

GIVING CLIENTS YOUR BACKGROUND / FIRST IMPRESSIONS

This week I wanted to talk about a few things that might help get the Customer / Client to be more co-operative.

If you have any methods that you would like to share with us on how you make great first impressions let me know and I will send them out next week.

Have a great week.

Paul

"First Impressions Are Lasting Impressions"

Everyone has heard this and has told it to someone. I know I would always say it to my clients in class and before they went on an interview. I believe that if clients had a better start in our offices they might be more co-operative. Most clients come with a negative attitude because they do not see us as helpers but rather as government workers. We are like the IRS of Workforce!

One of the things that I think would help is if clients walked into a lobby that was different than the run of the mill Work Force Office. Maybe see some plants, nice pictures and maybe a greeter, like they have at Wal-Mart. The greeter could be a retired volunteer or a work experience person who is trained to be interested in the client's needs and questions. Many times the person behind the desk that greets people is also the phone operator and does not have the time to answer phones and clients questions. The greeter could sit down with the client begin answering their questions and maybe give them a hand out about other successful clients who have come to the office.

One of the things that I see missing when a client is assigned to us is that we know about them but they have no idea who we are. I am suggesting that every case manager, trainer, job developer and counselor have a one page biography about who they are and what they have done. We are asking clients to listen to us but they have no idea about us. I believe that this may make a real difference to a client to walk into a professional's office and know their background, it might be more difficult to argue with an expert. Your biography could be handed to them while they are waiting in the lobby.

The bio could have a picture and MEET YOUR CASE MANGER: Mary Smith. Under that could be some background about Mary. Here are a few starters and ideas for you

1. Mary comes to us from Child Protective Services where she worked with children and their families for ten years.
2. Ms. Smith has won several awards for ...
3. She has placed over 50 people in the last year.

4. She has three children (maybe she raised them on her own)
5. Mary's sense of humor has helped clients see their issues in a different way.

What clients have to say about Ms. Smith then a few quotes from clients. "Mary has helped me find the job of my dreams and get my GED..."

Wouldn't we all like to walk into a place where we have to put our trust into a stranger and know a little about them.

This might be a great idea to bring up at your next staff meeting. Have the biographies in different color paper to make it look non-governmental. Maybe a contest!

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What a great idea! In fact, the clinics at University Hospital here in Little Rock have little bios with photos for each of the physicians in that particular clinic that are placed in display racks in the waiting rooms. Now, when I'm a new patient, I look for the bio of that particular doctor. Rose Adams (Little Rock)

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I refer to the "feel" of the reception area as the "social ecology" and it is vital to the attitude the client brings to the interview. When the receptionist is fried and disrespectful, the client picks

up on this and walks into your office with a similar chip on her shoulder. Next is RESPECT, RESPECT, RESPECT, and as we all learned from school, meet the client where they are. I find it very helpful to let them know that we are human, too. I always find a place to slip in our first meeting together that we all have our bumps - that my bump may be different than their bump, but we all have them. I also personalize my office (I work in private, non-profit where I can do this) and I have a welcoming play area to keep the children engaged, and a portable refrigerator stocked with drinks and snacks to offer. I am also very open about my admiration for this population, and when it's genuine I point out their amazing strength at being able to raise 3 kids by themselves as well as attempt to get clean, or whatever the strengths may be. Then all this has to be balanced with some bottom- line, tough- love because it matters to you that they succeed. I think it's also important to recognize and be OK with the fact that just as you don't like everybody, not everyone is going to like you. (Yes, I know, it's shocking). Have fun (I insist on it) and be playful.

Thanks, from Richmond, VA

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Thanks, but no thanks...!!!! The less my clients know about me the better.
I am not sure you have a realistic view of the kind of clients we work with. (MI)

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I think the best impression to give a client is to look at them in the face and greet them with a warm smile....Most FIA workers greet their clients in the waiting room with that disgusting look...LOL (MI)

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I don't think I do anything special to make people feel more comfortable when they come in. I DO ask questions about things that are common ground for the both of us (single mom w/ children, having to swallow pride to utilize gov't assistance to get ahead, trying to work AND finish school, family, etc). I do have a good sense of humor, and I use it often. I try to look for things that derive passion for the other person too (accomplishments, hobbies, etc). People are more apt to open up and let their guards down when they feel you are genuinely interested in them, which I am, and I think that shows. I WANT to help people. I want people to feel like there is a place for them in this crazy world, because there is. Finding out where you fit based on interests, talents, and skills is a huge task. Trying to take something broad and kind of out there and narrowing it into a career focus can take time, and many people we see don't have much of that to give, or at least don't feel like they do.

So many people I see have been working dead end jobs that don't satisfy for the much more than money to put food on the table. I try to recognize that as an unselfish act on their part, because truth is, survival comes first! I know it is difficult for some to even walk in asking for help at all, and I try to recognize that too. I take on a sense of personal responsibility for each client's success, which may be too much at times. But knowing what their needs are, maintaining a good rapport, and showing sincere interest in each person is what works best for me. Kim (Kings Co. CA)

I think this an excellent idea! I am going to put together a fun brochure. I will send it to you when it is complete.

I never have anyone call me Ms. Kindles. As the conversation allows I always try to share something personal I think our customers need to know we are not different and we all have problems whether we are working or not. People are not numbers. I am a Christian I do believe strongly in finding the good. TX

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That sounds wonderful, but how do we convince upper management?

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All too often clients are met with the attitude that they are just another person in a case manager's caseload of 200+, or that they are another "tick" in the "client received services" column so the agency can receive funding. This is not to say that case managers are "bad" - they are often ridiculously overworked, and making sure that an agency continues to get funding is vital; but clients react better when they are treated like people first and "numbers" second.

It is important to remember that any "worker" can make a good first impression by demonstrating a positive attitude towards a client. I've found that by being genuinely interested in the client and asking what are they looking for in a job instead of demonstrating the "any job is a good job" attitude generally sets a positive tone for my relationship with the client.

By being what I call "conversational" at that point allows the client to talk about things that are important to them, and I can then give them a little information about my background as we talk. This establishes a good rapport with my client, and then they are more likely to listen to/accept my coaching for them.

By letting the client know that I am interested in what they have to say, and that I have a "real" practical understanding of the "world of work" makes the client feel (s)he is getting assistance that is valuable to them.

Bill
Sacramento County Job Link Program

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Great ideas!! I would also like to see a play area for children with new, safe, clean toys that can be washed on a regular basis. Also some videos for kids that are non-violent and age appropriate. I also had this idea to give a prize package to every 50th customer with center goodies, like our logo coffee cup, calendar, maybe some free movie tickets, or other items. I think the bio is a great idea. It also helps us keep in mind that WE ARE THE EXPERTS by golly. You were right when you said we are selling a lifestyle. Unfortunately some of our staff are so far removed from our customer's lifestyle they can't believe we have to start with the most simple things like distributing a calendar. But it is true. I can remember when I was a young mother at home with small kids. There was no reason to know the day of the week or the date. Well got to go... We outreached 500 people last week for our 5 week class that starts today. I did 37 home visits in 2 days last week with a co-worker. Today we will reap the harvest. I am in charge of providing the day care services. Have a great week!!! P.S. I have 4 kids and worked for the Texas Dept of Human services Employment Program for 17 d 1/2 years. Been doing the same thing for the County for 3 years so you weren't far off the mark. Better shine up that crystal ball though.. Ha Ha maureen.neil@twc.state.tx.us

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I love the idea of the staff bio as a handout to clients & will pass that one along at our next meeting! We wrestled with first impressions & physical layout of our One Stop when we moved to our new building. Since I am not involved in the initial intake process or a case manager, I don't have the same "greeting" issues the staff there does. Because their numbers are so few, staff members must take turns being "greeter". However, I can tell you the agency has found there is such a thing as too much physical openness. The receptionist is vulnerable when people walk past her to others in the office or right into her front desk area to grab supplies off the desk! We are working on an extension of the front counter with a gate. I doubt if it will diminish her efforts to direct & help people, but it will definitely help organize the chaos when 20 people hit the door at the same time! Hope you have a good week, too! It's treat to hear from you! Best regards, Susan

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Since we have a culinary school right in our building, we're able to offer a lovely continental breakfast, complete with tablecloth, to our attendees. We allot 15 minutes at the start of each day of our 2-day "Inside Track" presentation to help people relax and "settle in". They seem to really like it. At one time, we also played stirring music for a few minutes (the 1812 Overture, the theme from "Rocky", etc.). However, I must confess to having gotten lazy about that.

Like your idea of the "Bio". Will run it up the flagpole and see if anyone salutes it.

Kathy

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I loved your idea on developing staff bios. My life has recently been filled with a number of medical exams conducted by a variety of specialists. On one occasion, the referring doctor alerted me to the fact that Dr. X had a reputation of being grumpy and unpleasant. Well now, them's challenging words for me. My goals for the appointment became two-fold 1) get the the nasty procedure done without acting like a baby and, 2) making this reportedly grumpy doctor smile and laugh.

I am happy to report that my goals were successfully accomplished. My secret...I read the doctor's bio, which was available in the lobby. I found out about his interests so I could engage him in discussion. Turns out Dr. X presents a very stern first impression. Given a second chance, he is a very friendly and compassionate person who is just a little shy and aware that his procedures cause discomfort for people.

Debby (WA)

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In the last three years I've learned so much about working with clients. It took me too long to learn the old adage "In order to get respect, you must give respect". I always hear case managers refer to their clients as those people. I never, ever do that. "those people" are no different from you or I. they have lost their way, and I get paid to make sure that

they find their way back. I'm much more friendly to people and I always remember their names when meeting them for the first time. I speak softly and always offer them a cup of coffee or a bottled water. The most important thing for me is to leave judgment calls out of it. I talk about their mistakes very shortly, and then I go right to the solutions I think might work. One of the most rewarding things a young male client ever said to me was, "you're actually making me feel like I could be somebody". I also try to make the client feel like he can trust me. A lot of the people I see are very beaten down. It's important to be somewhat gentle with them on that first meeting. Another little thing I do, is especially with my male clients, I always call them Mr. Washington, Mr. Fisher. They so rarely hear anyone call them Mr. that I just think it might boost them a little bit. I hope these help.

Gerri I. Gates Key West FL

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I really like your ideas on first impressions. I agree that most clients have a negative attitude about our offices and we don't do much to change their way of thinking. We want the clients to change but many times we don't see that we must change also. If the caterpillar refuse to change, we would never see the beautiful butterfly.

Until next time.

Margie

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Thanks for the tip on introducing myself. Sometimes I do that in the orientation (when we first meet clients). They are required to return the next day for a pre-employment workshop and respond more to the statement/question, "Tell me about yourself." I use myself as an example.

Until the next time, take care for now.

Elaine

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. I think your idea is a good one. If everyone else here at ETI has read this e-mail, perhaps it can be one of our topics at a staff meeting. I want you to know however, that though I do not always tell my clients about me at the first meeting, I do tell them as we go forward so that they realize that I'm a person as they are and at some point had someone to help me. I do feel that this has made a difference in some of my clients attitudes about working with me and others in my office. By the way, certainly keep us informed about other ideas like these that will help us be more successful in working with our clients.

Thanks again, Donna

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That was a great idea. We have a bio/scrap book in our lobby. It tells about all our employees as well as the programs they handle and includes newspaper articles/pictures re happenings pertaining to the programs our office runs. Our clients really appreciate

learning about our agency and all the things we do. Thanks for all your letters. I really appreciate all you do for us. Carol.

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