An essay approach to the Interpersonal Communication Journal

Supportiveness Steals Anger’s Grip

Last Monday, I took my car into the insurance claims office to have it examined by the adjuster. It was hot, Phoenix hot. The adjuster came out with a chip on his shoulder. He was disagreeable, irritated, his shirt wet from the arm pits. I didn’t want him appraising my car in the mood of hostility he was communicating. I could feel myself getting angry and decided that this might be a good time to try a new communication skill - "Supportiveness." Supportiveness is validating a person’s right to think or behave in a particular way.

I supported his right to be angry by saying, "I’ll bet an adjuster’s job is hard. Almost everyone you encounter is probably upset because their car is damaged; their anger gets directed at you. It’s not your fault they have the problem. They ought to understand that you’re trying to help them." His grumbling stopped, and he replied, "Boy, are you right; I’m not the one that caused the damage to their car. I’m here to help them. I like my job, but some days you just get a string of unreasonable people." At that point, he relaxed. His shoulders eased; the tension abated; a smile reversed his frown; we were clearly going to be friends.

The adjuster needed someone to understand and reinforce his right to feel irate. Understanding his perspective stole the power anger and hostility had on him. I think supportiveness enhances a person’s self worth, and when that occurs, defensiveness is defeated; peace replaces the anger. I liked his judgment on my car, and we both made a new friend. All-in-all, it was a good day - hot, but good.

Remember that performing these experiments will result in your being more aware of your communication skills, and this will make you a more effective communicator.