

She wanted a suck up, didn't find one.

How do u teach media relations?

Perspective on People:

By Karen Friedman

The woman left a voicemail at the office that went something like this.

“Hi. We may have a need for your services sometime in the near future. I hear from your voicemail that you’re on vacation, but regardless, I would like you to call me today. “

So, let me get this right. You’re not a client. We don’t know you. We have no clue who you work for or what your name is and it doesn’t appear that this is an emergency but you’re comfortable issuing instructions. I was on vacation which is why my personal voicemail left my assistants number and gave my email should someone need to reach me personally before I returned.

When I retrieved the voice mail a few days later, I immediately called the woman. She said she had hoped I would have reached her sooner but they had been conducting interviews and “no one was right for this job” so we may still have a chance. She said she’d like to set up a call first thing in the morning. When I told her I wasn’t available until later in the day and asked her to give me a brief sense of what she was calling about, she said since that’s the earliest I was

available, I could wait to find out more.

That was probably the point in time I should have told this potential new client that I wasn’t interested in her business. Giving orders to people who don’t work for you is even more offensive than listening to commands from clients who are actually paying you. But I took the polite route and told her I was looking forward to learning more about her needs.

Several hours later, I received a strange calendar invite from someone I didn’t know from a foundation I’d never heard of inviting me to participate in an hour long program at 8:00 p.m. central time. Not having any idea of the relation between the two and thinking it was probably spam, I declined the invite. That’s when the phone rang.

“This is so and so from the such and such foundation. When we emailed earlier today, you said you would be happy to talk to us at 4:00 tomorrow and then I received this rude nasty email declining our invitation. “

Aha! Now it clicked. The invite was from this same woman who never told me the name of her



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organization and left a voicemail at the office. I was being given a second chance to decline potentially working with Ms. Insolent, but trying to be polite and professional, I apologized for not realizing the directive was

from her and confirming I'd be available. Then I hung up and went on line to learn more about her organization.

Next day, call time. With four others on the line and not coming up for air, she begins to fill me in on the background. At first pause, I tell her that I had done some homework and read a few articles about them.

"What did you read and where did you read it?" she snapped.

I said I googled them and a bunch of things popped up that I perused. She informed me that anything I found on line was inaccurate. She went on to say that her team needed help securing media exposure but there was no media in her town. She said they reached out to several reporters directly but only one called them back when she said she wanted to read the story for approval before it was printed. He said "no" so she doesn't want to work with him.

I should have stopped there and realized I had been given a third chance to escape The Commander. Instead, I tried to be helpful. I explained that we were a communications coaching firm and could help craft messages and learn how to speak to the media but recommended she hire a public relations firm to for story placement.

I explained that because the story was about a philanthropist who died and dedicated his massive fortune to educating underprivileged children, regardless of lack of media outlets, they could generate a lot of interest outside of their small town. I confirmed that typically reporters won't let you approve their story in advance.

To that she said "you can't meet our needs" and hung up.

A part of me wanted to send her an email telling her that her attitude would kill any positive media coverage she hoped to generate and that she should hire us as she clearly needs communications coaching. While an email like that would have made me somewhat vindicated, it would have only continued a conversation I should have stopped before it started.

This woman clearly had no interest in anyone's advice. She was looking for a suck up to agree with her point of view and do exactly what she wanted.

In the workplace this type of behavior creates an atmosphere of me versus you. These type of managers typically only invite input from others so they can challenge opinions and shoot them down. Instead of involving people, they alienate them which robs the entire company of fresh ideas and different ways of doing things.

If I had sent Ms. Insolent that email, I may have offered the following media advice which applies in the workplace as well:

1. If you want media coverage, take the time to understand what the media needs so they can help you succeed. If you want motivated employees and loyal customers, don't dictate. Converse.
2. When you welcome different viewpoints, you generate conversations filled with interesting information that can lead to new ideas and valuable contributions.
3. Embracing those ideas often helps attract talented

creative people who have your best interest at heart.

Finally, people who truly want your help will ask for it. If they don't ask, they're probably more interested in the sound of their own voice than your help. Maybe you can't meet their needs as Ms. Insolent stated, but if one of your basic needs is to be treated with respect, they can't meet your needs either.

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