

Advocacy: It's Not About the Pickle

A modern parable about being an effective advocate, managing your emotions, and staying focused on the real issue and the best practical outcome.

Here are the facts:

- You are at a fair and you are very hungry.
- You have three choices of food vendors and only \$4.00 left to spend.
- Harry's Dogs sells nothing but hot dogs and you are allergic to hot dogs.
- Stella's Hot Lunch sells a wide variety of dinners, but the least expensive item on the menu is \$5.00.
- Jack's Burger Grill is selling hamburgers for \$3.00 each; the price is right and a hamburger sounds good.

You go to Jack's counter and ask for a hamburger "with everything." Jack smiles and says, "I can give you a hamburger with catsup, mustard, lettuce, onion, tomato, and mayonnaise, but it's been a very busy day and I just ran out of pickles." Will that be okay?"

How do you respond?

Response #1 I'm Ready for a Fight: You can give into frustration and go from hungry to hostile in zero to sixty. Your temper takes over and you call Jack a "burger-flipping-moron" (or something even more colorful). You can berate him at the top of your lungs for his failure to adequately plan for an adequate number of pickles, and you can say, "how dare you try to sell me a less than PERFECT hamburger" and walk away in a huff. You will, however, still be hungry and out of options.

Response #2 Everybody Is Conspiring Against Me: You can think that Jack reminds you of someone who slighted you once, and immediately jump to the conclusion that Jack actually has pickles and has intentionally decided to withhold them from you out of sheer spite. You can accuse him of saving the pickles for people who are richer than you are, more influential than you are, and better-looking than you are, and walk away without the burger, shouting that pickles or no pickles you wouldn't stoop to buying a burger from him if it was the last burger on earth. You are still hungry and out of options.

Response #3 Poor Me, I Never Get What I Want: You can immediately begin to feel sorry for yourself because you believe you never get the hamburger you deserve. You think you are always the one who has to take less than you wanted—and even though you decide to accept the hamburger (although less than graciously) you continue to dwell on all the condition mistakes that have ever happened to you or anyone you know. You become so wrapped up in remembering every time your bun was improperly toasted, that you forget to eat the hamburger until it's cold. Then you begin to complain that it must not have been cooked correctly because it didn't stay hot long enough—"things like this always happen to me."

Response #4 I'm Unhappy and Everybody Is Going to Suffer With Me: You can immediately begin to criticize Jack's burger-making

ability and tell him that if he can't offer you a burger with "everything," you expect him to give you a discount. How could you be expected to pay full price when there are no pickles? Jack politely responds that all condiments are included in the price, and pickles do not cost extra, but he is willing to take 50 cents off the price to make a customer happy. You rather ungraciously mumble that it should be at least a dollar discount, and take the burger. You can only eat a few bites because the whole exchange left a big knot in your stomach. Jack doesn't feel very good about the whole encounter either.

Response #5 I'm Mad and I'm Not Letting

Go: You can become sullen and sarcastic declare at length how much you like pickles, how much you have always liked pickles, and how pathetic a hamburger is without pickles. You can reminisce about how all the really great hamburgers you have ever eaten had pickles, and grudgingly accept the pickle-less hamburger, but make it clear to Jack and everyone else in hearing distance that you will not be able to enjoy it and you have somehow been cheated by the transaction. You eat the burger, but make the rest of the day unpleasant for yourself and everyone else because you continue to complain about the lack of pickles.

Response #6 This is an Acceptable Option:

You can think for a moment, rationally consider the relative contribution that the pickle makes to the whole hamburger experience and politely ask Jack if he could substitute a leaf of lettuce or, perhaps, a jalapeño pepper instead. You accept the hamburger with a pickle substitution graciously, it satisfies your hunger, and you can enjoy the rest of the day.

Response #7 I Can Be Satisfied with This:

You can think for a moment, rationally consider the relative contribution that the pickle makes to the whole hamburger experience and decide that its absence does not significantly diminish

your potential enjoyment of the hamburger. You can accept the pickle-less hamburger graciously, it satisfies your hunger, and you can enjoy the rest of the day.

Response #8 This is the Best I Can Do Here and Now:

You can think for a moment, rationally consider the relative value of the pickle and the fact that you are extremely hungry. You determine that Jack has made you the best offer he can at this particular time and has, in fact, come very close to completely fulfilling your "with everything" request. He is willing and able to fully address the issue of your hunger. You decide to graciously accept the burger with a smile and a "Thank You." The hamburger not only satisfies your hunger, but you enjoy it immensely, and realize that it might be fun to try different condiment combinations in the future.

- Do any of the responses remind you of people or situations you have encountered?
- Do you see how your advocacy style can impact the outcome—for you and for others?
- Which response would you choose?
- And the big question: What is the real issue?

IT'S REALLY NOT ABOUT THE PICKLE. Often, the real issue isn't the thing you get bogged down in arguing about. In this case, the issue was simply to get something to eat—something that was appropriate to satisfy your hunger, available to you now, and within your current financial means. It was never really about the pickle, but if you choose to make it about the pickle, you may miss your chance to resolve the real issue and get what you want or need. You may, in fact, end up getting so caught up in disappointment or hurt feelings that you turn down the solution that was almost everything you wanted and end up in a never-ending pursuit of some unimportant detail that has become unreasonably important to you—even though it won't really get you to your real advocacy goal. It's not about the pickle.

Access Info: It's Not About the Pickle