

A Baker's Dozen

Tips For Handling Difficult Callers

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1. As you listen to an upset customer, try to identify central ideas, as well as specific facts. This isn't easy since upset customers are not necessarily logical.
2. While the customer is talking, take notes. It will save you from asking the customer to repeat the information later on. Consciously keep an open mind. Avoid judging motives or analyzing.
3. When you take a call, make sure you are ready. Eliminate any distractions to listening. Visual distractions are four times more powerful than auditory distractions. If possible, position yourself so that your back is to the corridor.
4. Pay attention to the verbal and vocal signals of the customer, as well as to your own signals. They will help you to stay in control and better understand the caller.
5. Acknowledging the customer's concerns will diffuse the situation. You will also build rapport with the customer. Anytime you detect that the customer is upset, you should apologize. You can't overdo it. Remember you are apologizing for any inconvenience the customer experienced. You are not automatically apologizing for a mistake you made.
6. Acknowledgements work best at the beginning of the call when you get a sense that the customer is upset or having a problem. Avoid the temptation to launch immediately into fact-finding.
7. Acknowledgements that are meaningful are specific. *Okay* is not a sufficient acknowledgement.
8. Avoid saying *but* or *however* after an acknowledgement. It negates what you have just said.
9. Ask questions to verify and make sure you have all the facts. Do not *close* open-ended questions by giving the customer choices.
10. Be careful not to ask too many questions or the same question more than once. Customers begin to feel like they are being interrogated.
11. When you ask questions, always say *please*. It shows respect.
12. Paraphrase what you have heard to make sure that what you have heard is what the customer is expecting. Make sure to ask the customer if there is anything more he or she would like to add.
13. Know when to be flexible on policies or deadlines. Offer the customer some alternatives in the way the situation will be resolved. Then let the customer decide which one will work best.

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. It is not what you know but how you communicate it that makes a difference. To reach us, phone (847) 438-4480 or contact our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.