

Show customers that you care

Use these ideas to deal with difficult clients

WHEN was the last time you had to deal with a difficult customer? Was it an external customer or an internal one such as a member of your team, a colleague or even your boss?

I'm sure that you always want to provide exceptional service to both your internal and external customers. However, in the real world, things go wrong and mistakes are made.

These "customers" will often judge your level of service based on how you respond to a mistake. Do it well and they will probably forgive you and possibly even say positive things about your business or your abilities to other people.

The important thing to realise when dealing with an upset customer, whether an internal or external one, is that you must first deal with his feelings, then deal with his problem.

Upset customers are liable to have strong feelings when you, your product or service lets them down and they will probably want to unleash these feelings on you.

Here are five ways to deal with upset or difficult customers:

1 DON'T LET THEM GET TO YOU

Stay out of the problem emotionally and concentrate on listening non-defensively and actively. Customers may make disparaging and emotional remarks — don't take the bait and bite back.

2 LISTEN, LISTEN AND LISTEN

Look and sound like you are listening. The customer wants to know that you

care and that you are interested in their problem. So maintain eye contact and make affirmative noises like "Mm" and "uh-huh".

3 STOP SAYING SORRY

"Sorry" is an overused word. Everyone says it when something goes wrong and it has lost its value. How often have you heard, "Sorry about that, give me the details and I'll sort this out for you".

It is far better to say: "I apologise for ..." And if you really need to use the sorry word, make sure to include it as part of a full sentence. "I'm sorry you haven't received that information as promised, Mr Smith." It is also good practice to use the customer's name in a difficult situation.

4 EMPATHISE

Using empathy is an effective way to deal with the customer's feelings. Empathy isn't about agreement; it is the acceptance of what the customer is saying and feeling. Basically the message is, "I understand how you feel".

Obviously, this has to be a genuine response. If the customer realises you are being insincere, he will feel patronised — and become angrier!

Examples of empathic responses are: "I can understand that you're angry", or "I see what you mean".

5 BUILD RAPPORT

Sometimes, it is useful to add another phrase to the empathic response, including putting yourself in the picture. If you say: "I can understand how you feel, I don't like it



Customers are primarily driven by their emotions. - Bloombergpic

either when I'm kept waiting", this has the effect of getting on the customer's side and building rapport.

Some customer service people are concerned with this response as they believe it will lead to the question: "Why don't you do something about it then?" The majority of customers won't respond this way if they realise that you are a reasonable and caring person.

If a customer does say that, continue empathising and then tell him what you will do about the situation. Say things like: "I'll report this to my manager" or "I'll do my best to ensure it doesn't happen in the future."

Customers are primarily driven by their emotions. It is therefore important to use human responses in any interaction, particularly when a customer is upset or angry. If

customers like you and feel that you care, then they are more likely to accept what you say and forgive your mistakes. - Source: ST/ANN

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