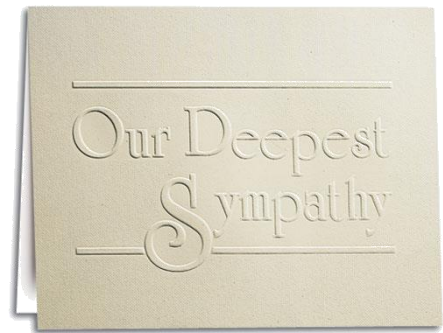


Grow Antennae

A story tells about a Philadelphia legal firm that sent flowers to an associate in Baltimore upon the opening of its new offices.

Through some mix-up, the ribbon that bedecked the floral piece read “*Deepest Sympathy.*”

When the florist was informed of her mistake, she let out a cry of alarm: “Good grief! Then the flowers that went to the funeral said, ‘Congratulations on Your New Location!’”



While the situation is humorous – unless you are one of the parties involved – it is a reminder that it is difficult to offer comfort without mixing up the sentiment. So difficult, in fact, that many people simply don’t know what to say to someone who has just unburdened grief or emotional pain. Not unlike the new clergyman who – when a distressed young woman confided that she was pregnant – blurted out, “Are you sure it’s yours?”

Steve Goodier, an ordained United Methodist minister and author of numerous books about personal development, motivation and inspiration, writing on the subject, explained: “Too often, we want to help, but find that our attempts to comfort, solace or hope fall short of the mark. But there is something we can say to those who hurt that *can* be helpful and comforting.”

To illustrate, Goodier told how a man whose grandson died accidentally found genuine comfort when he shared his pain with friends shortly after the tragedy. Of all the well-meaning words of support, two statements helped to sustain and comfort him through the grief more than the rest. They were: “Thank you for sharing your pain,” and “I grieve with you.”

“After hearing those words, he no longer felt alone in his suffering. He felt as if his friends embraced his grief. He felt better,” Goodier said.

“Thank you for sharing your pain” is an honest acknowledgment of another’s suffering, Goodier added. “It also expresses an appreciation for the effort it takes a wounded soul to open her emotional wounds to others. ‘I grieve with you’ is an expression of empathy. It is a way of saying that I am willing to share some of your pain, even for a time.”

We may never know how someone feels who is hurting in a way we have never experienced. But we can give some comfort.

James Angel, former president of the University of Michigan, was once asked the secret of his success. “The secret of success?” he replied. “Grow antennae, not horns.”