

Oh Her? She's New: A Lesson in Attitude and Performance

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*This article was originally written and published in June 2011 for the general public as opposed to a claims specific audience. It includes excerpts from the book *Attitude, Ability and the 80-20 Rule*. Since that time, the article has appeared in over 40 national magazines and websites including... (name 3 or 4 here).*

We have agreed to reprint it here for our subscribers.

Part of any management, leadership, and employee motivation speech, is a common theme; that is that people's performance is influenced by their attitude. This article will propose that people's performance is 80% their attitude and 20% their ability. When referring to attitude, it doesn't mean how happy they are. What is referenced is their attitude towards their job.

Charlie travels extensively for his job. He travels so often that he is constantly observing the customer service he receives on an airplane. The other day, Charlie encountered a somewhat overbearing flight attendant while in first class. The flight attendant, Sweet Dee, was being very pushy and telling people what to do.

Sweet Dee ordered people around in a demanding, unnecessarily authoritative tone. "Close that laptop." "Put that up there." "Put that seatbelt on." "That can't go there." "That has to be turned off." After observing this for some time, Charlie couldn't resist speaking up to Sweet Dee about her customer service skills. Charlie said, "You know, I think your customer service skills could really use some improvement." Of course, the other passengers were all nervous looking around at each other thinking, "Oooooooo ... he's gonna get it"

"Well sir," she said snidely, "I'm here mainly for your safety."

That's all Charlie needed to know. That statement alone answered Charlie's question on how someone in the customer service business could be so lacking in skills. The answer is she's not lacking. Her ability is just fine.

Flying as much as Charlie does he knows that pilots always say "The flight attendants are here mainly for your safety, but if there is something they can do to make you feel more comfortable, please feel free to ask ..." Well, Sweet Dee actually believes this!

So, let's pose a question: What's driving her performance? She knows how to be polite if she wants to be. She knows she's a representative of the airline. She probably has to deal with huffy customers every day. So what's driving her poor customer service performance? This poor woman thinks she's in the safety business and not the customer service business. She believes her job is safety. She even said it, "I'm here mainly for your safety." What's driving her poor performance? Her attitude!

And her attitude is: *I'm not here for your pleasure. I'm not here for your comfort. I'm not even here to ever make sure you come back again. I'm here for your safety.* And because of that, she can be mean. She can be nasty. She can be bossy. Why? Because she's not in the customer service business, she's in the safety business. And because of her attitude, she is perfectly okay with pushing customers around.

Knowing this, Charlie responds to Sweet Dee by saying "Yes, I agree you are here for safety. But you're not in the safety business. You are in the customer service business. I think you made a mistake by separating the two. Safety is part of the customer service you provide. It's an important part, but still just a part."

As she rolled her eyes, Charlie said, "Think about it. 99.9 percent of the time, you are dealing with people and their needs; Serving drinks, answering questions, and getting them things. You're not dealing with safety issues. Most of your time on the job is spent providing customer service."

Knowing flying is very safe, Charlie even asked Sweet Dee, "Have you ever been on a plane that has crashed?" "No", Sweet Dee replied. "Well, there you go then," Charlie said, "You've never even been on a plane that's crashed. Yet it's your excuse for bossing people around." Again, Sweet Dee demanded, "I'm here mainly for your safety ... SIR!"

Growing tired of the conversation and realizing that all of the passengers had pulled their ear phones out and were now listening intently, Charlie finally said, "Okay. You're here mainly for my safety. Fine. Then why is the other flight attendant back in coach being so nice? You know, the one who is always smiling, being polite, courteous, helpful, and friendly? Why is she asking people to do things and not barking orders? You do the same job yet she's making people feel good about it. Why is that?"

Sweet Dee looked down the aisle, looked back at Charlie and smiled condescendingly, pointed down at the other flight attendant, and said, "Oh, her? She's new."

There you have it. A perfect example of someone who's attitude is driving their performance. Was it her ability? Probably not, she knows how to smile. She knows how to ask instead of demand. She knows how to talk to people, so as not to make them feel yelled at. Her ability is just fine. What was driving her poor performance in customer service? Her attitude!

It's her attitude about what she does for a living which is driving her poor performance. Maybe her attitude is that she is in the business of safety, transportation, or "keeping the airplane clean." Who knows?

It's not that she has a nasty attitude in life. It's just that she doesn't understand her job. You see, she's not in the transportation business or the safety business. She's in the customer service business. Performance is 80% attitude and 20% ability.

How can Sweet Dee improve? She can remember these points:

- **Attitude drives performance:** How she describes her job is just as important as the tasks she performs.
- **Take off the blinders:** The plane probably really isn't going to crash, so she should keep in mind that although safety is important, most of her time deals with customer service.
- **Perception is everything:** Although she might not believe her job is in customer service she needs to let the passengers think that. If she was perceived as being polite then people would more willingly listen to her and act accordingly. ■