

Helping Difficult Clients

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Why Me?

- We see people in crisis
 - Hurt
 - Injured
 - Angry
 - Wronged
- We may be feared

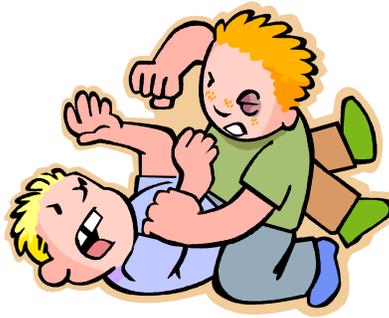


Types of Difficult Clients

- Assertive or aggressive clients



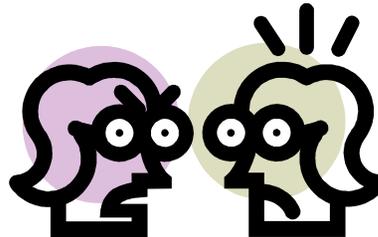
- Angry clients



- Talkers



- Non-Talkers



Assertive or aggressive clients

Behaviors:

- Impatient
- Rushed
- Cold
- Loud
- Show authority
- Name droppers
- Demand action



Strategies

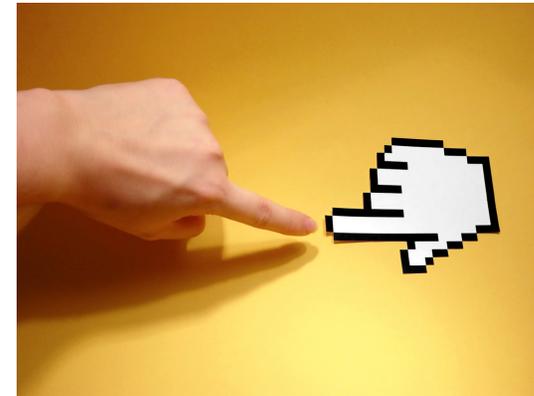
- Raise your assertiveness level, but always keep it below theirs



- If your voice is soft, raise it slightly

Aggressive Clients

- Be direct and to the point
- Stick to the business
- Sit tall
- Do not be offended by the lack of rapport
- Culture and training



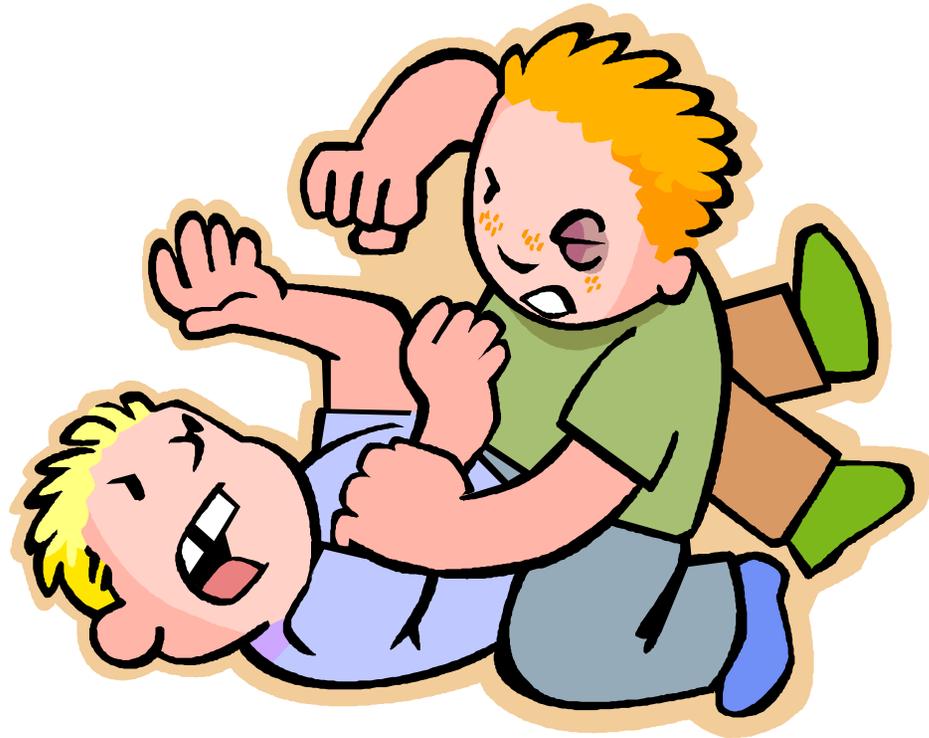
Poll #1

- What do you find most challenging about working with assertive or aggressive clients?
- A) Unreasonable demands
- B) Getting a word in
- C) Challenges to advice or expertise

Angry clients

Behaviors:

- Mad
- Loud
- Screaming
- Cursing
- Insulting
- Distrustful
- Argumentative



Strategies

- Depersonalize the emotions
 - They are hurt
 - Not your fault
 - Control issues
- Let the caller vent
- Empathize without committing to agreement



- The louder they get

the softer you get



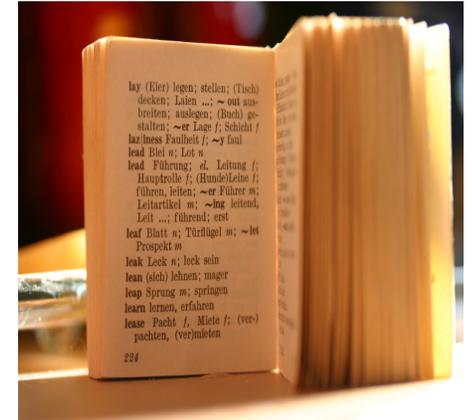
- Avoid becoming defensive
- Take responsibility for what you can do, apologize for what you can't do

Poll #2

- Have you ever hung up the phone on an angry caller at work?
- A) Yes
- B) They have hung up on me
- C) No

Subtle Differences in Words

- Use positive phrases to correct wrong information
- Example:
- If they Say, Medicaid is going to take my life savings
 - Say:
 - Unfortunately, you won't qualify for Medicaid while you own \$500,000 in stock
 - Instead of:
 - Medicaid won't take your money



Take a break

- Ask permission
- Minute or two
- Gather your thoughts
- Give them a chance to cool off
- Come back with a strategy



Ask for Help

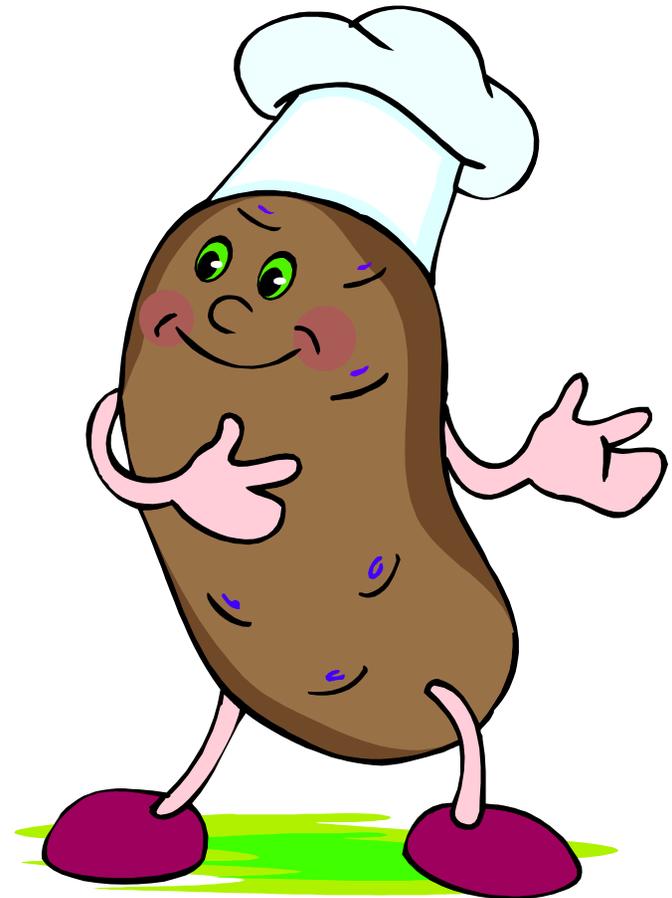
- Ask permission
- Ask a colleague
- I checked with _____ and _____



Hand Off a Hot One

- Ask permission
- Brief your colleague
- Different eyes and ears

- Cultural expectations
- Real authority



Poll #3

- What is the greatest challenge of working with angry clients?
 - A) Feeling like I am being blamed for things I am not responsible for
 - B) Abusive language
 - C) The behavior gets in the way of being able to help the client

Talkers

Want to tell you

- Life story
- Lots of things unrelated to the issue
- Too much Information
- Can't get away



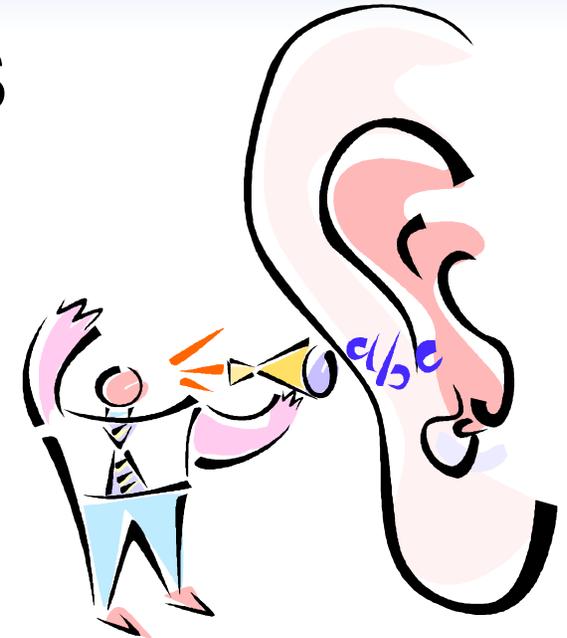
Talkers



Behaviors

- Talk and talk and talk and talk and talk and talk
- They need someone to talk to
- May be lonely
- Feel that no one believes them

Strategies



- Try to understand the reason
- Let them talk as long as you can
- Provide minimal responses
- Offer to call back or meet them when you have more time to listen

Practice Active Listening

- Acknowledge – eye contact – concentrate
- Rephrase key points
- Summarize and feed it back
- Non-threatening questions that reinforce understanding



Listening Tips

- Focus your attention
- Review mentally what you already know about the subject
- Avoid distractions
- Acknowledge any emotional state
- Set aside your prejudices and your opinions



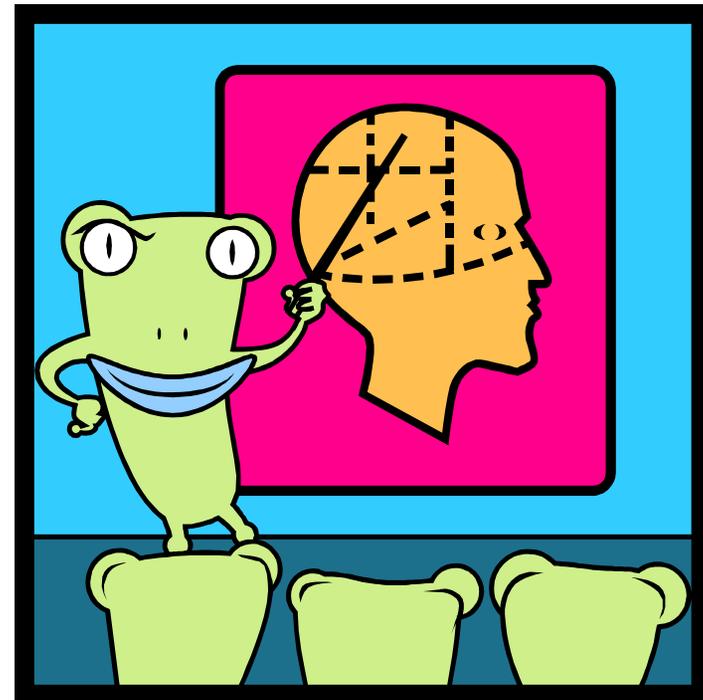
Poll #4

- Have you ever?
 - A) Checked your email while listening to a phone call
 - B) Left the room while a talker was on the phone
 - C) Lost track of what the talker was talking about
 - D) None of these

Probing

- Follow up question based on previous answer
- Shows that you are listening
- Used to gather additional information

- Example:
- My last vacation?



Control the conversation

- Ask questions
- When necessary, ask closed questions
- Shorten pauses between statements
- Tag a question onto the end of an answer
- Interrupt to focus answers



Closed and Open Questions

- A closed questions demands a limited answer
- What color was the car?
- The car was green, wasn't it?



Open Questions

- Open questions welcome a narrative answer
- Describe the car for me?



Closed Questions

- The respondent provides the answer
 - How long have you been married?
- Suggested answer or choices
 - Did you drive or fly?



Set Limits

- Establish ground rules
- Concentrate on one issue at a time
- Redirect the conversation back to that issue



Ending the Conversation

- I know you are busy, so I'll let you go now
- I need to get started on this right away, so I am going to say goodbye now
- May I call you tomorrow after I have done some research on the subject?
- I have another call holding
- I hate to run, but my 3:30 appointment is waiting



Poll #5

- What is the longest a client has ever talked?
- A) Two hours
- C) Three hours
- D) Four hours
- E) More than four hours

Sub variety of Talker

- Frequent Flyer





The Boy Who Cried Wolf

There once was a shepherd boy who was bored as he sat on the hillside watching the village sheep. To amuse himself he took a great breath and sang out, "Wolf! Wolf! The Wolf is chasing the sheep!"

The villagers came running up the hill to help the boy drive the wolf away. But when they arrived at the top of the hill, they found no wolf. The boy laughed at the sight of their angry faces.

"Don't cry 'wolf', shepherd boy," said the villagers, "when there's no wolf!" They went grumbling back down the hill.

Later, the boy sang out again, "Wolf! Wolf! The wolf is chasing the sheep!" To his naughty delight, he watched the villagers run up the hill to help him drive the wolf away.

When the villagers saw no wolf they sternly said, "Save your frightened song for when there is really something wrong! Don't cry 'wolf' when there is NO wolf!"

But the boy just grinned and watched them go grumbling down the hill once more.

Later, he saw a REAL wolf prowling about his flock. Alarmed, he leaped to his feet and sang out as loudly as he could, "Wolf! Wolf!"

But the villagers thought he was trying to fool them again, and so they didn't come.

At sunset, everyone wondered why the shepherd boy hadn't returned to the village with their sheep. They went up the hill to find the boy. They found him weeping.

"There really was a wolf here! The flock has scattered! I cried out, "Wolf!" Why didn't you come?"

An old man tried to comfort the boy as they walked back to the village.

"We'll help you look for the lost sheep in the morning," he said, putting his arm around the youth, "Nobody believes a liar...even when he is telling the truth!"

Frequent Flyer Club

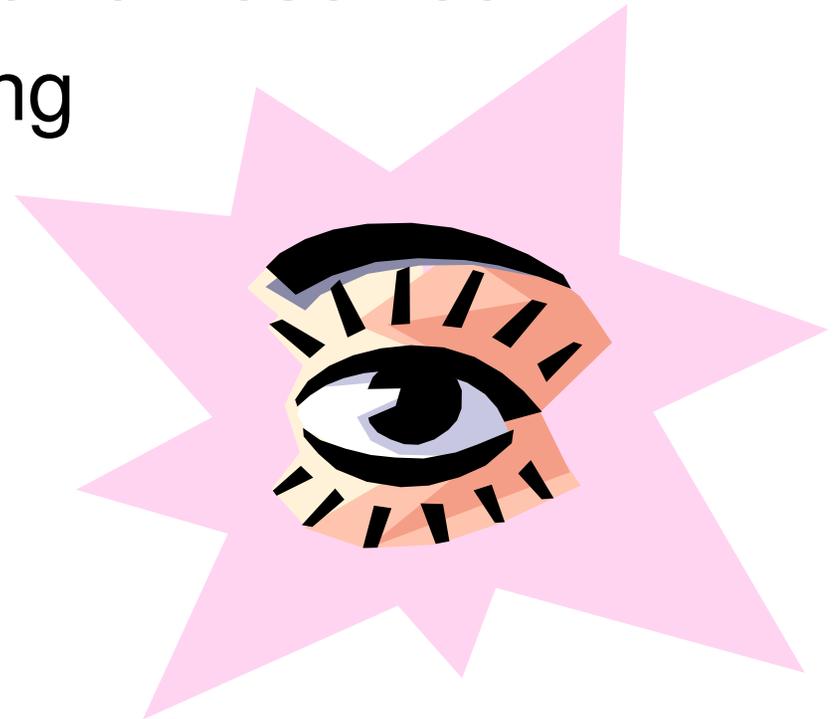
- Don't Make Assumptions
- Listen with an open mind
- Ask probing questions
- Identify/test caller's ultimate goal
- Use inclusive rather than exclusive mind set (i.e., is there some way I can help this person?)



Frequent Flyer

Look For

- New issue that you can help with
- Change in circumstances
- Is underlying problem still unresolved
- If irresolvable, counseling



Non-talkers

- I have a problem
- Short answers
- No answers
- Only what is asked
- Fear



You need them to talk, if you are going to be able to help

- Set the scene for privacy
- Explain confidentiality –
 - different rules for different advocates
- Explain why it is important that you know
- Offer examples
- Offer to help them find answers



- Encourage – reinforce
- Get them talking about things they know
- Closed to open questions
- Don't fear the silence - He who speaks first buys it



Poll #6

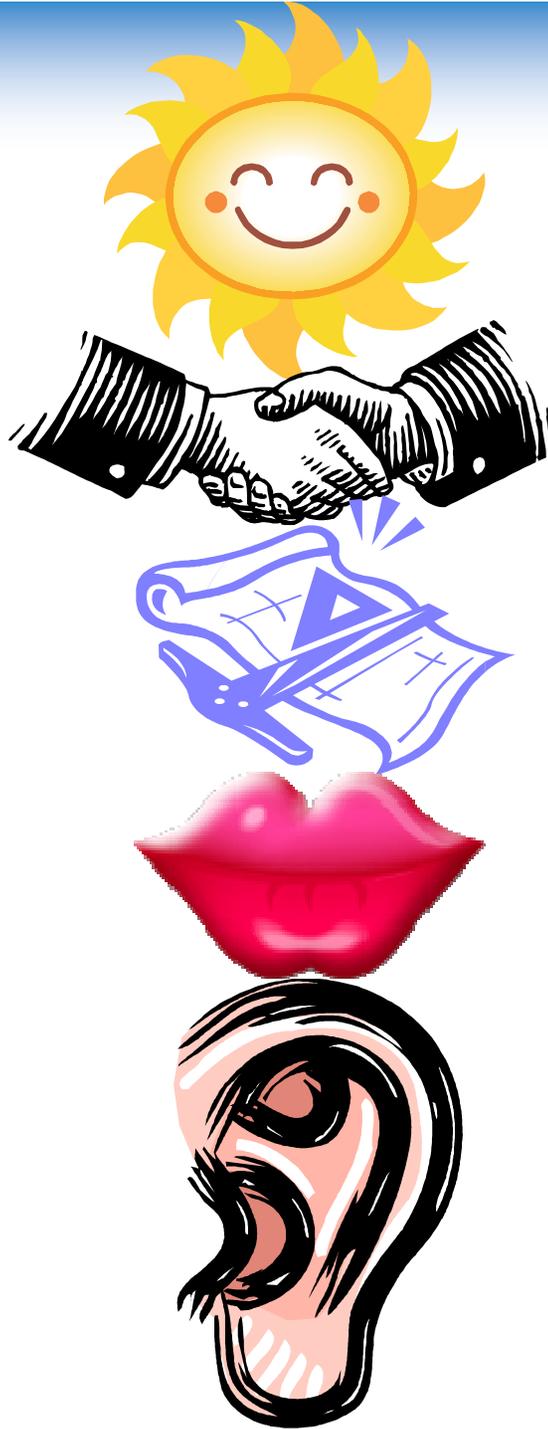
- Have you ever made the breakthrough and been able to help a client you had considered giving up on?
- A) Yes
- B) No

Strategy for Difficult Clients



The stack

- Big hairy ear
- Brilliant red lips
- Blueprints
- Handshake
- Bright smiling sun



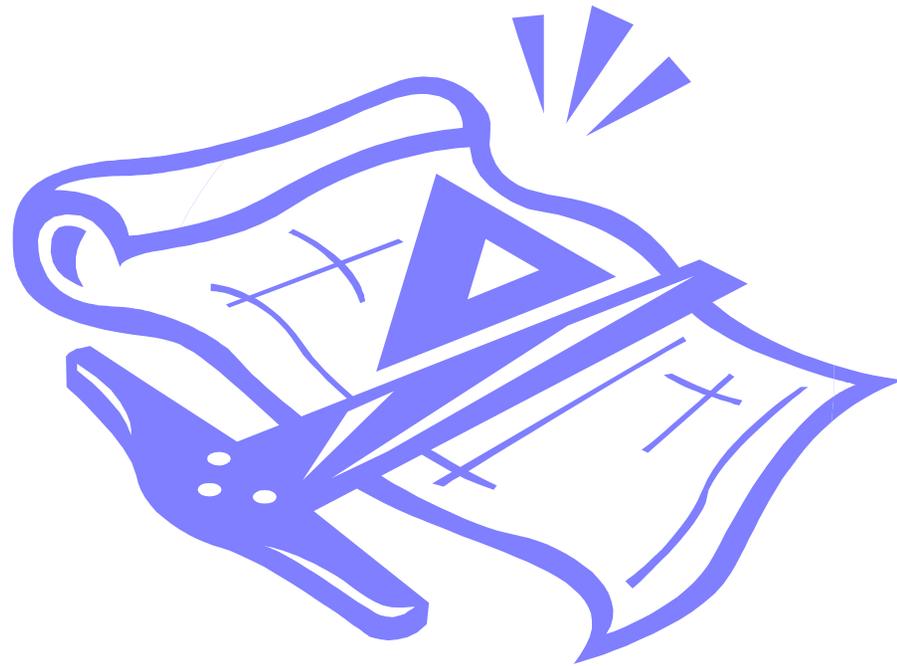
- Hear them out



- Summarize and feed it back



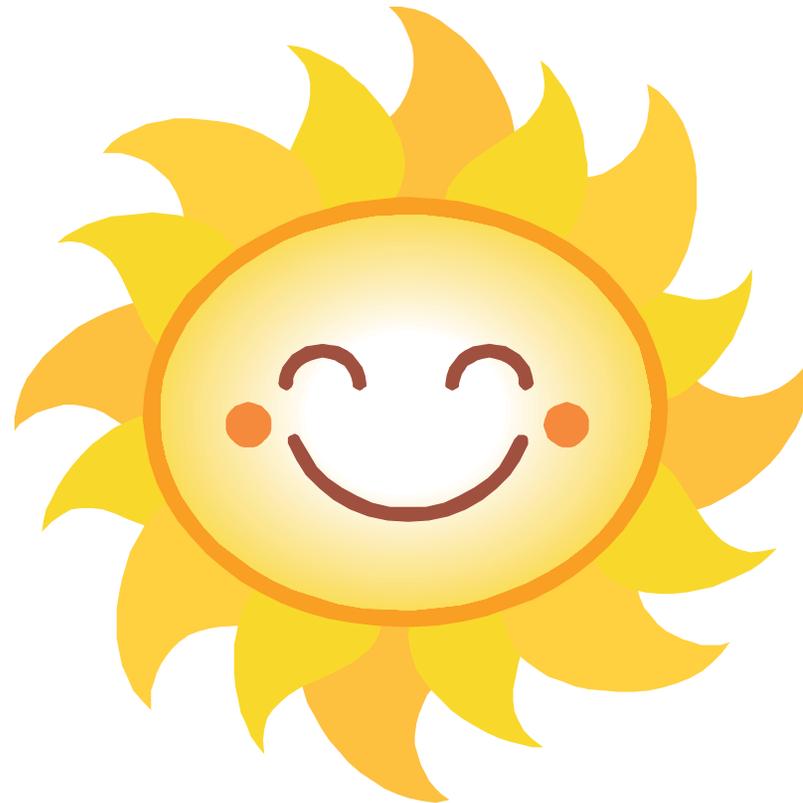
- Make a plan

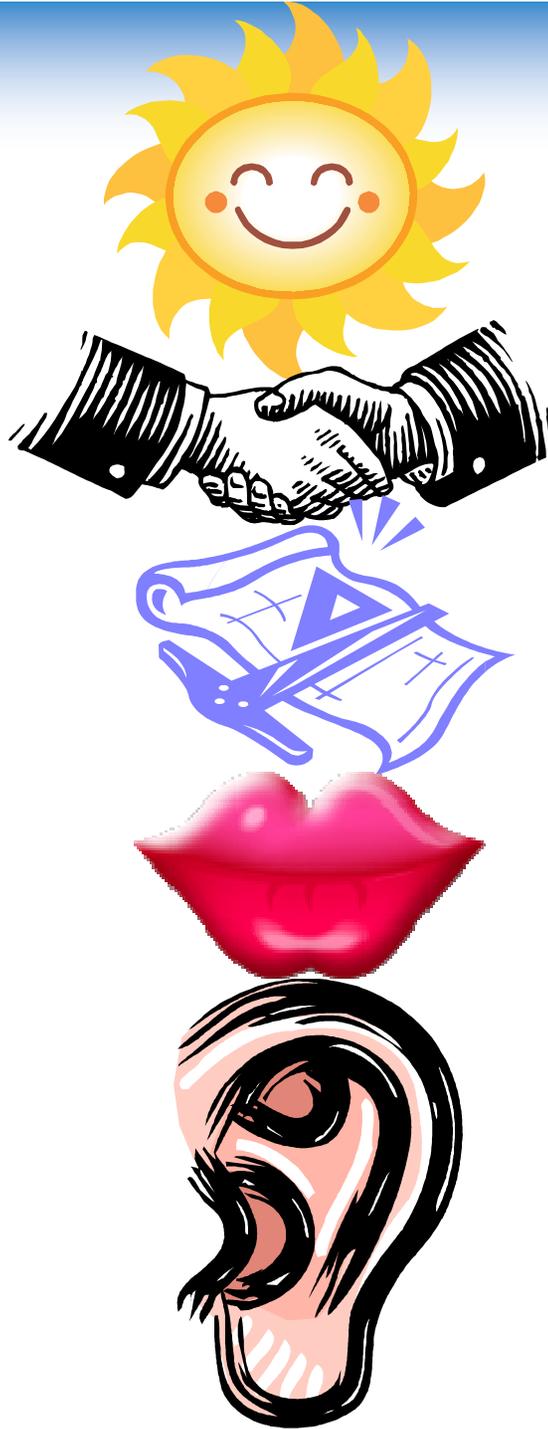


- Confirm agreement



- Under promise and over deliver





Self Check

- How am I reacting?
- Am I taking it personally?
- If I were in their shoes – how would I feel?
- What is my stress level?



Tips

- Q-Tip (quit taking it personally)
- Take time to have a little fun each day
- Control the things you can
- Acknowledge the things you can not
- Know the difference between the two
- Find humor in what you do





Thank You!

NLRC

**Providing Legal Support to the
Aging-Advocacy Network**

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