

Smart Answers to Tough Questions

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Tough customers can sap our energy and tax our patience. They can make us feel like Rodney Dangerfield, the comedian, whose comeback line was always, “I get no respect.” Today’s time-oriented, value driven, highly opinionated customers require us to be a part-time psychologists, detectives and magicians able to fix any and all problems to their satisfaction. Wise technical support and customer service representatives can better arm themselves for handling tough questions by remembering to apply three key principles as suggested by Kristin Anderson and Ron Zemke in their book, **Knock Your Socks Off** Answers:

- 1. Align with the customer’s inconvenience or distress before tackling the issue.**
- 2. Educate instead of ordering, directing or blaming.**
- 3. Compromise so that it is a win-win for both of you.**

Consider how these three principles would work with the following common questions or complaints. For each of these, your response would be some variation of the following.

I. *Customer Complaint/ Question: **I was promised delivery by 9 am, and it still isn’t here. This is our busiest time. I paid extra for special delivery. I need this now!***

Step 1: I am really sorry your delivery is not there. That has to be upsetting, especially when you paid extra for overnight service. Let me see what I can do to fix this for you. Can I have your account number so that I can access your invoice?

Step 2: Yes, I see what the problem is. Somehow, your special delivery got overlooked, and, again, I apologize for that.

Step 3: We can overnight this to you, and, of course, we will refund your delivery charges. I can promise you that I will personally deliver this to shipping and make sure this shipping request is not overlooked. Or, I notice that we have stores near your location. If it is possible for you to go into one of our locations, you can still have this today. I can call ahead to have them set one aside for you. Your cost would be the same as ordering on-line. What would you prefer to do?

II. *Customer Complaint/ Question: **What’s this price increase on my bill?***

Step 1: I know it’s frustrating to have to pay more on your heating bill.

Step 2: We have tried hard not to raise prices. This actually is our first price increase in three years. Because of the rising cost of oil, we felt we had no other choice.

Step 3: To make this as easy on our customers as possible, we have adopted a new graduated payment plan whereby the cost will go up incrementally over the course of the season, rather than one big increase. We also have several booklets which I would be happy to mail to you on ways to save energy costs. I have tried several of the suggestions, and it has made a difference in my own personal usage. Would you like me to mail you one of these?

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III. *Customer Complaint/ Question: **What do you mean this isn't returnable?***

Step 1: I am really sorry you thought these rolls of wallpaper were returnable.

Step 2: Full rolls of wall paper that are not specially colored most definitely are returnable. As you know, since yours are specifically colored to your preference, we would not be able to restock them.

Step 3: While I am not able to return these, I can send you a 10% off coupon for your next order. Would that work for you?

IV. *Customer Complaint/ Question: **I can get this cheaper from XXX.***

Step 1: Price is always important to our customers and so is value. I can appreciate that you want to get the best deal.

Step 2: As you know, our product is tested to be 95.5% dependable. So it has gone through extensive research and development that none of our competitors can claim.

Step 3: I know from your earlier comments that reliability is critical in your business. You simply cannot afford for this to go down, and that is why our product is worth your investment. What this product will save you in terms of loss of business due to outages and service calls is worth its weight in gold. Would you agree?

V. *Customer Complaint/ Question: **I want to talk to a supervisor.***

Step 1: I'd be happy to connect you with a supervisor, but they are all in a meeting right now.

Step 2: I would be happy to try to help you. I know time is important.

Step 3: If it doesn't work, I can put you in cue. Would you like to give it a shot?

Customers today can be hard hitting when it comes to voicing their opinions and asking questions. The five questions listed above are questions or statements call center representatives hear over and over. Using this three step process will be invaluable to quelling the lion within your difficult customers.

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.