



# The Problem With "No Problem"

It was late morning and I was in my hotel room getting ready to speak and then to travel on to my next engagement. It was a long flight and wanted to be able to change into my travel clothes before getting on the plane. Knowing what a hassle that can be without having the convenience of a hotel room, I called down to the front desk to ask a favor.

The hotel was a first class Scottsdale beauty and the service had been up until that point, stellar, so I anticipated a friendly response to my request for a late check out time.

"Hi this is JoAnna Brandi in room 352 and I am speaking with the Inc. Magazine conference and I would love to be able to check out of my room late and change into my travel clothes, can I get a late checkout?"

"No.." came the response from the desk clerk. My mind raced into gear, "Okay, then, I guess I'll have to go into the ladies room to change, oh my goodness, it's so hard to get my suit off and those darn pantyhose and get the heels all packed up in their little bag, and then hang it all up in my suitcase so my suit's fresh when I get there," my mind raced as it imagined all the steps it would take to get seated comfortably on the airplane. And then the young man finished the sentence. "...problem. No problem."

YIKES! What a waste of my precious energy! The moment my ears heard "No" it sent my mind into action (more like hyper-gear.) Can't help it – that's what happened – I heard the "No" long enough to react. Customers never want to hear the word "No." And then he topped it off with that other word customers never want to hear, "Problem."

So yesterday when I got off the phone with my phone company's tech support service and when I bought some light bulbs at the drugstore and when I called to have a package picked up and asked for water with lemon at the restaurant the other night and I got that same response, "No problem," "No problem," "No problem," "No problem," "No problem," I let out a rather loud shriek. I'm having a serious problem with "no problem."

Why is this seemingly innocuous little phrase annoying me so? For one thing it's crept into our language so pervasively that sometimes I hear it six or seven times in one conversation, for another, I know a little about how the human brain works – and herein lies the real problem. Humor me for the moment.

I don't want you to think of basketball. That's right, DON'T think about basketball. And while you're at it, don't think of juicy ripe oranges. And please, whatever you do DON'T think about alligators. Don't for a moment put your mind on pink elephants.

Okay, what did you just think about? Basketball, ripe oranges, alligators and the perennial favorite, pink elephants? Of course you did. Your mind is wired the same way as everyone else's. We can't think about anything else BUT what we focus on and the word "don't" and "no" register the same way as "go right ahead" because the unconscious mind can't understand the reverse of an idea. So it's true that when you tell little Sally NOT to drop the ball she is likely to do it because you just focused her attention on it. "Watch out! Don't spill your milk!" Yep – it's a subconscious command to spill the milk.

And back to the customer? Well, they might have just had a perfectly lovely experience with you and they politely say "Thank you" and you respond with "No problem."

Puh-leeze! Get over that wimpy negative phrase and step up to the plate with some real care and appreciation.

Let's look at all the nice things one can say to a customer in place of those two negative words. "It's my pleasure." "Absolutely." "I'd love to help." "You're welcome." "Certainly." "Great, I'll get right to it."

Creating a more POSITIVE customer experience is the goal. Language plays an important, even if subtle part of the whole impression. From today on pay close attention to how many times you hear "no problem," and how many times you say it. You'll be amazed!

**"DID I SAY  
THERE WAS A  
PROBLEM?"**