

(Laurie Gardner, Words of Wisdom column)

No Problem

I'm sad to report that today, I was an airport asshole.

As I stood in line for the ticket counter, jammed in among several screaming babies, frazzled moms with carry-on car seats, and a crew of eight buzz-cut army guys with two overstuffed duffle bags each, the wait around the four winding turnstiles to the ticket agents seemed endless. I craned my neck forward in a vain attempt to inhale the steam of the early morning coffee that the couple in front of me kept passing back and forth.

After a particularly stressful, draining week, I'd been on the phone until 2:00 am trying to resolve a baggage fee that was supposed to be free. Ultimately, the agent told me to handle it at the airport. When I finally got to the front of the line, I explained my situation. Another hour and three airport employees later, the issue still wasn't resolved.

Then it happened: I became one of those people – the kind who completely loses their cool. I could feel my stomach tighten and my fists start to clench as the second supervisor told me there was nothing he could do. I felt outraged, beyond exhausted, jerked around, and most of all, lied to. I simultaneously wanted to put my head down on the counter and cry and punch the supervisor in the face. I didn't full-on yell at the ticket agent, but I definitely wasn't patient or polite.

Cursing loudly under my breath, I paid the baggage fee and literally sprinted through security. Once on the other side, I took a moment to regroup:

Why did I get so triggered? Part of it is that I don't like getting punished when I've done nothing wrong. That probably stems from some deep childhood experiences I've repressed. I also don't like it when people don't come through on their word. And who enjoys being treated poorly, waiting forever on hold and even longer for a supervisor, having to explain the situation again and again? Still, why was I making things so stressful?

After buying myself a cookie, I had a sudden a-ha. It was all about my approach and attitude. Whenever I come at a difficult and unfair situation with negative feelings of, "This is a problem," it indeed becomes one. Instead, when I approach it with the relaxed attitude of *problem-solving*, i.e. "No big deal, but let's figure out a way to resolve this," the situation often works out even better. (The last time I had an issue with an airline, I joked with the agents, and they upgraded my seat.)

As I lined up at my gate to board, I kept silently repeating to myself: "It's not a problem." "It doesn't have to be hard." After a few minutes, I realized that I had lined up with the wrong boarding group and that I would now have to go to the end of a very long line.

“Oh, shoot, I’m in group 2, not group 3,” I muttered aloud.

The man standing next to me in group 2 stepped back and waved an open hand, inviting me to line up in front of him.

“Wow, thanks!” I said.

“No problem,” he smiled.

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