

Principles of business communication

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Every customer is entitled to the best quality product and service. We, at Stovall Home Products, realize this and constantly strive to uphold product excellence and innovation. It was therefore with considerable concern that we recently learned about your unfortunate experience in connection with the use of our flagship brand, White-n-Brite Liquid Bleach.

As you may have read from reputable consumer product rating publications which have given the brand the thumbs-up, it is our common practice to carry out rigorous testing, quality control measures, and regular updating of directions to guide consumer usage and care.

We thank you for bringing the matter directly to our attention. After careful assessment by our Laundry Products Laboratory, we find that the item you had requested Stovall Home Products to refund was made of material not compatible with either dry or liquid bleaches. Moreover, we have publicly stated, and indicated in the label directions on White-n-Brite Liquid Bleach, that this product is not to be used as a local spot remover.

Nonetheless, we understand the aggravation the incident may have caused you. If you so wish, you can send your personal item, postage-free, to Stovall Home Products and we'll see what we can do about it.

Stovall Home Products definitely does not compromise its integrity, regardless of whether it concerns the flagship brand or new product innovations. As a token of goodwill, we are enclosing introductory single-use packets of White-n-Brite Bleach: Delicates suited for your lingerie and hosiery, as well as in-store coupons of our new Air Fare Home Air Freshener

aromas, entitling the bearer to \$1 off for every purchase of any three new aromas that include Sea Air, Autumn Spice, Fresh Pine and Spring Flowers.

Allow us to do as much as we can for you, as our valued customer. Let us know if you need further informational details, such as those contained in our free booklets on caring for delicate fabrics, air freshener or tough stain tips, or any help we can offer on our new products.

Yours sincerely, Carol Smith Applying the Principles of Business Communications to Writing Negative Messages

Using the principles of business communications gleaned from the readings, I made a conscious effort to avoid phrases that may possibly strike the reader, in this case the customer, as rude, hostile, uncaring, condescending or arrogant (Locker, 2000, p. 67).

It struck me that when the customer wrote Stovall Home Products to refund her for her stained jacket, she has somehow already made up her mind that it is the product which is defective, and not her misuse or oversight to check both her garment care tags and the White-n-Brite Liquid Bleach label directions. The likelihood that the customer may be resistant to views not supporting hers counts as one obstacle to be overcome (Locker, 2000, p. 68). I, therefore, used an opening line with an area of agreement or a common ground I obviously share with the reader (Locker, 2000, p. 68).

To make my writing sound like friendly face-to-face discussion, I used words such as we, you, and our for readability, as well as contractions in cases when it will come out more naturally than two short separate words (Burne, 2006, para. 27-29). I likewise took into consideration “ the seven Cs of

business letter writing” which are: clear, concise, correct, courteous, conversational, convincing and complete (Burne, 2006, para. 4).

I avoided stating the negative message outright at the start of the letter, and I agree with one of the main readings on conveying negative information that when the reader’s ego is on the line, “ opening with the negative message would violate the reader’s expectation and damage rapport” (“ Writing Negative Messages,” 2002, para. 4). I likewise agree that “ the more the negative information concerns the reader as a person, the greater the need for psychological preparation” (“ Writing Negative Messages,” 2002, para. 4).

I therefore built up the brand and the long-held tradition of product testing and updating of directions. Soon afterwards, I incorporated a brief buffer (“ Writing Negative Messages,” 2002, para. 7) leading to the finding that negates the customer’s claim and which forms the key subject or specific concern. I was especially careful to avoid negative transitions like however, but, and even though just before conveying the company’s findings that show that the customer’s demand was off-tangent, because such transitional words signal a turn for the worse (“ Writing Negative Messages,” 2002, para. 8).

I also avoided blaming the customer, who is the reader of the letter, for instigating the problem even if all signs point to it (“ Writing Negative Messages,” 2002, para. 9). Instead of “ spotlighting” the bad news, I positioned it strategically, and since “ explicit refusals may be unnecessary and at times cruel” (Guffey, 2000, p. 290), I opted to imply or indirectly refer to the negative reply without seeming unclear about the company’s decision,

which is not to grant the refund to the customer because the product was not used according to the stated directions.

“ Implication is often an effective way of transmitting an unpleasant idea, that is, the idea is not expressed, yet the receiver understands” (“ Writing About the Unpleasant,” n. d.) based on the facts and explanations presented. In stating the legitimate reasons for turning down the customer’s request, I have implied that negative reply and I did not dwell too much on the created problem anymore, proceeding, instead, to further cushioning the impact on the customer and offering a workable alternative.

By including the line “ we understand the aggravation the incident may have caused you,” I wanted to show empathy, or placing oneself in the customer’s shoes to understand how upset she may be and to understand how natural her reaction was to write the company and request for a refund. On the other hand, I also took note of the fact that there is a “ fine but clear line between being sympathetic about the customer’s problem, on the one side, and implying or taking responsibility for it, on the other” (Erdman & Hildebrandt, 1998, p. 157).

It is in this light that I suggested to the customer to send over to Stovall Home Products the stained piece of clothing, and I phrased it to sound non-committal. I tried to be mindful or “ careful not to take responsibility in circumstances where it’s not appropriate” (Erdman & Hildebrandt, 1998, p. 158). I realize that saying no or refusing a customer’s undue request serves my organization’s welfare and needs (Locker, 2000, p. 214), preventing the setting of a precedent for company liability (Erdman & Hildebrandt, 1998, p.

158). I also tried to show that while the offered course of action may not be perfect, it is “ the best solution currently available” (Locker, 2000, p. 68).

At this point, my overriding objective, alongside cushioning the impact of the negative reply to the request, has now turned to educating the reader and reselling the product in question, where a problem spot was encountered, or for new product innovations of the company (“ Writing Negative Messages,” 2002, para. 24). Because I am also trying to change the customer’s brash judgment about the company’s flagship brand and attempting to correct this customer’s understanding of company policy, I deemed it best to let the reader “ save face” by hinting that changed circumstances “ call for new attitudes or action” (Locker, 2000, p. 68).

I then closed on a positive note by offering a counterproposal (“ Writing About the Unpleasant,” n. d.) Maintaining goodwill is very important, especially in the light of the thrusts of a company like Stovall Home Products, which has relied for many decades on customers’ loyal support.

At no part of the letter was an apology extended, because in so doing, it will serve, not just to trigger future company liability but highlight the company’s “ acknowledgment of the mistake or wrongdoing, acceptance of responsibility, expression of regret, and assurance that the offense will not be repeated” (Kellerman 2006). Except for accepting a measure of responsibility in order to maintain positive relationship with the customer, and the expression of regret as a sign of empathy, none of these apply in connection with the Anne Thompson’s case.

References

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