



It's only 9 a.m.?

Amy Lester, Office Manager, arrived thirty minutes early at the school. She set the small vase of fresh cut flowers from her garden (*the flowers are meant to be a welcome to Ms. Joan Arden on her first day*) on the desk behind her. Today is the day that the new Office Assistant, Joan Arden, is to start working on campus. Mrs. Lester is eager to have the needed help. It has been a tough two months trying to do her work, and that of the previous Office Assistant; who resigned due to her husband's transfer to the West coast. Mrs. Jenkins, the Principal of Beam Elementary, expects Mrs. Lester in her role as Office Manager to mentor Ms. Arden as she becomes an important component in the front office.

The phone rang. It was thirty minutes before Mrs. Lester had to officially begin answering the phone. As a strong believer in Customer Care she chose to answer the phone anyway. Mrs. Lester answered the phone to the hostile tone of a parent. He demanded to speak with the principal. The P.E. teacher had made his son sit out of the volley ball game in the gym yesterday for being disrespectful to the referee. The parent continued, "What is disrespectful? My son is never disrespectful." Amy Lester listened and noticed the small smile on her face, in the mirror she kept next to the phone. She was trying hard not to become irritated with this parent. She had met his son who was obnoxious, never making eye contact, mumbling when answering anyone in the office, and whiney whenever he was disciplined. She refrained from speaking what was on her mind and listened patiently to the parent. When he paused she said that the principal was not available at this moment but she would leave a message for her or he could have her voicemail. "Every time I call up there Mrs. Jenkins is not available; I always get her voicemail. Is she ever there to answer the phone herself?" demanded the parent. Mrs. Lester with a smile on her face assured the father that his concerns would be relayed to the principal and if he wished she would have the principal return his call. The father chose to leave a message on her voicemail. What a way to start a day and she thought to herself, 'I am glad I was here to answer the phone. That father needed to vent.'

Mrs. Lester checked the coffee pot to see if the custodian had turned it on. She hated to have to check on the custodian, but he had forgotten several times. This task was established at the beginning of the year, making coffee available for the staff as soon as they entered. The Principal had an expectation that not only was coffee to be available for all staff but all guests who entered the office were to be asked if they would like a cup of coffee or bottled water. At first Mrs. Lester thought this was ridiculous. Neither she nor any of the office staff had the time to be servers, as though this were a restaurant. Alas, she had seen the power of coffee for herself. Now she understood that it is the little things that make people feel comfortable coming into the office. 'It is just like the office is my home; I treat people just like they are my guests,' she thought.

The daily donuts for the staff arrived and were set up in the workroom. Mrs. Lester knew she should not be thinking this but she hoped the staff realized that they were being spoiled. There was probably no other principal, in this district, during this economic crisis, who purchased donuts from her own pocket. Teachers began to come in and many spoke to Mrs. Lester, but there were always a few that refused to say, "Good morning." The newest teacher did not return the greeting. She seemed to lack personal skills such as greetings and the use of courtesy words. When the new teacher asked for something from the office she never prefaced it with a courtesy word or closed with a "Thank you." Mrs. Lester found herself cringing each time the new teacher came into the office for assistance. As the new teacher arrived and picked up a donut, Mrs. Lester said, "Good Morning." The new teacher looked straight ahead and continued to the workroom. The Principal walked past just as this was happening and looked over at Mrs. Lester and then said to the new teacher, "Good Morning. How are you today?" The new teacher looked up and said, "Good morning!" Mrs. Lester decided to make it her goal to have the new teacher respond to support staff the same way she had just responded to the principal.





This was a busy time of the day; phone calls were coming in while students and parents arrived at the counter wanting to be assisted. Seeing the need for assistance, the nurse volunteered to answer the phone. Mrs. Lester was pleased at hearing the nurse's phone interaction as she had just presented a review of telephone Customer Care etiquette at the last staff meeting, which was presented to all who would possibly be answering the telephone. This presentation was inclusive for all staff, including the principal.

'What a morning to start a new job,' Mrs. Lester thought as she saw Ms. Arden enter the office. Mrs. Lester motioned for her to come on around. As soon as she was off the phone she told Ms. Arden to take her place at the desk and begin answering phone calls. Mrs. Lester was so happy that the principal had taken her suggestion for a 45 minute pre-start date meeting with Ms. Arden to go over office procedures and protocols, which included Customer Care. She reflected fondly about her conversation with The Customer Care Teacher, Brenda Jean Patrick. She had called her for some ideas to share with the new employee. *(After a phone call with The Customer Care Teacher one always feels inspired, more knowledgeable, and even more attractive.)*

A student came in asking for the nurse; he had thrown up in the bathroom and felt sick to his stomach. He said, "I told my mom I was sick, but she said go on to school." The nurse ushered him into the clinic and Mrs. Lester called for a custodian to take care of the boys' restroom. The Counselor came in to the office to deliver some paper work and stayed to help with parents and students at the counter. She asked a mother who was there to see her, concerning her son's bullying issues, to be seated until after the announcements were made. The counselor offered the mother a cup of coffee, which she accepted.

The four students from fifth grade entered the office to do announcements. Mrs. Lester asked them to be seated and to remember that while they were in the office to use their inside voices. The librarian ushered the students into the conference room where the announcements were to be conducted and shown on the monitors throughout the building. The parent of one of the students making the announcements was in the office ready to film her daughter as she participated in the program. As Mrs. Lester finished with the last student at the counter, and the counselor left with the mother, the UPS delivery man came in with a large package for the principal. Mrs. Lester signed for the package and delivered it to the principal's office. Now it was time to help Ms. Arden acclimate to her new job. She looked over at Ms. Arden and saw her smiling; smelling the flowers on her desk and it was only 9 a.m.!

Your Assignment:

Discuss and answer the questions below, then return on 12-13-11 with this document.

1. How did Mrs. Lester communicate professionally with parents and teachers?
2. Predict how Mrs. Lester plans to mend the frazzled relationship with the new teacher?
3. Please list 3 times that Mrs. Lester's leadership resulted in a positive impact for the campus thus impacting the district.
4. How powerful is the Office Manager's communication style to the "running" of the front office?
5. How does this scenario prove the critical nature of the Office Manager's role and why must they realize their impact on the district as a whole?



Copyright © 2011 by Brenda Jean Patrick, The Customer Care Teacher
This document may be printed and shared as long as the material is kept intact
with the copyright statement. www.brendajeangepatrick.com

