

Summer challenge # 7: Be direct and get it fixed

A few years ago, I had a client who thought I had a special skill: mind reading. Unfortunately for both of us, I am not actually able to read minds. I can sense moods (anger, disapproval) but I can't actually know what a person is thinking unless that person decides to tell me. In the case of this client, I did not do what she was thinking I should do, and therefore, the relationship went south.

Years later, reflecting on this client relations episode, I concluded that that particular client was passive-aggressive. She had high expectations, which she did not clearly articulate, and then was extremely disappointed when her staff and contracted personnel failed to meet those standards.

Unfortunately, passive-aggressive behavior has become standard for many. Instead of confronting a problem, they hope the other party will sense their disapproval. If you've dealt with passive-aggressive people you know they will often pretend everything is OK but do things like procrastinate or give the wrong information in an effort to subvert your efforts. Or they will give you the silent treatment. (You may want to read: [How to Spot and Deal with Passive-Aggressive People](#) .)

In social media, we see a lot of passive-aggressive behavior. On Twitter, we see it in "sub-tweeting," in which a tweet refers to a specific individual without identifying him/her. We see it in random complaints, designed solely to shame the company but not actually get the problem fixed. You know the type: "My phone service sucks thanks to @companyIhate ... I should switch." Or there is the re-tweeting and hashtagging of someone's tweet, in order to embarrass or mock that person (I recently had this done to me and it resulted in getting a couple very ugly tweets from random strangers).

Recently, I saw some truly remarkable passive-aggressive behavior on Twitter from someone busy live-tweeting her condo board's meeting. She tweeted her displeasure at everything discussed. Never mind the condo board is not on Twitter and that nobody would even know to look for the hashtag this Twitter user made up. I read her litany of tweets with complete astonishment. She was present in the room—why not speak up and address these issues with the people she was so angry with instead of showing (and recording for posterity) her mocking displeasure?

My summer challenge to you is to drop the passive-aggressive behavior and be direct. If there is an actual issue, get it fixed. Yes, it may mean confronting someone directly. In some cases, it may mean going offline and using the telephone to call the dreaded customer service to deal with a problem. In the end, the problem will be aired out if not resolved completely.

Before you go to Twitter to air your problems, why not follow excellent advice from Paula Kiger on *Spin Sucks: Four Questions to Ask Before You Complain on Twitter* .

If you are upset or angry at someone's actions, why not discuss it directly? Here are *5 Tips for Communicating Assertively Without Being Passive-Aggressive*.

What do you think? Have you been victimized by passive-aggressive behavior? Or do you engage in passive-aggressive behavior yourself? The truth is we have all been on the giving *and* the receiving end of passive-aggressive behavior. Let's try to stop the cycle.