd worked with them a couple of times before but hadn't received any replies or feedback from my various outreaches over the past two years.

I had received very nice comments following the previous engagements, but they had gone silent on me.

Now, truth be told, that's a fact of life in the "speaking world." Unlike many service industries, no matter how well-received you are, you are not likely going to be on the top of their list for the next job.

The customer growled and cursed as she had to walk over to a stand to fill out various forms.

After a couple more minutes of swearing, she hadn't calmed. She then walked to another window to ask a question.

This time, another employee had a tone and demeanor that conveyed concern.

Within 30 seconds, the customer was telling her about a medical procedure she had pending and why she was so anxious to take care of some things that day.

The employee said, "I totally understand," and an amazing transformation took place.

Within another couple of minutes, the customer was apologizing for her frustration and sincerely thanking the banker for her assistance.

As she departed, the banker told her she hoped everything goes well and that she'll see her again soon.

It appeared that the second banker gave basically the same information as the first.

Her tone and empathetic manner, however, delivered an entirely different experience for everyone involved, including other customers in the branch.

Customers do not visit branches. They visit bankers.

The quality of those visits hinges on our personal interactions.

What will yours look and sound like today?

If you're a competent plumber, electrician... or banker, you may be the first person satisfied customers call when they need the services you provide.

Speakers, on the other hand... not so much.

This particular episode, however, reinforced to me something I've preached to bankers for many years.

You should never assume that just because you once asked a person or organization for their business that they have that fact filed away in their memories.

You must work to stay on their radar.

It's quite likely that many other folks or companies who provide products and services similar to yours have contacted them since then.

And as often as not, the person who has asked for attention most recently gets first consideration.

Sure, first consideration doesn't mean their only consideration. And if you are clearly a better option, you may have an advantage.

But in hyper-competitive industries (like banking) the competition is always pursuing the same customers you are.

You won't win a competition you aren't truly in.

Continue reaching out to ensure both your customers and your prospects know that you are.

"Ambition is the path to success. Persistence is the vehicle you arrive in."

» Bill Bradley

Dave Martin, author of [The In-Store Advantage](#), has become one of the most prolific writers in the banking industry. His keynote presentations, seminars, and podcasts have an authenticity and humor that brings teams of all sizes and seniority levels together.

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