

# THE SET FREE LIFE

## Undercover Client

I walked into a doctor's office last month and announced myself to a young woman who glanced at me as though I were an intrusion. She wore blue scrubs and had her hair pulled back and I wondered if she had risen from bed just that way; she certainly conveyed the impression that she was stressed out, overworked, and had experienced a terrible day. But it was only 10:00 a.m., and I'd managed to take a shower, put on a little bit of makeup, and dress with the idea I would be interacting with other human beings that morning; apparently, she could not do the same.

She asked if my insurance was unchanged since last time (this was my annual visit) and I began to explain to her an issue I was having. "I will be happy to simply write a full check for this visit and I'll make the claim myself," I told her, "or if you are willing to let me settle the issue I will call you and you can submit the claim. It should only be a few days."

She did not look up, but sighed and said, "Look, here is our policy: payment must be made in full at the time of service and you have to submit your claim on your own if your insurance isn't in order." I responded, "Yes, that's what I just said."

To my astonishment, she scolded me. "You don't have to get defensive, ma'am. It's my job to enforce our policies and make sure patients understand them. I am just trying to do my job." I protested that I was not contradicting her nor was I trying to cause a problem, but she interrupted me by pushing a clipboard in my direction and droning where I was to fill out information and told me to have a seat. I, now viewed as the unruly and nasty client, had been put in my place.

As I filled out the form, I thought about how unpleasant the trip to this doctor's office has always been. Every member of the staff dresses in those unkempt scrubs, looking not so much efficient as they do unwilling to groom themselves. They can't be bothered with treating the patient as a client who pays for services. No polite welcome, no cheery banter as one is checked in and weighed, no friendly familiarity as one settles the bill. Seeing the doctor herself is fine—it's the rest of the visit's experience that makes the

whole thing a dreaded chore. Now I had been reprimanded by an arrogant little girl who saw it her duty to make sure patients didn't step out of line. I asked myself, "Why do I return to this, year after year? Why do I accept it?"

So I put on my coat, stepped up to the counter and said, "Cancel my appointment," and walked out. When I find another physician, I will write this doctor to request my records and I will explain to her why I no longer wish to visit her practice. I'll also note that I will tell others who are looking for her specialty that they should stay away from her office, since one is treated like a child who has been sent to the principal's office for some egregious infraction. There are a good number of doctors' offices that are warm and inviting. I'll find one.

There's never, ever, EVER any excuse for this kind of atmosphere—not if your business depends on bringing people back. No matter what your specialty—a medical practice, a financial services firm, a small accounting office, a couple of lawyers in a rented space—if you have any desire to attract people of means who will do repeat business, then treat them like they mean something to you. Dress like you mean business, and demand all of your staff do the same. Act professionally. Be courteous. Make people feel welcome. Don't make them feel stupid, even if they act stupidly. Your receptionist may take a lot of abuse, but that's her job, so put someone in place who can shine even when being handed a package of dog poop (and then make sure she's rewarded for her skill). People connect with an emotional experience, and it takes so little effort to be considered above average. They may hang onto you because you're the only game in town—or they may drive to another town. Every client is, essentially, undercover.

That doctor's office invited me to leave, and I took the offer. What you and your staff convey may be sending that message. How will you find out? What are you willing to do to remedy such business-killing foolishness? ☹



*Sue Thompson is a personality expert, etiquette trainer, and an instructor in life lessons. Her work on recognizing and developing talent, identifying personalities and working effectively with the people who possess them, responding appropriately to difficult experiences, treating others with respect, and behaving like a professional have caused companies and business organizations throughout the country to value her consulting skills. She trains those entering the workforce how to present themselves with style and authority; new employees in the importance of respecting one's work and the workplace; managers in the value of understanding employees' talent and temperament; and everyone in the timeless rules of behavior that will always bespeak excellence.*

### Quick Links

[Etiquette Dog](#)

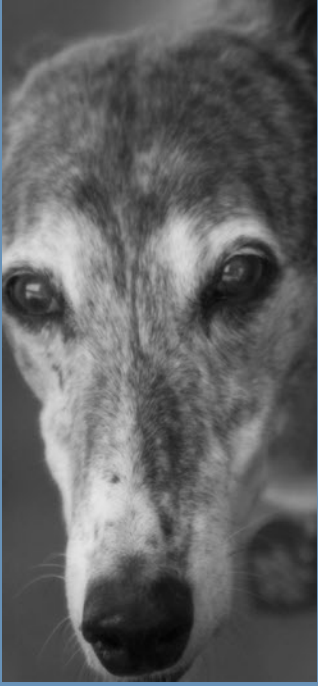
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[Sue@SetFreeLifeSeminars.com](mailto:Sue@SetFreeLifeSeminars.com)

[www.SetFreeLifeSeminars.com](http://www.SetFreeLifeSeminars.com)

877.231.6993

# Teddy Bear Says...



A good way to think about dogs and their various temperaments is to think of them as specialists. Greyhounds are specialists at running, and we do it elegantly. People enjoy watching us when we do what we were made to do. Border Collies are specialists at herding—and come to think of it, people like to watch them do their thing, too. More importantly, people who need the assistance of Border Collies consider a great herder worth his or her weight in gold. Terriers are good at being vigilant and conveying an image

of strength and power, no matter how little they are. Pointers and Retrievers are valued for their unique abilities. We all look like what we do.

Many times, humans seek out canine companionship based on the cuteness factor when what they need to consider is the hardwiring behind that sweet face. We know how to turn on the charm! We've been doing it for thousands of years. We want the home you provide, so we know how to look like you're our knight in shining armor.

Unfortunately, many a couple who fell head over heels with the adorable Terrier now must contend with the constant yapping and the bottomless supply of energy. The parents who desired a playful friend for five kids finds that beautiful Border Collie aggressively herds those children because it has to do what it was made to do. The young woman who lives alone in an apartment may have loved that doe-eyed Golden Retriever's face but can't give it the romping exercise it needs to thrive. (She should have gotten a Greyhound. We sleep all day and only need a good run or two on the weekend.)

The power of appearance is undeniable. Those dogs wouldn't have gotten near the car door if they hadn't made themselves look "wantable." Once in your home, though, what they are on the inside comes out. If they don't perform as you train them to, you may have made a mistake based on appearances alone.

The same thing goes for business: humans should not depend strictly on appearance. It's vitally important—the first thing judged. Few people actively seek out an ugly dog with a great temperament; they want both endearing looks and sparkling personality. So why not look for both?

Humans try so hard to suppress their own gifts of intuition and instinct that a job seeker or someone wanting to move up in an organization will frequently

Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society.

*Mark Twain*

Contact Sue today to learn how she can meet your business needs

**Sue Thompson**

877.231.6993

[Sue@SetFreeLifeSeminars.com](mailto:Sue@SetFreeLifeSeminars.com)

[www.setfreeliveseminars.com](http://www.setfreeliveseminars.com)



demand their appearance means nothing and their talents everything. They insist on shutting down one side of the equation. The person doing the selecting can't see the talents because the appearance is so atrocious, but they push forward because they want to be fair, and then they end up with someone who can do the job but can't be invited to present to the board or represent the company in some way because he or she dresses like a homeless person.

The thing is, when someone is really good at what they do, they should look like it. An overweight Greyhound cannot showcase the explosive burst of God-given speed with which it is gifted. A shaved Border Collie won't be able to survive the heat of all-day herding in an arid terrain. Westminster champions don't make it to Madison Square Garden without some serious spa time. To get to the place where you can show what you were born with, you have to look like something is inside.

So humans, think about job hunting from the same perspective as someone picking a dog (okay, or a cat). Employers, think about how you approach your selections. Appearance and talent should come together to say, "I look like the best person for the job, and I've got the skills and abilities to prove it." Unless you don't mind being entered into the Ugliest Dog Contest, you've got to look like Best in Show. 🐾

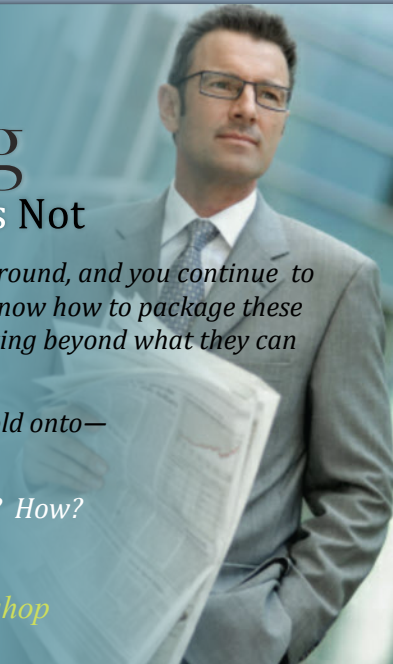
## Image is Everything Except When it's Not

*You've got the education and background, and you continue to develop your skills. But unless you know how to package these assets, few will be interested in looking beyond what they can see to find out what's inside!*

*Employers are looking for—and hold onto—quality and excellence.*

*Do they know you possess it? How?*

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