

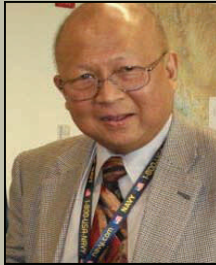


Because of the recent passing of Al Wong, a retired TSA Customer Service Representative from Phoenix, AZ, I was forwarded this article and picture. His advise on dealing with passengers and their prohibited items is right on target. Take a few minutes to think about how you deal with these issues, and see if Mr. Wong's guidance can assist you in the way you handle these difficult situations.

“CHARMING DENIAL”

Submitted by Al Wong, Retired TSA Customer Service Representative

A sure sign of professionalism is the ability to say “NO” without offending or antagonizing those you address. It is also a sign of maturity. And it does not take a lot of scholarship, not a lot of authoritarian posturing, but it gets results more effectively. At times, our job requires us to decline or deny clearance to those who are interacting with us. There are several techniques that can be used to reduce the pain and even to eliminate it altogether. Negative interactions are inevitable but don't have to be excruciating to the parties on either side of the situation. Recognizing that most of our encounters at a passenger or baggage checkpoint are time-sensitive, good technique is important in minimizing the impact these interactions may have on your workload. Brief and effective are the keywords to follow.



1. **Tone of Voice**: Your tone speaks more than your words, there is never any good reason to use an aggressive or offensive tone. Our mission is to protect the traveling public, if we are causing them distress then the other side has won the battle because we have failed our mission – it means that we have failed to protect the public from us. . . .

2. **Offer Options**: Most times there are options available to the passenger, some of them may not be acceptable but that becomes their decision and not ours; for example, when discovering liquids that exceed allowed quantities, you offer the option to go to the non-sterile public side to mail the item – but the passenger may not have enough time to do it, then the decision to change flights or surrender the item is his or hers.

3. **Empathize**: Be understanding, not accusatory. Humans may forget and, at times, even those who know the rules well may not be fully aware that they are carrying something that goes against the rule. Those that are trying to play the system, are losers the moment you discover their item – there is no need to gloat or to make them feel worse. If their only crime is to carry a minor prohibited item through, you have done your job and delivered a powerful message in discovering it – there is no need to go further, we are not in the business of penalizing people, our charter does not allow us to do so. If there is a need for penalties, then call a LEO or write an incident report for the ASI's to pursue the matter.

4. **Irate Moments**: If the person you are screening begins to get offensive, loud or irrational, it is time to pause. Do not let them bait you into reaching their anger level because then you become a loser as well. As a professional, you need to stand above them. Talk to your supervisors, managers, other officers, about their experiences. Learn from those who have been in those shoes before. But always stay at your high level – if the situation is affecting your screening

activity, stop and get help from the Lead or Supervisor. Do not respond in kind, and, at times, it is best not to respond at all. Just stop what you are doing, let the person know that you cannot complete the screening because you recognize they are unhappy with what you are doing, ask them to wait until someone else becomes available to help them. Make sure they do not walk away without getting cleared, and find some else to finish. You may have to assist others in similar situations, but you'll soon see that a change, when properly explained, goes a long way towards diffusing the anger because the persons quickly realize that they are not going anywhere until the process is completed.

5. **Your Name**: When a person requests your name, refusals tend to support their impression that you are not confident of your own actions and you are trying to hide. You can always show the TSA tag to the requester. Generally, those that are interested will find your identity in other ways. If you feel that the passenger may have been right in some ways, talk with your supervisor as soon as possible and write a short but detailed Incident Report to document your experience. Respect: It is all about respect. The Federal Government, TSA, your managers, supervisors, peers and customers all expect that you will perform your duties in a respectful way. Just as you would expect each of them to respect you as well. When the customer does not keep his or her side of the equation, you have options available to bring the situation under control and these options require that you keep your professionalism high and your head clear to see if the concern is legitimate or it is a ruse to draw your attention from something else. When the concern is legitimate, do what ever you can to fix the problem. When it is not legitimate, get support from others who can help you diffuse any escalation. Please remember that disagreement is not disrespect. Disagreement is allowed in our democracy. Disagreement may not always lead to agreement, but cannot be allowed to lead to failed security or failed courtesy or failed respect. The true professional remains respectful no matter what challenges he or she faces. You reach the top of your class when you master the art of handling conflict and disagreement with elegance and professionalism. You learn the way by practicing, by watching and asking others. You will soon notice that even those who challenge you and may not like your decisions can admire the manner in which you handled these situations.

As you get better, you will also see that the challenges are fewer and the disagreements become much easier and faster to resolve.

Best wishes as you continue to take those steps that will enhance your skills and make you a high-caliber professional TSO.