THE SET FREE LIFE

Seeking Explanations

Think of how many times you encounter products or services that have a design or process flaw that makes you wonder, "Why did they do it this way?"

My husband, who designs this newsletter and my website, is frequently confronted with applications that promise to be "easy!" and "no hassle!" but, of course, are fraught with problems that have him asking, "What were they thinking?" Steps that actually *should* be easy are made difficult because instructions understandable to the lay person are not provided. Why is that? Is it because the software products are created by programmers who believe everyone speaks their language or sees the world from their view? That everyone just *knows* what is *not at all known* by the uninitiated? It's a kind of snobbery.

"You would think they'd give you a simple set of instructions," he'll say, or, "You would think that if they wanted it to be simple, they'd tell you how big the image needs to be to fit into that template." It makes him crazy, and it makes me crazy listening to it.

It makes me crazy, too, when I have to deal with it. I happen to love Go Daddy and a good portion of its products and services. Their customer service is fab. They will walk you through anything. So why does every single person I've ever known who uses (or once used) WebSite Tonight® tell me how worthless it is? How difficult to navigate, how truly NOT SIMPLE it is/was?

I signed up for Go Daddy's free blog service and I also purchased its Quick Blogcast™ product. Insanely maddening features: the blog often will not retain the font in which I wrote it, it adds space between lines that I didn't insert, customizing the template involves a guessing game of where an image should or can be inserted and how big it can or can't be, a customized banner can't be inserted as an image unless one knows programming language. Geez! Why call it "QUICK" at all? It should rightly be called "Cumbersome Blogcast." I'll be moving to WordPress as soon as I can figure that one out, although I am so technically slow that I find WordPress almost as daunting. I'll probably just hire someone, because Go Daddy and WordPress just don't want people like me fooling with their product.

This goes on. Why does an agency (or a doctor's office or whatever) require 40 pages of minutiae when really, what's needed is maybe 2 pages of relevant information, especially when they're going to ask a good many of the questions verbally? Why do some corporate websites make it difficult to find the most relevant information (such as a physical address to which one could write)? Why in the world would a trade association that cannot provide all of the education it should be providing its members *not* partner in an intelligent way with those who *could*? Why do stores leave up signs that have you stopping to check things out only to find they haven't carried that product for a long time? They can't take down the sign? Why would an accounting department create a check request form required for every single invoice, demanding information that's clearly noted on a billing and would be just as payable with the appropriate signature and account code noted on it? ("Because we can't always read your chicken scratch signatures," I was told. "THEN ASK THE PERSON TO PRINT HIS OR HER NAME UNDERNEATH," I responded emphatically. In vain.) Why do stores place price stickers in shoes that can only be removed with a product such as Goo Gone or risk practically destroying the shoes in the attempt to remove them? Why make a caller key in a 97-digit account number and wait, only to be asked, "Account number, please?" Why make something *more* difficult? Why not make things *less* difficult, more streamlined, easier to follow? Doesn't it make easier for both parties?

I'm not sure why this is so pervasive, other than general stupidity. But it's more than that. In some cases, folks create rules for rules' sake; they can't help but fulfill some anal retentive need to categorize and collate and staple and file. In other cases, they simply do not take the time or effort to step away from their everyday function to see how users view the process. They have no idea they are creating discord and frustration and ill will, so they keep perpetuating it, wondering why they aren't attracting more customers or members or patrons, wondering why people walk out.

It's just not necessary. Look at the process from the user's eyes—from one who will most certainly ask, "Why do you do it this way?" If you don't have a plausible answer, do the right thing and make it simple and easy. You'll feel better and your customers will appreciate your common sense. ♣

Quick Links

GoDaddy

Independence Day in Washington DC

Etiquette Dog

Adopt-A-Greyhound

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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.

Teddy Bear Says…

In matters of etiquette, Teddy Bear is no super-duper expert. I am, after all, a dog, albeit an elegant and refined dog of stellar character (my father was an Irish champion racer). What I do know about etiquette is that it is simply common sense. It's what you would want done to you and for you, how you'd like to be treated, what you'd expect from anyone. Is that so hard?

Someone steps in front of you in line, and you very politely, without defensiveness or a harsh tone, explain to them that you are next in line. Would you prefer the offender:

a) Apologize profusely and go to the end of the line

b) Look at you up and down and ask, "Who are YOU?"

c) Ignore you

Teddy Bear thinks it surely must be (a). So consider this when you have inadvertently stepped in front of someone, even if the person does not speak kindly. Keep your cool, apologize, and make it right. It's common sense that because you've made the mistake, you should respond with apologies, no matter how poorly others address you.

You send an invitation to a colleague, inviting them to an event. Would you prefer he or she:

a) Ignore your invitation

b) Ignore your invitation but then show up

c) Ignore your invitation but then show up with a guest

d) Respond quickly with an acceptance of the invitation or apologies at being unable to attend

Teddy Bear is certain you have selected (d). Consider this when you are contacted with any kind of invitation, whether it be a friend's wedding or an organization's monthly meeting. It's common sense that plans have to be made, and lack of response must be taken as a decline.

You are dining with friends and/or coworkers, and conversation is lively. You want to participate in the discussion and open your mouth to offer your views or ask a question. Assuming you are not monopolizing the conversation, would you prefer:

a) To be interrupted nearly every time you begin to speak

b) To be ignored

c) To have those involved listen to you

Of course, you have chosen (c)—this is obvious. So when someone you are with is attempting to converse with you, don't step all over their communication with constant little interruptions ("Did you get a fork?" "Is it cold in here or is it me?"). Listen. Pay attention. It's common sense that people like it when others act as though their contributions matter.

See how easy this is? Nothing spectacular or snooty. It's common sense, and that's the foundation of proper etiquette.

So much of what we call management consists of making it difficult for people to work.

Peter Drucker

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

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Fourth of July Tip

If you've never visited Washington DC on the 4th of July, let me encourage you: it is a truly spectacular experience. Festivities include a reading of the Declaration of Independence on the steps of the National Archives, a performance of the United States Army's Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps, the National Independence Day Parade along Constitution Avenue, and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival on the Mall, featuring a couple of cultures and their foods, music, crafts, etc. This year Asian Pacific Americans and Mexico are the focus of the festival.

Every 4th the concert, "A Capital Fourth," is held on the lawn of the Capitol and broadcast live on PBS stations. This concert showcases Broadway, opera, and country music stars; television personalities; and the National Symphony Orchestra, ending at just the moment when the fireworks begin and the NSO plays the 1812 Overture, along with the boom of actual cannon fire! This year marks its 30th anniversary.

Speaking from personal experience, having spent hours camped out on the Capitol steps in order to get a good view of the concert and the fireworks that explode above the Washington Monument, there is hardly a fireworks show more glorious that the one in our nation's capital. The day can be unbearably hot; it has sometimes poured rain throughout the entire concert, only to stop just at the moment it was time for the fireworks. Once they begin, all inconveniences are forgotten!

For event times, locations, and maps click here.

Happy Independence Day, America!

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!

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