

Have a Difficult Caller? Just Say AAH

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Does this sound familiar? You pick up a call in cue in your normal professional manner and the caller on the other end of the line explodes. The person has been in cue for ten minutes, and when he does get a live person—you, he starts ranting and raving about his delivery problem, the second one he has had this month. It's not your fault, but the customer takes it out on you. So the question is how to handle it. The solution is to just say **AAH** and to do it quickly!

ALIGN

Instead of defending yourself or ignoring what the caller just said by asking for the account number or tracking information, etc, the first step should be to **align** with that customer by **acknowledging** the problem or the inconvenience caused by it. Usually, when the caller hears that you are apologetic, it is difficult for the person to continue in the same offensive manner. *The trick is to make the acknowledgement statement very specific and very sincere.* It cannot sound phony. It is not sufficient simply say to say "I'm sorry" or "OK" An acknowledgement has to be more detailed or explicit.

An example of a strong empathetic statement might be:

"First, I apologize that you had to wait in cue so long, especially when you have such a serious issue. I am also really sorry you had a delivery problem. You say it was the second one this month? That's terrible. That has to be frustrating.

With a strong acknowledgement statement, the customer feels you get it. He feels you are on his side. Once that happens, he becomes receptive to solving the problem in a reasonable fashion.

Tone of voice is critical for the statement to be perceived in a positive manner. The voice has to sound

warm. You cannot rush. Thus, between each statement, you should pause for a few seconds and take a breath. The more you pause, the more sincere your voice will be. The more you pause, the more the customer will hear your words.

ASK

Disgruntled customers like it when you seem to want to get to the bottom of their issue. After you have aligned with the caller, then begin to **ask some questions** about what happened. If you ask questions before acknowledging, customers do not believe you care. They feel you just want to get rid of them. As you ask questions, be sure **not** to interrupt. They need to get their story out. Also, be sure to summarize what you hear periodically so that they and you feel you have the facts straight.

If the issue is your customer's fault or, for example, the delivery service's issue, make sure to choose your words carefully. For example, if the problem is because the customer placed an order late or didn't pay the extra charge to expedite shipping, do not become accusatory. Do not lay blame. *Speak in the third person. Do not start a sentence with "you."*

For example, if the problem was the customer's fault, you might say the following.

"It looks like the problem is due to the time the delivery was placed. The pick-up times are regulated by Federal Express. The order was placed according to the records in the system at 4:30. Our last pick-up of the day from Federal Express is at 3:30, and, I don't see anything in the system that says the pick-up was expedited. But let's see how we can fix this."

HELP

Customers want their problem resolved quickly so they need to hear that you are going to help several times in the conversation.

For example, you might say. "I know this is upsetting and you need to have this resolved quickly. I am going to help you get that delivery as soon as possible."

If the issue is your company's problem, determine what you can do to fix the situation and then go above and beyond. For example, offer to overnight

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the goods at no charge or to credit the account. When the issue is the fault of the company, the customer looks for freebies. If you can offer to do something for nothing, customers will notice.

When an issue is resolved, 70% of customers remain loyal. When the issue is resolved quickly and in a positive manner, 95% of the customers continue to do business with an organization. Over time, they have a tendency to spend ten times the amount of the purchase that dissatisfied them, if they feel the service they have received has been exemplary. By saying **AAH**, you increase the chances of satisfying the upset consumer.

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. When you have to have impact, phone (847) 438-4480 or visit our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.