

Language of Attitude

By Anil Shrivastava 'Musafir'

Do you feel intimidated, humbled and humiliated by your pharmacist? Am I the only one who feels this way? The pharmacist and his crew remind me of the 'Soup-Nazi' of the Seinfeld fame. I have to hold my prescription carefully with both hands and stay at attention by their little counter until someone comes to the window.

A drugstore is usually operated by a crew of four people. One person is a pharmacist who stays secluded on his throne, one person is always on the phone while two others pretend to be too busy to attend to customers.

It happened to me again today. After five minutes of waiting, someone finally came to the counter. Her eyes were filled with antagonism, coldness and inhospitality which, probably, are the prerequisites for the job. I presented my prescription to the omnipotent and bowed to her with respect. She looked at the prescription and asked for hundredth time, "Have you ever had the prescription filled here before?"

"Yes, this place is like my second home. I have every disease known to the humankind. I come here at least twice a day and wait all day long for my medicines. I only go home to sleep. Thanks for your kindness; I haven't seen my wife in daylight for years and yet she recognizes me. How come you don't?" I unloaded my frustration on her.

"It will be two hours," she replied wryly and walked back to the center of the enclosure. My words had no meaning for her.

"Why two hours? You have filled this prescription at least twenty times for me before. I can see the medicine right in front of my eyes and it has the correct number of capsules in the container. Why can't you just grab it and hand it over to me?" I pleaded in frustration.

"The pharmacist will talk to you when he is free," she snapped at me and walked away like a lioness about to devour her prey. I dread seeing a pharmacist. That reminds me of going for a flogging in a Catholic school. Father Lawler, who was my school principal and the pharmacists are my biggest nightmares.

The pharmacist came to the window after fifteen minutes. "What can I do for you?" He asked in an unconcerned manner.

"Why do I have to wait here two hours for my refill?" I asked gathering my courage.

"Well, as you can see, we are very busy around here," he answered succinctly.

"What are you busy for? I do not see many customers around. Moreover, there are four of you in this cage. Why can't one of you just hand me the medicine?" I was determined to do or die.

"That's not the way things are done here. We have to look at your medical history and all other medicines that you take and make sure that this medicine is right for you," he tried to play one-upmanship on me.

"But my doctor already has my medical history. He manages my medicine. I have paid my dues to him by spending one third of my diseased life in his office in a flimsy gown. He knows what is right for me. That is why he gave me this prescription. As far as you are concerned, you have been dispensing the same medicines to me for years. What is there for you to check and why do I have to wait for another two hours to get my refill?" I demanded an explanation.

"Do you want an explanation?" The pharmacist became aggressive.

"Want? I not only I want it. I insist on getting one!" I decided to stick to my rights.

"There is no law that forces pharmacists to fill prescriptions right away. As a matter of fact, I don't think pharmacists should have to fill prescriptions for insensitive people like you at all." The pharmacist was determined to have an all out war with me.

"I can take you to the court. I can sue you, if you deny me my prescribed medicines." I tried to threaten him.

"Yes, I can deny. I can prove that the drug you want interacts negatively with another one. No court of law would want to be responsible for this kind of liability. It's part of our checks and balances with patient care in this country and this is the only power we can exert on hapless people like you and I intend to exert that power."

"Do you know that you have an attitude?" I was exhausted by listening to his lecture.

"Yes, I know! That is one of the prerequisites of getting into this occupation. In other professions aptitude is the key, but you need an attitude and not the aptitude to go into this field. We are screened to make sure that we have a negative attitude towards the patients. Our selection is very rigorous. We are tested for derogatory and cynical behavior and only the best in the class are chosen to apply for this profession. It is not easy being a pharmacist, after all."

"Thank you! Can I get my medicine now?" I was humbled.

"You will have to wait for another two hours now." The pharmacist returned to his throne just like the 'Soup-Nazi.' I walked away meekly to the magazine stand and gazed at air-brushed, made-up and contrived face of Oprah smiling at me for a millionth time.