

When Your Customer's Talk What Do You Hear?

Take a moment to recognize what your client might be feeling and needing.

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Years ago I studied Non-Violent Communication and took the courses. During an early session, the instructor pulled out a giraffe puppet, and a set of jackal ears which she put on her head. I wondered what in the world she was doing. She explained that whenever you take offense or get annoyed with someone, you are listening to them through jackal ears. The moment you notice your hostile feelings, you can translate jackal into giraffe. Since giraffes have the largest heart of any land mammal, they are used to

represent non-violent communication.

When your needs are not being met, your feelings become indicators to cue you in.

Examples? When you need food, you feel hungry. When your hand touches a hot stove you feel the need to move it immediately. Without your feelings of discomfort from the heat, you wouldn't recognize the need to move your hand.

Translating hostile "jackal language" into "giraffe language" turns an offensive statement into a basic set of feelings and needs.

This has direct application for serving customers. Suppose you are getting annoyed with a customer who you hear through jackal ears as "argumentative." Translate your negative judgment into the customer's feelings and needs. You might guess that the argumentative customer is feeling frustration or confusion, and has a need for connection, clarity, or understanding. Imagine that!

Thinking of a customer as argumentative shuts down communication and sets you up to respond unhelpfully. Thinking of a customer as a person needing connection, clarity or understanding, will help you respond more compassionately. With that translation, your heart is activated, and it becomes much easier to respond in helpful ways.

I recently had a chance to use this approach in my own business. A potential client called me after finding my name on the National Speakers Association website. She wanted to book me to present a program to her small staff, two hours from my home. After a lengthy conversation she mentioned that her business did not have a training budget and asked if I would volunteer my services. I sometimes donate presentations to groups with causes I support and non-profits who need a helping hand, but this was neither. I noticed I was feeling a bit offended. Alarm bells went off in my head. I had to get myself in check. It's part of my basic philosophy to give all customers, even the ones that push my buttons, respect, not attitude.

It had been years since I thought of those classes I took, but in that moment I saw the image of those jackal ears. In jackal language I would say, "She is trying to take advantage of me." In giraffe language, I said to myself, "I'm feeling disappointed because I'm needing to have my work

be seen as worthy of financial compensation. I'm wanting fairness and respect."

I then guessed at *her* feelings and needs, "She's probably feeling hopeful and needing cooperation and professional growth for herself and her staff." Instantly my heart opened, and all the tension left my body. I offered the woman a mini -consult by phone to put her in the right direction for staff training on a tight budget. We explored some alternative ways of creating a win-win for both her and potential trainers she might bring in, and when we hung up the phone, we both felt great about each other. I respected myself by not giving away my training, and respected her by pointing her in a direction that would suit her current situation. While I judged her, I couldn't see things clearly.

By replacing the judgment with an exploration of our feelings and needs, it opened the door to understanding and mutual respect.

The next time your feelings flash alarm bells, notice what you're feeling and needing. Then, take a moment to recognize what your client might be feeling and needing. When you take a compassionate approach you create unbreakable bonds of respect, and fabulous word of mouth about you and your business.



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