

SO WHAT ABOUT IT?

Attitude



I had an early morning flight. Now, I've rushed to the airport at the very last minute many times in my life, struggling and tripping over my baggage, exhausted, with no time to spare. But for this particular flight I woke up early, made breakfast, arrived at the airport with plenty of time, made my way through check-in and security and got to my gate. With extra time on my hands, I decided to grab some coffee and a magazine. While in line, I took time to observe the people around me. What could I determine about their attitude, just by watching them wait in line for a latte, I wondered? It turns out -- a great deal!

I was about three people back in line. No sweat, I thought. It didn't appear like it would be too much trouble to get in and get out of the airport café. Besides, I had time on my hands.

The first woman, already at the counter when I arrived, was curt and prompt. She was dressed impeccably in black, from head to toe; her hair pulled back crisply, her face perfectly painted. This made me realize that we communicate a great deal about our attitude toward the day, who we are, and what we are up to, just by getting up and getting dressed. Her impatience was demonstrated in her incessant tapping on the counter, the clerk behind the counter clearly anxious and nervous because of this. She ordered a cheese plate. The clerk scurried to get it; the line grew deeper behind me, the terminal busier by the moment. The transaction was relatively painless with the exception of the length of time it took to fetch the cheese and complete the credit card transaction.



The next person could only be described as bumbling. He didn't even realize that there was a line when he butted in front of me, bleary eyed and barely awake. I let it go and watched him. He wore wrinkled khaki shorts and a crumpled t-shirt, his slim frame hugging the counter as if for support. He managed to sputter out his order – "just black coffee," and then fumbled to find money in his numerous pockets. The woman behind the counter stood passively, waiting. He handed over his money and scooped up his change, finally stepping aside. Breathing a sigh of relief, I moved forward; and just when I reached the counter, he swooped back in to ask if he could also have a muffin. The clerk turned her attention from me back to him, asking what kind. He moved over to the glass case and pointed. "That one," he said groggily. It took the clerk several minutes to get the muffin, warm it up, and deliver it to Mr. Bumble. Once again, he searched his pockets for some cash.

Next up: a young man, his wife, and three kids circling him, the counter, the magazine racks, and ice cream window madly. Occasionally one of his children would bark out an order or request, "I want chocolate." "Dad, look! They have sub sandwiches!" – All of which he took in stride. He asked for a chocolate gelato, hot chocolate, double skim latte with no foam, and a fruit platter. The clerk blinked at him widely. He repeated his order, assertive but patient.

I was able to garner numerous impressions about the general attitude of each of these individuals during my brief foray into the airport café. The first person could be described as a well-organized person, certainly on task. She may or may not have been tolerant of the world around her or the disruption to her routine. The second individual was very self-absorbed. He was completely unaware of either his surroundings or his impact on others. It's unlikely that he had any idea that he butted in line or that he held others up with his disorganization. My last subject was remarkably able to balance both the needs of his family and the task at hand without blinking an eye.

Attitude is powerful. It's the energy you emulate. It reflects how you feel about life. Each one of the observations in the passage above reflects a different attitude or mood, with which these individuals were living at a particular moment. These brief encounters may or may not represent who each of these individuals are on a larger scale; but it was certainly who they were for a brief moment in the airport that morning. Have you ever heard the phrase "a good attitude is catchy, but a great attitude is contagious?" Whether you are aware of it or not, for every new scenario you encounter, you take inventory and make assessments about the people you meet. Whether it is walking into a classroom for the first time, moving into a new residence hall, starting a new job, or



going to a party, you judge others by their attitude. Conversely, others form opinions of and remember you by your attitude.

You've also probably noticed that it's easy to identify individuals that others gravitate toward. People want to spend time with people that they feel good around. Such individuals possess a variety of characteristics; however there is most likely a common factor with each of these charismatic folks: a positive attitude.

So, what is the definition of attitude? Is attitude how Webster's Dictionary defines it? Perhaps, but it's also much more than that. You see attitude in people. You feel attitude in people. You live your attitude. You see attitudes you don't want anything to do with. You see attitudes that leave you wanting to get to know a person better. Our attitudes define us.

So you may be thinking, that's all fine and good; but what can I really do to change my attitude?

Read these simple suggestions and you'll be amazed at what an immediate difference you can make in your life:

- ***Surround yourself with positive people.*** Whether positively or negatively, the people you spend time with affect you and you affect them. Spend time with people who lift your spirits, not people who bring you down.
- ***Make the most of your life.*** We've all heard that before; but each new day provides a new opportunity to make positive changes. Having a good attitude makes it easier to notice opportunity and gives you the power to realize your dreams and fulfill your goals.
- ***Self-talk.*** If attitude is a state of mind, then the messages you allow to come in and out of your stream of consciousness surely affect your overall attitude about your life. Self-talk and your state of mind determines your well-being. Dump negative baggage that pulls you down. Dwelling on yesterday or what could have been will do nothing for you but leave you stuck in an old story. Live in today.
- ***Mood follows action.*** Sometimes, you can't just "think" your way into a positive attitude – you have to take action to spark a different chain of events. Engage in the



behaviors that make you feel good and that have the ability to move you in a different direction.

- ***Set your life trajectory - your life path.*** Life can either happen to you, or you can be motivated by what life throws your way. You can't set trajectories for yourself if you don't take the time to determine what you want. Who, where, and what do you want to be? What would you like to accomplish, and in what timeframe? Chart your course.
- ***Identify and commit to a daily practice.*** Daily practices help ground you as an individual. Some examples of daily practices include: taking time for a quiet breakfast, exercising, meditating, reading, etc. Pick one that suits you and commit to it every day.
- ***Face the world.*** Live your life with a spirit of generosity, gratitude, and forgiveness toward other people. It will come back to you two-fold.

College can be some of the best years of your life. Live with fervor and make the memories count! In the words of my mentor, Dr. Richard Strozzi-Heckler "Take it easy, but take it!"

Pamela L. Patterson, M.S.
Dean of Students

