

OPINION

Why Problems Are Always Opportunities

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It is not what happens to us, it is how we react.

Like many wise sayings, this advice is easy to preach but hard to practice. Who hasn't wanted to yell at the support staff, a client or even a complaining customer? I often think: "The world would be such a great place if people would just behave like I wanted them to."

I was recently reminded that a crisis could provide a great opportunity to demonstrate leadership, integrity and deepen relationships.

Recently, I traveled to Disney Land with my niece, Lizzy, who was visiting from Australia and enjoying the gap year between high school and university. As we drove across the Rainbow Bridge on our way to the fun park, I cursed and complained about a client. My niece was quick to offer me a reality check. During her part-time job at Starbucks, she was taught the phrase 'client recovery'. If a customer was unhappy, the situation provided an opportunity to go the extra mile, she said. Problem situations are opportunities to show our circle of influence that we mean what we say and say what we mean.

In his book *360 Degrees Leader*, John Maxwell talks about leading from our circle of influence. In the first chapter of 'How To Win Friends and Influence People', Dale Carnegie emphasizes that in order to be good with people, we should never criticize, condemn or complain. "Any fool can do that and most fools do," he writes.

When things go wrong, and they always do, it is important to keep focused on recovery not blame.

Whatever has happened has happened and now we need to focus on being proactive. We need to look for a solution.

According to research, one common characteristic of strong influence is 'empathy'. This means taking the time to really understand the situation, to walk in the person's boots, to see the world through their eyes.

This is vastly different to showing sympathy or nodding your head with concern. Only by understanding the other person's view can we create a win/win situation. To borrow again from Mr Carnegie, "No one thinks that they are wrong, all of us believe that we are right."

So who is right? Is it just a matter of perception? If we seek first to truly understand before we are understood, we are along the path to recovering trust and building a stronger relationship.

As one of the directors at Eli Lilly told me recently, to be a great negotiator, we need to listen very carefully and respond with even greater care.

When things go wrong.

1. Think, "Great, here's an opportunity."
2. Remember the three C's. Never criticize, condemn or complain.
3. Empathize, not sympathize. Listen first and seek to understand.
4. Be proactive and keep focused on client recovery.
5. Carefully listen then respond even more carefully, not the other way around.