



"Thank You" "No Problem"

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

My wife and I were out to dinner a while ago and ran into a very personable young waiter named Kyle. This young man was still in college, and he was working to earn money and looking for his future. I really liked this waiter because he made great eye contact, and he was polite but not intrusive. He had one annoying habit that was a distraction from an otherwise stellar impression that he created.

Every time he would do something, like refresh my water, I would say "Thank you," and he would reply "No problem." For a while I just let it pass and did not think about it, but eventually I recognized that his response habit was hurting the impression he was making of himself.

The statement "No problem" is really not a bad thing to say, but it does represent a missed opportunity to build trust with the other person. Reason: the statement does not represent a proactive positive response to gratitude. Instead, it reflects a kind of throw-away line that I, the customer, really did not matter much to him. The effect is very subtle, so the negative impression is not severe, but a more upbeat response or at least some variety of response would work much better.

A simple "You're welcome" would be better than "No problem," but there could be hundreds of more creative and memorable statements the young man could have used that would further entrench the good impression we had of him. Remember, he has plenty of time to prepare creative comebacks because he pours water for people every day.

For example, in response to "Thank you" after he poured the water, he might have said, "We double-filter all of our water before we serve it to our guests." He could have blown me away with a statement like, "We never serve water that is warmer than 47 degrees." Another response might be "I view your glass as bottomless." How about, "I'll be watching to be sure you never run out." Another tack might be to demonstrate respect by responding, "I am honored," or "It is my pleasure."

The young waiter, had to realize that he was serving expensive food to people who could afford it, so every night he was making impressions on people who could potentially influence his life. I took the time to compliment Kyle on his demeanor and also give him some coaching on his habitual response to gratitude. He got the message and was truly thankful for it because he had never given the matter any thought. It was just something he was used to saying.

The response to a "Thank you" should be thought of as a great way to differentiate yourself from the pack if you are in a customer service occupation. Don't waste the opportunity with a throw-away line like, "No problem."

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