
article:**Stop the Sorry Statements***by Laurie Guest*

In an episode of *Seinfeld*, a popular television show, George Costanza said, “You can stuff your sorries in a sack, mister.” He meant your apologies are not accepted. Are you using sorry statements in your business or organization?

Many companies are quick to say “I’m sorry” because they believe the statement comes across as great service. That’s not true. I urge you to save your “Sorries” for when an apology is owed. I am amazed how often I see “Sorry” signs that could be worded differently. Several years ago, I was in an electronics store with a choice of four cash registers to ring up purchases. Even though it was a busy holiday shopping day, only one register was busy, two were open with no waiting, and the fourth had a sign on it that read, “Sorry for the inconvenience. This register temporarily closed.” First off, I noticed the sign was a professionally printed one, so there was nothing temporary about the situation. This sign was put in front of any register they didn’t want to use as a way of saying “Sorry, we’re not using this lane.”

“Sorry” is the first word on the sign. Way back in their subconscious minds when customers see “Sorry,” they feel slighted rather than served. The sign should read, “We would be delighted to help you at any one of our open registers.” See how much better that sounds?

Do you have any “Sorry” signs up right now in your place of business? What about verbal “Sorries” to customers? Recently, I did a training session at a hospital. Twelve different groups of employees with an average of 50 people in each group attended. During each session, I asked this question: “How many of you say sorry to someone every day at work?” More than half of the hands went up in every class. That means that

this organization says “Sorry” over 9,125 times per year to their patients and patients’ families. Great service? Perhaps stuffing the sorries is recommended.

The hospital was in the middle of a remodel. The sign in the lobby and the message on the radio ad they ran said, “Sorry for the mess.” I encouraged them to change the ad to say, “Guess what? We’re renovating to help serve you better.” Since that session, I’ve asked every audience the same question, “Do you say sorry to at least one customer every day?” Because the response has been an overwhelming “yes,” it made me realize what a big deal this is.

Take a tour of your building and look for the “Sorry” signs. Revise what you say to give the information without the apology. Discuss how often and in what situation you find yourself apologizing to your guest. When you determine an apology is owed, find the best way to say it. If you decide an apology isn’t owed or it’s just a habit, start creating your list of replacement sentences. Yes, stuff your sorries in a sack. You will not miss them.