

Top 6 Things Not to Do with Angry Customers

Avoid these common pitfalls when dealing with tough customers.

1. Don't make threats. Have you ever said this, "If you don't calm down, I'm not going to help you." Or, "If you continue to yell at me, I'm going to have no choice but to terminate this phone call." If you've ever made these, or similar, statements, I'd bet that your sole intent was to regain control of the conversation. But the problem is, your customer perceives this type of language as threatening and it does not make them back down and it does not create calm. Try a phrase like this instead: "I really want to help you, but your tone/language is making it really hard for me to do that." And then pause for 2-3 seconds to let your words resonate with the customer.

2. Don't argue. Trust me on this one - you can never win an argument with a customer. Certainly, you can prove your point and even have the last word, In a discussion on the futility of arguing with people, Dale Carnegie once said "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. Carnegie encourages us to carefully consider some hard questions before going to battle with customers: "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)?" Carnegie advises, "The only way to get the best of an argument is to avoid it." By the way, customers will spread negative word-of-mouth advertising to 50 people if they get into argument with you!

3. Don't hang up on the customer. I realize I sound conservative on this one, but I stand firm. If you hang up on a customer who is already livid, do you think a "disconnect" helps the situation or hurts the situation? The customer still has the problem and most customers won't give up their fight because you chose to hit the flash button. Most will call back and guess what? They will be angrier than ever AND it will cost far more in time and money to resolve the issue. If you just can't handle the customer, offer to transfer to a supervisor or co-worker.

4. Don't make the customer feel helpless. I cringe every time I hear an employee say, "This is all I can do." When customers feel helpless, some will resort to whatever they feel it takes to get their needs met. This behavior may include yelling, demanding to speak to a supervisor, or starting a blog about your company. This simple phrase changes the entire tone of a tough situation: "Mr. Bryant, what I can do is?"

5. Don't raise your voice. When I want my five-year-old daughter to use her "inside voice", I don't yell, "Lauren, USE YOUR INSIDE VOICE!" I speak in my "inside voice" with the expectation that she will mirror the calm tone of my voice - and she does without any further prompting from me. We must use the same technique with demanding customers. Escalating your voice when dealing with an upset customer will not create calm. It will only incite your customer. Lowering your voice presents you as confident, in control, and credible. In many cases your angry customer will begin to calm down because he realizes his intimidation tactic (yelling) isn't working. Try making one

of these statements in a low volume when dealing with an angry customer. "What can I do to help?" or "What can I do to fix this situation?"

6. Don't tell a customer she is wrong. You will be smart to never tell a customer s/he is wrong or mistaken. Telling a person, they are wrong arouses opposition and will make the customer want to battle with you. (Ever tell your spouse they are wrong?) It's 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, "I thought the contract read otherwise, but let's take a look."

The next time you find yourself the target of verbal abuse from an angry customer, keep in mind these six "don'ts" and you'll be well on your way to getting the angry customer to back down and regaining control of the conversation.