



OAK BAY  
COACHING & CONSULTING



*Making Promises You Can Keep:  
How to Market Homestay*

**Jennifer Robin Wilson**

Languages Canada Conference

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# *Learning Outcomes*



- Review the literature on the benefits of homestay
- Identify the promises we can make
- Summarize the secret to getting referrals
- Develop a story-telling model that speaks to the heart of homestay



# Literature Review: Impact of Homestay



- Homestay is widely believed to be a productive context for language learners abroad, but **this is difficult to prove.**
- One study found links between satisfaction with homestay experience and the amount of language learned
- Variation in language learning may be explained by the skills of the host, the disposition of the student, and the mutual interest in engaging with each other
- Homestay has been shown to help with

# Literature Review: Impact of Homestay



- Despite the complexity of the research findings, Dr. Celeste Kinginger believes homestay offers an advantage over other accommodation options for international students, especially in high school
- Most research has been done on post-secondary students
- Kinginger told me “**homestay experiences are fundamentally different for minors versus adults**”
- Younger students may be at an advantage as the hosts are more likely act *in loco parentis* attending more

# *Impact of Homestay*

“Students who become well integrated into home and school settings can make dramatic gains in language ability and acculturation.”

- **Dr. Kinginger**



## **The Professional Lives of Language Study Abroad Alumni**

A Mixed Methods Investigation



Celeste Kinginger  
and Jingyuan Zhuang

new  
perspectives  
on  
language  
and  
education

# Impact of Homestay



- Founded in 1932 in California
- Sent students to Europe with a mission to foster peace
- In 1933, Dr. Watt conceived the idea of homestay

## Following The Experiment abroad:

92%

Students say their experience influenced their educational choices and was helpful in gaining access to academic programs.

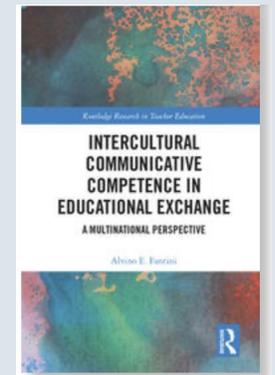
94%

Students say their experience (and the homestay in particular) was helpful in gaining language abilities.

85%

Students say their experience was helpful in gaining employment.

From Dr. Alvino E. Fantini's book, *Intercultural Communicative Competence in Educational Exchange: A Multinational Perspective*, (Routledge, 2019), based on qualitative and quantitative data collected from 2,000+ students of The Experiment and SIT Study Abroad programs.



# *Role of the Host*

- Must welcome their student as “a person of consequence, deserving of access to everyday communicative practices as well as assistance...”
- Approach the experience with cultural humility; be willing to “**negotiate difference**”
- Offer advice and support as the student learns cultural norms and language
- Engage in conversation **over family dinners**
- Understand that it is through language that we learn to appreciate another culture’s values and worldviews, and that





## *Role of the Student*

- Immersion into the social environment does not happen easily and should not be taken for granted.
- Be motivated and willing to invest in relationships and actively seek learning opportunities (esp with locals)
- Cut ties with “virtual” home, eg. social media, friends back home, home-based media
- Be prepared to deal with discomfort and disequilibrium; practice cultural humility
- Participate in family meals and activities. **Let your hosts “parent” you!**
- Get involved in social activities, including sports (shown to help with integration in the host country)

# *Role of the Program*

- Design curriculum that requires students to initiate structured conversations with their host families (Knight and Schmidt-Rinehart (2010))
- Offer opportunities to participate in a variety of communicative settings (Ducate 2009)
- Offer guidance to help student learn from and interpret their experiences (Kinginger 2011)
- Offer training to host families – especially regarding importance of connecting with students, how to negotiate difference, and how to support language learning (Kinginger 2016)
- Ensure students are welcomed and invited to contribute in the classroom (Churchill 2006)
- Collect stories from alumni!



# *Learning Outcomes*



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Disappointment is the gap  
that exists between  
expectation and reality.

John C. Maxwell

# Promises

**We CANNOT guarantee:**

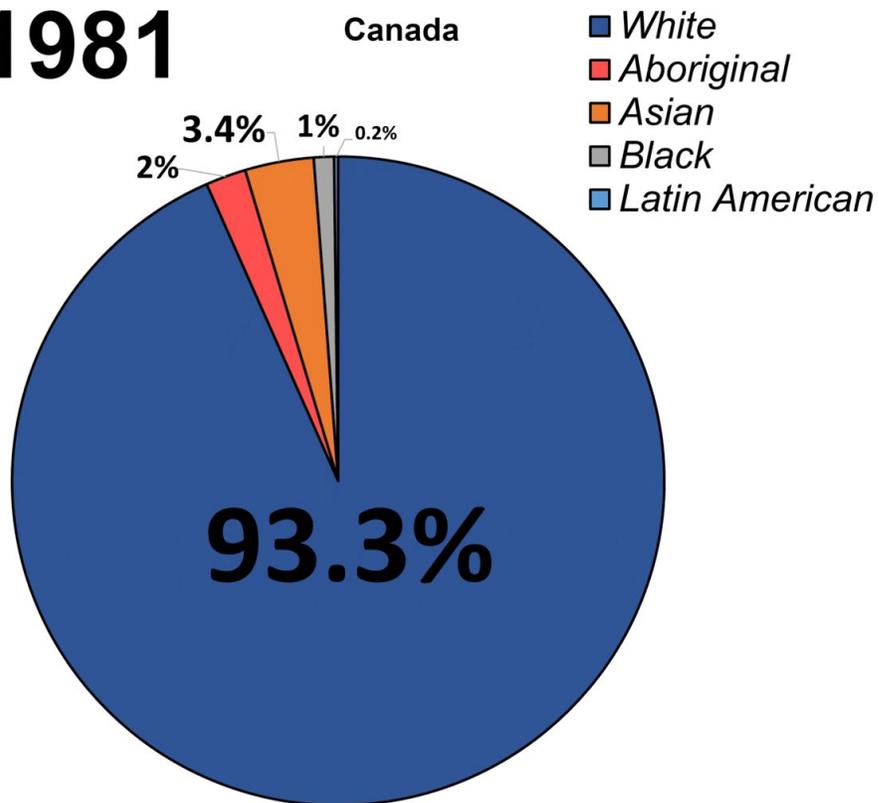
White families

**... but we can guarantee:**

Cultural and language immersion  
(English/ French)

**1981**

Canada



**Top ten spoken languages in Canada**

**2021 census<sup>[f]</sup>**

Language	Percent
English	87.06%
French	29.08%
Chinese <sup>[g]</sup>	4.21%
Hindustani <sup>[h]</sup>	3.24%
Spanish	3.22%
Punjabi	2.59%
Arabic	2.31%
Tagalog	2.03%
Italian	1.51%
German	1.15%

# Promises

<b>We CANNOT guarantee:</b>	<b>... but we can guarantee:</b>
Students will get all their preferences met	If students apply early, they have a better chance of getting their top priority preference met



# *Promises*

## **We CANNOT guarantee:**

Students will be comfortable.

## **... but we can guarantee:**

Discomfort comes hand-in-hand with learning, and it is valuable. Most likely, students will come to appreciate challenging their preconceived notions about culture (theirs and their hosts').

The constraints and rules of life in homestay are there to keep students safe and help them learn and adapt.

# *Promises*



**We CANNOT guarantee:**

Student success

**... but we can guarantee:**

Better outcomes if students approach the experience with humility, an interest in their hosts, and a willingness to push themselves out of their comfort zone.

# Promises

## We CANNOT guarantee:

How hosts will behave.

## ... but we can guarantee:

We will work with students, parents, and agents to mediate any issues, and we will relocate students in accordance with our policies.

\*\*Customers want justice and fairness.

- Right outcome
- Right process
- Right interaction

Problems are a chance to show the customer how valuable they are.

# *Learning Outcomes*



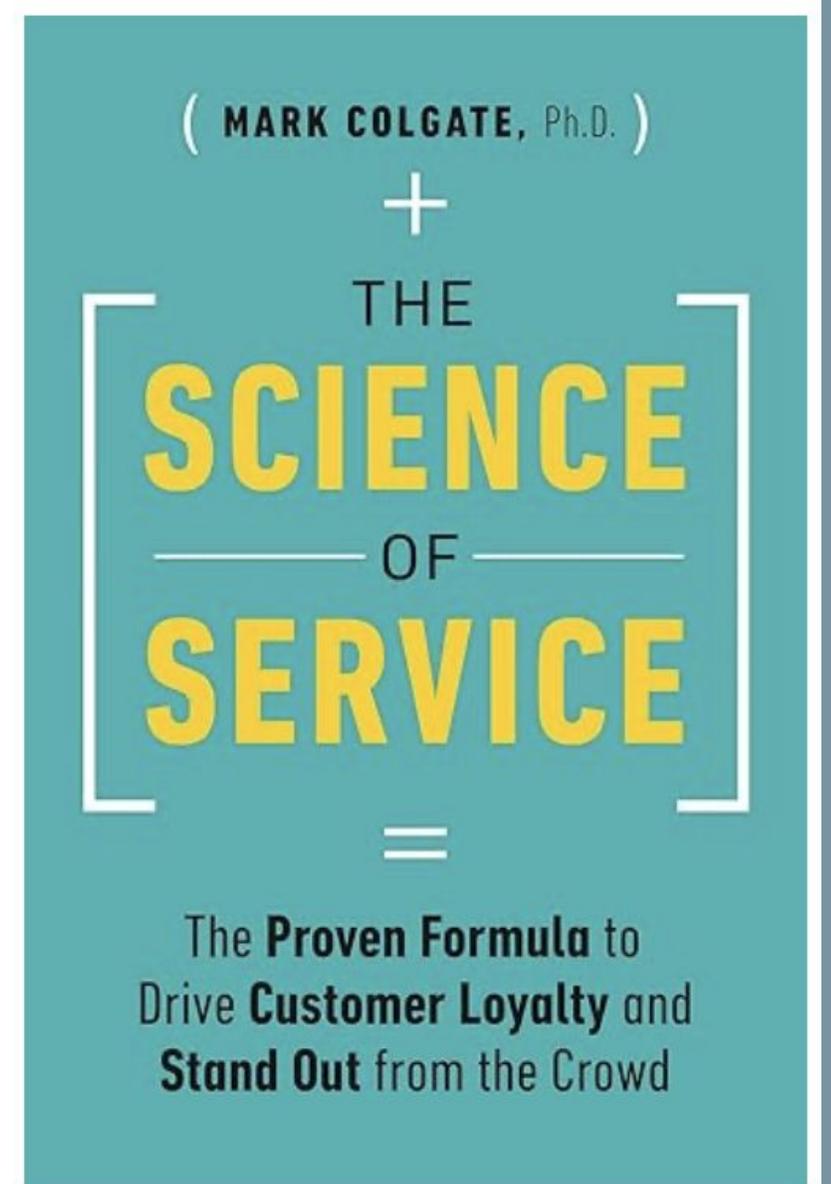
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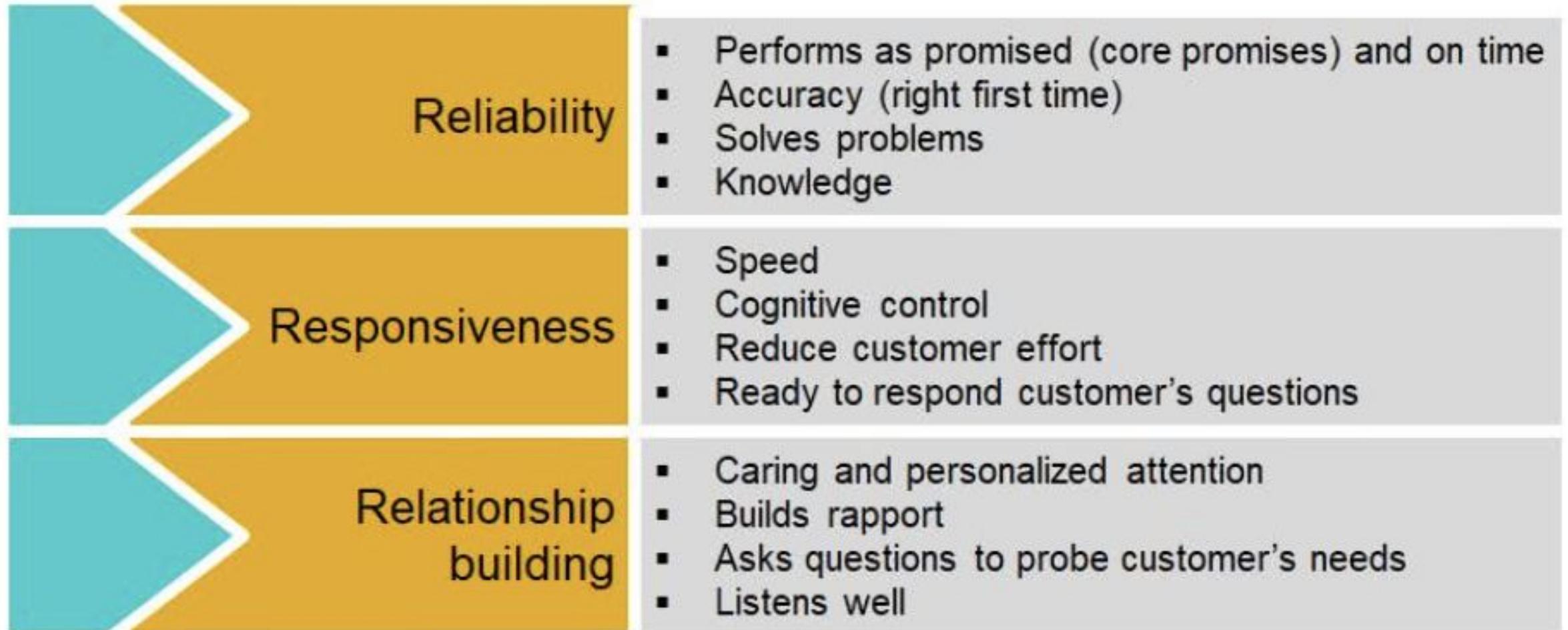
# *Research on Customer Service*

How would you rank these, in order of importance to customers?

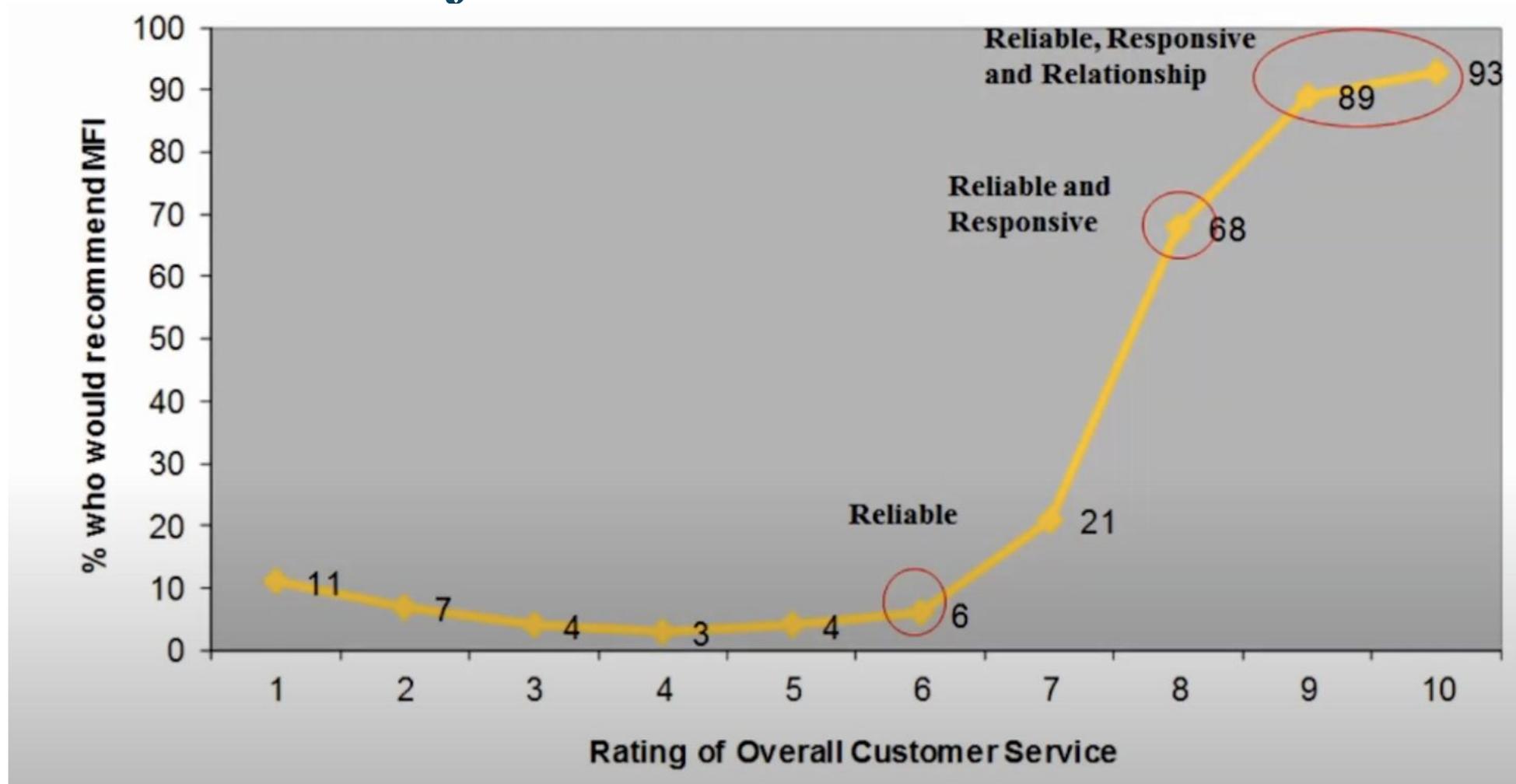
- Responsiveness
- Relationship building
- Reliability



# *The Three Rs of Customer Service*

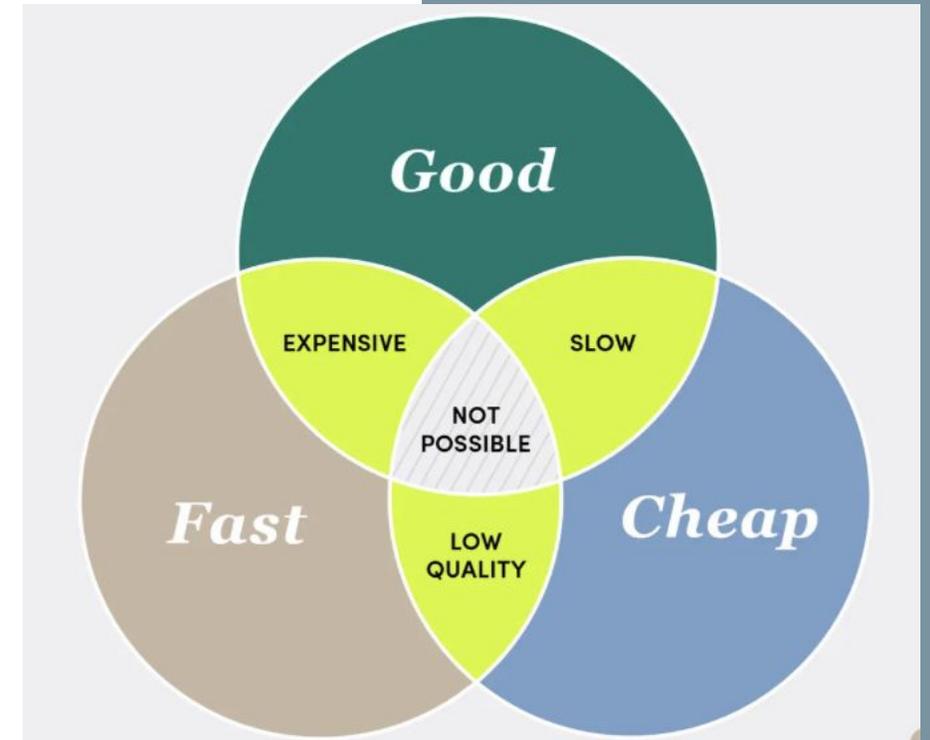


# The Secret to Referrals



# Pricing

Focus on Value: Homestay is not a commodity



# Pricing

## Focus on Value: Homestay is not a

**commodity** can expect you to offer **plenty** of **good**

hosts for a **low price**. And—even with higher prices, capacity has always been a challenge, especially in a post-COVID world.

- There are no winners when we compete on price.
- Don't be afraid to advocate for your hosts; homestay is a crucial part of the student's overall experience.
- Consider package pricing: tuition + homestay.
- Consider offering discounts on your total package (not homestay) on some quid pro quo like early registrations, volume targets, or prepayments.
- People want to feel like they are getting value for their money. **What do they value most?**



# Pricing

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## Good

- Base price
- No frills
- Eg. farther away, relocations for a fee, no preferences, no allergies, etc.



## Better

- The benchmark



## Best

- Extraordinary features
- Eg. premium location, special diet, English/French tutoring in the home, private bath, etc.

# Pricing

Your price should never be the foundation of your relationship with your customer.

AND

It never pays to be afraid of your customer's reaction to price.



# *Learning Outcomes*



- Review the literature on the benefits of homestay
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- **Develop a story-telling model that speaks to the value of homestay**



# *Storytelling*

Stories are simulations that allow us to:

- vicariously experience situations we haven't had to face yet, and
- imagine what it will feel like and how we would behave.



“Feelings don’t  
just matter.  
Feelings are what  
mattering means.”

- Daniel Gilbert, Harvard  
psychology professor

# Storytelling

Stories translate big ideas, dry facts, and abstract concepts into specific scenarios.

They allow us to make better decisions by engaging our emotions.

Emotion isn’t the monkey wrench in the system. ***Emotion is the system.***

# Storytelling

Stories show others who we are:

- We are fellow learners, in a journey of discovery of our common humanity;
- We are members of a family that bridges ignorance, language, culture and social divides;
- Our values are X, and we will live by them, even under duress



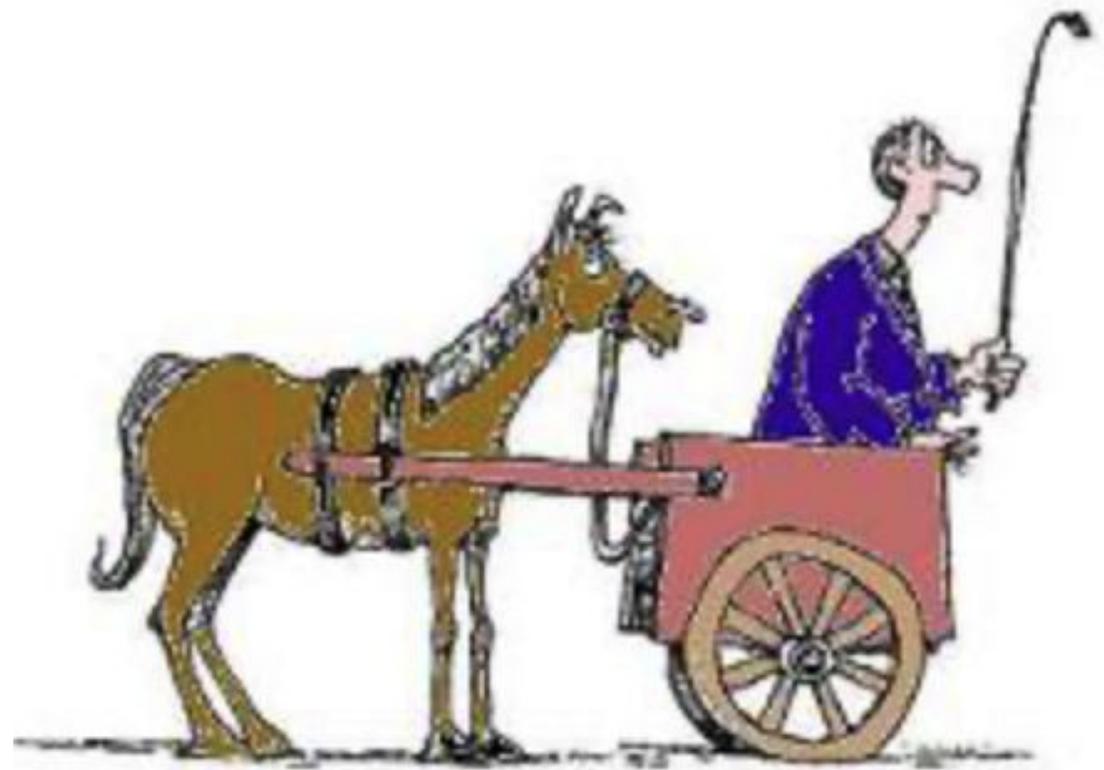
# Story Structure

= The sequence of external events that occur in the story... also called the plot.



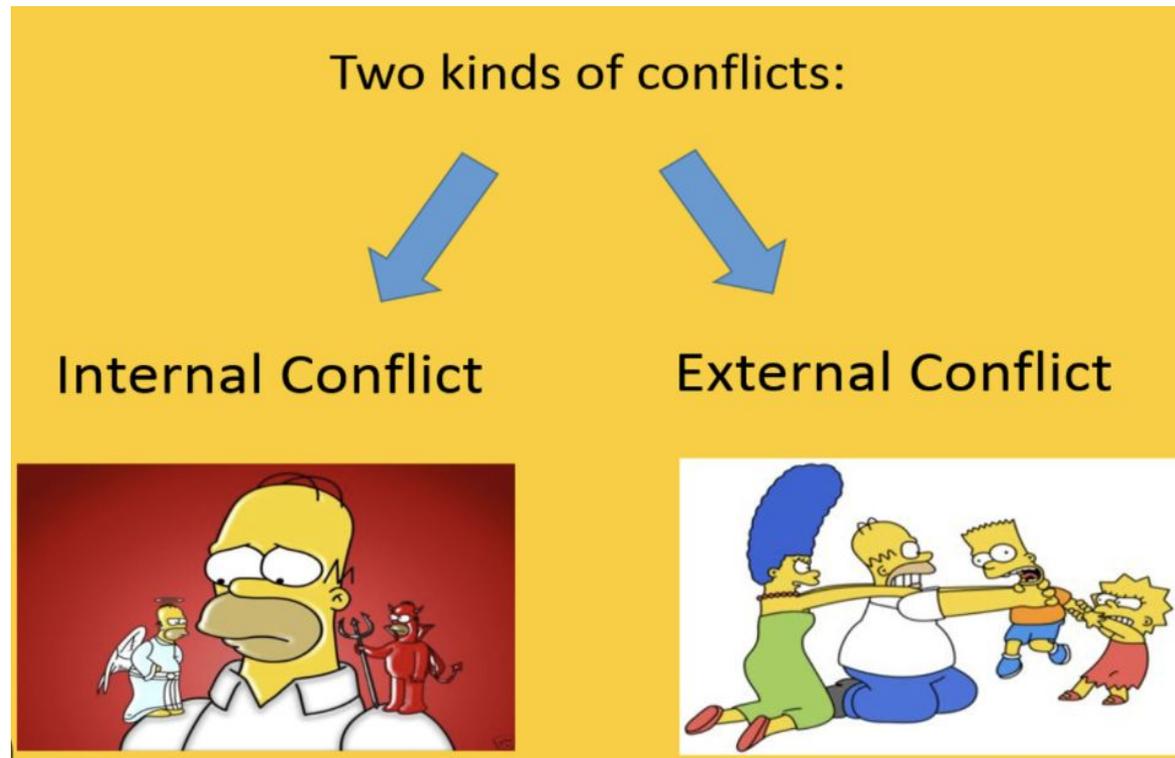
# *What is your story about?*

- Hint: It's NOT the plot.



# *What is your story about?*

- It's about how the things that happen **affect** someone.



# *Plot vs Story*



WHA  
T



WH  
Y

## *Ask WHY:*

- Why will this matter to your agent, student, natural parent?
- What are they afraid of, worried about, struggling with? What's holding them back? What's the problem or challenge they're facing?
- What will make them remember their time happily (wistfully / fondly / forever) after it's over and they are back at home?
- **What do they value most?**

*You have to change the way someone feels about a thing  
in order to change their mind about it.*



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# *Morgan in Paris*





# *Homesickness*

- Beginning:
  - Who, when, what
- Middle:
  - Mounting obstacles
  - The ordeal
- End:
  - The reward
  - Lessons learned

Parents value your ability to relate to their experience. They want to know they can trust you.

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# *What are your stories?*



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## **What happened?**

- The plot: Who? What? When? Where?
  - Use a simple sequence: “One day... after that... eventually... at last...” to track the beginning, middle, and end
- What did the main character want?
- What stood in their way?

## **Why does it matter?**

- How did your character overcome their obstacles?
- How did they change?

## **Additional Tips**

- Use vivid details to bring it alive
- Pace yourself
- Engage with your audience: allow for

# *Final Thoughts*

- Use stories to convey the value you offer and that homestay offers, and to address parent and agent concerns
- Use photos of diverse families and modest homes in your marketing materials
- Include a preferences ranking tool in your application forms
- Remind agents and NPs that students will be uncomfortable, and will need to approach this experience with a willingness to learn, engage, and stretch themselves; it's not all on the hosts and the program to ensure success
- Remind agents and NPs that hosts are 'independent contractors,' not professional service providers. While you cannot guarantee their actions, you **can** guarantee your responsiveness. It takes time to develop trust.
- Emphasize your values. Why do you work in international education?
- Try hosting a student yourself! Your personal understanding and experience will fuel your passion, empathy, patience and resilience.

*Thank you!*

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