

5 Things NOT to Do with Upset Customers

Learn exactly what not to do when dealing with upset customers.

A couple of months ago I had a small kitchen fire in my home. All is well now, but for a few days my family and I camped out in a hotel room and once we returned home we had no oven (it was destroyed in the fire) so we were forced to eat every meal out for several days.

On the day of the fire two representatives from the insurance company told me to "Hold on to your meal receipts, send them to us and we'll cover your meals plus sales tax." After the contractors restored my home and we settled back in, I was preparing to mail in my meal receipts for reimbursement and I gave my adjuster a quick call before dropping the envelope of receipts in the mail. He explained that reimbursement was actually for 50% of meals and not 100%. While a partial adjustment made sense to me, I clearly recalled two company representatives promising to "cover meals plus sales tax."

My adjuster became sarcastic and defensive in both his words and tone and said, "No one in this entire company would have told you we cover 100% of meals. Our policy is to cover 50% because you would have been eating even if the fire had not occurred."

I was livid. Now it's no longer about the issue, it's about the principle. So what did I do? I assembled all the facts that supported my case, presented an opening argument to the company's corporate office calmly and methodically, and finally delivered a fervent and succinct summation of my evidence and closed the deal---walking away with 100% of my meal charges.

Here's the lesson here: Had the claims adjuster done and said the right things during my initial phone call, the company would have been able to resolve this problem with a simple explanation and apology. Instead, they paid out nearly \$200 more than they had to and had to spend 10 minutes listening to my case.

This costly scenario is played out countless times every day throughout the service sector because employees don't know how to communicate with upset customers with diplomacy and tact and in such a way that creates calm and goodwill.

In my case, had the claims adjuster responded with, "What we were trying to explain is that your policy covers 50% of your meals plus sales tax. You would have been out of expenses for meals even if you had not experienced the regretful fire. We try to minimize your inconvenience during your loss by covering expenses above and beyond your normal meal expenses. Does this make sense? I'm so sorry for any inconvenience this misunderstanding has caused you."

This approach certainly made sense and I would have very likely accepted the 50% policy. But instead, the claim adjuster's attitude incited me and I was determined to accept nothing but full reimbursement. The wrong approach to an already upset customer only makes them more forceful and often results in a much higher payout from the company. I don't want you to have to pay one dollar more than you absolutely have

to and to help you manage costs better I'll give you 5 things not to do with upset customers.

1. Don't tell a customer they are wrong.

Telling your customer, he is wrong arousing opposition and will make the customer want to battle with you. It's difficult, under even the most benign situations to change people's minds. So why make your job harder by starting out on the wrong foot.

2. Don't argue with a customer.

You can never win an argument with your customers. Certainly, you can prove your point and even have the last word, you may even be right, but as far as changing your customer's mind is concerned, you will probably be just as futile as if you were wrong.

3. Don't speak with authoritative tone as if you have to prove the customer wrong.

Even when the customer is wrong, this is not an appropriate response, as it will put the customer on the defense.

4. Don't say, "We would never do that." Instead try, "Tell me about that."

5. Don't be afraid to apologize.

Offer an apology even when the customer is at fault. An apology is not admission of fault. It can be offered to express regret. For example, "I'm so sorry for any inconvenience this misunderstanding has caused you."

Never forget in problem situations the issue is not the issue. The way the issue is handled becomes the issue.