

Grand Scheme or Minutia – What Do You Really Want?

written by Lori Jo Vest

Ever notice what happens when you get angry? Doesn't matter if it's your spouse, a customer or your neighbor, when you react with anger, it's easy to get caught up in the minutia of "being right" and lose sight of what you really want. What if you kept your desired end result in mind whenever you were faced with potential conflict? Here's a quick example...

The television production studio that I manage is located in a business district that's evolving from light manufacturing to more of a retail and creative area. While we've been in our building for ten years, new tenants are moving into the other spaces in our complex. One of these spaces has large windows that face our side door, the one that our employees use to enter the building.

We're always curious when a new business moves in and the one next door was a real puzzler. The space was relatively sparse – a few tables and chairs – with a mannequin in each window. The business seemed closed most of the time, though every so often, several very thin women in high heels would show up. One day, I pulled up to see fifteen models in jeans and white t-shirts lined up in this new neighbor's suite while a few other people directed their movements. What the heck did these people sell? We eventually decided he was probably a photographer and left it at that.

Remember to think of the "grand scheme of things" – what you really want as your end result – rather than focusing on the minutia of any upsetting situation.

Then one day last summer, I pulled up to see one of the mannequins in the window was wrapped in a black garbage bag, taped to look like a hostage. She also had a black bag over her head. Yikes. It felt like a violent image to me and after discussing it with the other women in the office, it was unanimous. This new window display was extremely offensive to our team. What would our clients think?

As the senior manager of the business, it was up to me to manage this "interesting" situation. Since there was rarely anyone present in the space next door, I did an internet search and found their website. I discovered that the skinny women in white t-shirts were acting as live displays for high-end designer jeans. I found the contact form and wrote my request to the business owner.

As I wrote my note, I felt angry. Why would someone put such a violent image in the display window of their business? My first version was a bit aggressive, though as I wrote, I kept going back and softening my words, reminding myself that what I really, really wanted was the window display to go away. I didn't want an angry neighbor, a complaint to the landlord or worse yet, another violent window display. Here's the gist of what I said:

Dear Mr. Sir,

My name is Lori Jo Vest and I manage the TV production studio that is directly adjacent to your space on Cole Street in Birmingham, Michigan. I am writing you to request that you remove the current display from the window that faces our offices. While I'm sure this is not intentional, the bound mannequin is being perceived by the women at our company as violent. It offends my sensibilities. If you would please replace it, we would be very grateful.

Thank you,

Lori Jo Vest

I sent my missive at about 10:00am that morning and by noon, I had heard from the designer. He said that he and his team had viewed the display as demonstrating someone who was a "slave to fashion" and hadn't thought about it being seen as violent. The display was removed by 4pm. Success! Our neighbor didn't seem angry and the new display seemed much more friendly. The mannequin was even holding a bouquet of purple flowers. I sent a follow-up email to the designer, thanking him for recognizing our concerns and removing the display.

Fortunately, in this situation, I had a bit of time to mull over my response. What if you don't? I like to remember to think of the "grand scheme of things" rather than focusing on the minutia of any upsetting situation. When customers are angry, what do you really want? You want to resolve their issue so that they're happy and return to your place of business. Ask yourself as you go into any customer conflict, "grand scheme or minutia?" What will work best? Remembering the grand scheme, of course!

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Co-author of the customer service bestseller, "Who's your Gladys? How to Turn Even the Most Difficult Customer into Your Biggest Fan," Lori Jo Vest has been involved in relationship-based sales and customer service for over 20 years. She has developed extensive marketing, sales and customer service expertise through her work in business-to-business sales and marketing positions. She consults with mid-sized and second stage businesses on methods to enhance their sales and customer service efforts through one-on-one awareness campaigns, methods for developing personal connection and custom strategies for long-term relationship building. You can reach Lori at lori@lorijovest.com.

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