

# THE SET FREE LIFE!

## Undercover Business Ops

You may be blissfully unaware of how your division, your company, your branch, or your small practice is perceived by clients and customers. They like *you* and they keep coming back, but what experience are they given before and after they meet with you? How many have walked out without explanation?

Here are a few ways to be your own mystery shopper:

1. Have a friend call your office from an outside line. (Your employees will most likely recognize your voice, so you need a helper.) Give the friend some basic questions to ask the person who answers, such as whether or not new clients are being accepted, how long a typical first appointment lasts, etc. Are they treated with respect and friendliness? Does the employee reflect professionalism and patience? It's not always necessary for a receptionist or a staffer answering the phone to be off-the-wall perky, but it is important that a caller does not feel unwelcome.

2. If your friend is willing, have him/her set up an appointment with you and go through the entire process of a first visit. Instruct your undercover agent to stay aware of all aspects of the visit and give you an honest critique. Find out the impression given by the appearance of those offering first greetings, the cleanliness and design of the office, etc. Get a full report.

3. Write a letter of complaint to your own office or office manager, or to yourself—*anonymously*, of course, and using an address not your own. See if it is brought to your attention. Is someone writing back on your behalf? If they do, how does the response come across—uncaring? Rude? Humble? Appropriately apologetic?

4. Use a service such as Survey Monkey to poll a select group of clients, customers, or patients. Email surveys are not hard to design and you can do it yourself (or have someone show you how). All you need is the email addresses of people you'd like to survey; you probably already have this information on file, and one of your staffers can compile them for you if necessary (the employee doesn't need to know what you're doing with the addresses). Write your clients/customers/patients an honest message in the body of the survey explaining your desire to provide

an experience of quality, and ask the questions you feel will give you the information you need most. The survey can ask for information such as:

- An employee who consistently provides excellent service
- An employee who does not consistently exhibit courtesy and respect
- The impression given by the office atmosphere, both tangible and intangible
- How phone calls are handled, etc.

You get the picture. The survey results will come to you personally and they may be a terrific eye-opener.

5. If you prefer not to use something as impersonal as an online survey, write individual letters to a significant sampling of your clients/customers/patients. Ask them to respond to you directly (provide an address different from the office, or with an envelope that notes "confidential" and instruct your employees these are for your eyes only). Encourage your readers to help you make their visits the best you can offer. Many will appreciate the personal touch. And don't be immediately dismissive of comments regarding things such as office atmosphere. Some may tell you the office furniture is so outdated it looks like a museum display, or that it might be time to upgrade equipment. Assuming you have the funds to address these thoughts, keep in mind the entire experience a customer receives is an emotional one. Provide a pleasant one—sometimes costing so little!—and they'll keep coming back. Upgrades as simple as fresh paint, or flowers on the reception desk, or mouthwash and hand lotion in the bathrooms can do wonders.

6. Of course, you can always simply *ask* your clients or patients or visitors of their impressions. Some won't want to hurt your feelings; others will freely tell you the receptionist's appearance doesn't represent the company well, your administrative assistant



*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

[Survey Monkey](#)

[Etiquette Dog](#)

[Adopt-A-Greyhound](#)

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

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

877.231.6993

acted as though the visitor might be attempting criminal activity, or the bickering between employees that could be heard while waiting in the lobby was unpleasant.

In this day, people frequently give up on the rude, unprofessional, dull-on-the-uptake behavior of the employees they encounter before they get to you, because many companies' standards for their staff are poor and they provide no training, nor do they seek to hire those who can best present excellence. Clients tune out and just accept the experience will never get better. Is that what you want them to think of your practice, your office, your department? The time will come when they admit to themselves the trip to your place is just not worth it—and they'll find a place that is. 🐾

## Teddy Bear Says...



Riding in the car is usually one of the delights of my species. Head out the window, ears flapping in the breeze . . . it's a blast!

Of course, this makes us privy to the driving behavior of our humans, and when dogs get together to share stories, we hear a lot about how frustrating it is when drivers do not use turn signals. Yes, we've heard our humans yelling at someone (or being yelled at), "Use your turn signal, idiot!" Sometimes "idiot" is replaced with an even more unattractive word. Clearly, those who do not use turn signals can be highly irritating.

(Conversely, we hear a lot from our human companions about people who start signaling about a mile before actually making a turn, passing up numerous possible turns on the way, so that it becomes a guessing game for the driver behind.)

This made the Teddy Bear think about what a turn signal indicates. It is a polite gesture, letting other drivers know one's intentions. When used properly, it prevents accidents, especially when it is paired with behavior such as physically turning the head to view one's surroundings (oh, I've heard a lot about this one—"She didn't even look!") or glancing in rear view mirrors. It indicates to drivers that this driver has a modicum of respect for others and does not consider the road his or her personal domain. It's a recognition that he or she is not alone out there on the open highway—the road is shared with others, so there needs to be civility or there will be chaos.

Consider how similar this is to good manners. Our proper behaviors indicate to others our intentions, such as when we politely request if we may ask a question or offer an

Life is not so short but that there is always time enough for courtesy.

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

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)



opinion, or when we pick up the bread basket at a table and pass it to our right. By exercising good etiquette, we prevent a host of accidents with behavior that might be read as rudeness, selfishness, self-centeredness, or unkindness. Good manners show respect for others, speaking to our understanding that it's not all about us and our feelings and our desires. People generally depend on the role of etiquette to keep everyday interactions uneventful and less stressful. It's not right that one should go to the supermarket and be assaulted along the way with ungodly decibel levels emanating from the vehicle next to us, or with impatient and impolite parking lot management (such as the rude person who zips into a space for which you have been patiently waiting). It's not right that while you stand in line, you are forced to listen to a one-sided conversation someone is having with another on a cell phone, particularly when it is vacuous. It's not right that someone incites a riot by taking a basketful into the "10 Items or Fewer" line, that the cashier says nothing to remedy the infraction, and that loud, angry comments ensue. It's not right that you make it home from the grocery store feeling like you just negotiated the latest round of international meetings on the use of nuclear weapons.

Use your turn signals, people. 🐾

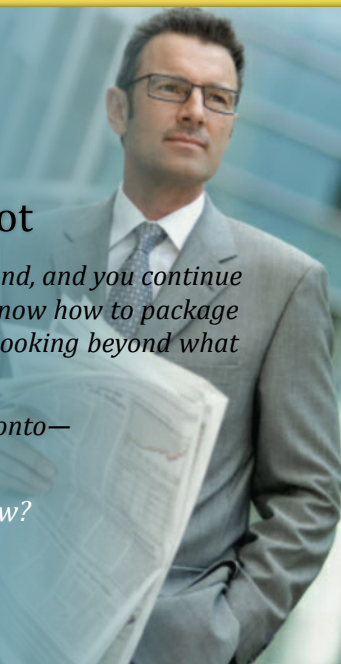
## Image is Everything Except When it's Not

*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.*

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