

Is It You That Makes Your Customers Irate?

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Customers from Hell don't start out as monsters. Something happens that makes them go ballistic. That "something" is often you. Customers have expectations about how they ought to be treated. If the treatment doesn't measure up, they become agitated. To reduce your own stress and improve customer relations, take a moment to review what customers expect. Then set some goals and make the necessary changes.

First, customers expect phone reps to sound empathic. They sense within the first ten seconds whether you are really interested in helping them through your tone of voice. A sincere voice immediately has a calming effect on even the most upset person. On the other hand, a monotone voice communicates that you are bored and disinterested. Also, if your tone of voice becomes defensive, you make a bad situation worse. Is your tone appropriate or annoying?

Customers who have problems prefer not being interrupted. When you have heard the same issue ten times already or have other calls in cue, you may want to jump right in. That's a mistake. Customers become offended. When customers are upset, they just want you to feel their pain. The way to do that is by listening. As a rep, get feedback on whether or not you interrupt. Listen to your own calls from the customer's perspective. If you frequently interrupt, take a deep breath and count to three before making any response.

Anyone who has been inconvenienced wants an apology. "Okay" isn't sufficient. Customers need more. They need to feel you are sorry. Regardless of whether it is your fault or not, apologize for any inconvenience your company caused. It makes customers feel you have aligned with them. Without an apology, they assume you haven't been listening. They repeat the same thing, only louder and thus the call escalates. Assess how and if you acknowledge your customers' feelings. Do you do it enough? If not, practice.

Customers hate to hear, "No." Their expectation is that their problem will be successfully resolved

and to their advantage. If you can't do what the customer is requesting, be sure to state what can you do. Free delivery or a reduced service charge does a lot to calm an upset customer. Do you know what your company's policy is on compensating a customer? If your company doesn't have a policy, be sure to bring this to your manager's attention.

Customers also get annoyed when you tell them, "I'm not sure" or "I don't know." People expect that if you work for a company, you know its products and services. They do not want to be passed from person to person. If you have a large product line, make a commitment to learn two new products each week until you feel comfortable. Create your own "cheat" sheets that show the specs on popular products. Talk to other reps to get the answers to commonly asked questions. The bottom line is you have to be willing to continually learn about your company and your competitors. If you are new to the job, what are you doing to educate yourself?

Lastly, people want to be treated with respect. Customers will not tolerate cynicism or defensiveness. A mild annoyance will become huge in no time. To make sure that you don't get defensive, post pictures of family members and people you care about in your cubicle. Pretend you are talking to one of them instead of a faceless non-entity.

Handling difficult customers isn't easy. By remembering how customers expect to be treated, you can turn a bad situation into win-win. It's hard to be angry with someone who is listening and demonstrating they want to help. The more you remember The Golden Rule, the more you will find satisfaction in your job.

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.