

Seven Behaviors That Cause Problems with Angry Customers

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1. Telling the customer he or she is wrong.

You will be smart to NEVER tell a customer they are wrong or mistaken. Telling a person, they are wrong arousing opposition and will make the customer want to battle with you. (Ever tell your spouse they are wrong?) It is difficult, under even the most benign conditions to change people's minds. So why make it harder by starting out on the wrong foot? If you know your customer is wrong, it's better to start off saying something like, I thought the contract read otherwise, but let's take look.

2. Arguing with a customer. You must realize you cannot win an argument with a customer. Certainly, you can prove your point and even have the last word. You may 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. Your goal in complaint situations is to retain the customer, not to be right. If you win the argument, you may very well have lost the customer. Think carefully about the response you want to give and ask yourself, Is my reaction one that will relieve the problem, or will it just relieve frustration? Will my reaction drive my customer further away? What price will I pay if I win the argument? The only way to get the best of an argument is to avoid it.

3. Telling a customer to calm down. Certainly, there are times when a calm disposition would make every one's life easier, but telling your customer to calm down is rarely effective. Like you, your customers don't like to be told what to do. Try this approach instead: "Clearly you're upset and I want you to know that getting to the bottom of this is just as important to me as it is to you."

4. Failing to apologize to customers in the wake of problems. One of the easiest and quickest ways to diffuse anger, create rapport, and regain goodwill with unhappy customers is to apologize. Offering an apology to a customer who experiences a problem should be a natural response from customer service providers. Yet, recent research reveals the startling fact that 50% of customers who voice a complaint say they never received an apology.

Not only does an apology give "soft benefits" such as creating calm, shaving minutes off of talk time, less stress on the employee, etc., it can also translate into significant and measurable savings in reduced lawsuits, settlement costs, and defense costs.

An apology does not have to be an admission of fault. It can be offered to express regret. For example, "I'm so sorry for any inconvenience this misunderstanding has caused you."

5. Escalating voice. Avoid the temptation to yell just because your customer is yelling. You don't want to get caught up in their drama. Instead, remain centered and calm, relying on your ability to communicate with diplomacy and professionalism.

6. Not allowing the customer to vent An angry customer can be compared to an erupting volcano. When a volcano is erupting, there is nothing you can do. You can't tame it, can't speed it up, and you can't control it. It must erupt. But erupting volcanoes eventually subside. Your angry customer who is intensely emotional is the same way. He must erupt (that is express his anger through venting). You can't tame the customer, you must simply let him vent. After briefly venting, most angry customers will begin to calm down. Let your customers vent.

7. Proclaiming to the customer: This is all I can do. You are there to help. Give your customer options and look for every way you can help.