

Top 7 Things You Must Know Before Dealing with Your Next Difficult Customer

Some customers are just plain difficult. They are always complaining, they are picky, know-it-alls, egocentric, faultfinders, constant complainers, unreasonable, demanding you know these customers. Here are 7 insights that will help you gain the upper hand with difficult customers and ultimately regain their goodwill.

1. Anger precludes rationality.

Angry customers simply cannot rationalize. This is because they are so wrapped up in the emotion of anger that everything you say is filtered through their emotions. Anger is an emotion and emotions are experienced in the right side of the brain. Rationalizing, problem solving, listening, and negotiating are all left-brain activities and your angry customer is stuck in the right side of the brain, and therefore cannot be expected to rationalize with you.

2. Anger must be acknowledged.

It's not productive for you to ignore anger or tiptoe around it. There is something known as the communication chain. When people communicate, they expect the person or persons they are communicating with to respond or react this response or reaction is a link in the communication chain. A failure to respond to communication leaves the communication chain unlinked broken. For example, If I walk into my office and say... Hello Sherry, how are you?and she says absolutely nothing, she's broken the communication chain. And that leaves me feeling awkward, perhaps embarrassed.

If a customer expresses anger and we fail to respond to it, the communication chain is broken and the customer feels like they are not getting through, that you are not listening. So, the customer may speak louder to make his or her point. They might become even angrier and more difficult, as they are resorting to whatever it takes to feel heard and understood. You can keep your angry customers from getting angrier by acknowledging their anger and responding to it. You can respond to anger with a statement like, 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. This statement directly and professionally addresses anger without- making the customer even angrier. Now that the anger has been acknowledged, you have completed the communication chain.

3. First, diffuse anger. Research has shown that an approach to problem solving that emphasizes anger diffusion first results in a lesser payout by the company. If you first work to diffuse anger and then move into problem solving, you will find that communication is much easier/because your customer is able to really listen to you. Problem resolution is now possible because your customer is calm and in the position to rationalize. Beginning the problem-solving process before addressing and diffusing anger makes your job much harder because your customer is emotional and not able to fully rationalize. If you do attempt to solve the problem or negotiate, you will almost

always have to offer more to satisfy the customer than you would if you had successfully first diffused anger.

Now that you know that anger precludes rationality and that anger has to be responded to, make sure you don't ignore the customer's expression of anger and that you always work to diffuse anger and create calm before beginning the problem resolution process. When you do this, you'll quickly find yourself responding to anger with much more ease and confidence

4. The issue is not the issue in conflict situations, the issue at hand is not usually the real issue. The way the issue is handled becomes the real issue. What really matters to customers is not the \$2 overcharge or the fact their order for cranberry red paint is actually holly berry red. What does matter is how the company responds and resolves the issue. That becomes the real issue.

5. Ventilation is crucial.

An Angry customer can be compared to an erupting volcano. When a volcano is erupting, there is nothing you can do about it. You can't speed up the eruption, you can't put a lid on it, and you cannot direct or redirect it it must erupt. When a customer is angry, they must experience and express their anger through venting. We should not interrupt them or tell them to calm down. This would be as futile as trying to tame a volcano. A volcano erupts and eventually subsides. Your angry customer will vent and eventually calm down.

6. An apology works.

An apology makes the angry customer feel heard and understood. It diffuses and anger and allows you to begin to re-establish trust. Not only that, but pilot studies have found that the mere act of apologizing has reduced lawsuits, settlement, and defense costs. You need to apologize to customers regardless of fault. Certainly, the apology needs to be carefully worded. Here's an example of a sincere, yet careful apology:

Please accept my sincere and unreserved apology for any inconvenience this may have caused you.

7. 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. The only way to get the best of an argument is to avoid it.

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