

The Art of Saying “No”

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Wouldn't it be wonderful if saying “NO” to people were easy? For those of us who do business over the phone, it would certainly make our lives a lot less stressful. However, the reality is that we can't always acquiesce to our customers. We have to say, “No.” But callers hate hearing “N-O.” Often, because callers see you as a nameless, faceless entity, they become rude and demanding. While each situation is unique, there are some guidelines for saying “No” gracefully that will protect the relationship.

1. **Watch how you say it.** Your word choice can make a difference. At all costs, avoid statements that are sarcastic, blaming or condescending. It will only enrage the customer and cause a communication breakdown. Statements like, “It's not our fault. You declined special shipping,” will cause the caller to become defensive. It is much better to be impersonal in pointing out a mistake. “No, the policy is that orders must be in by 2 pm to insure pick-up by the freight carrier for “next day delivery.”
2. **Avoid tentative language.** When you say, “I am not real sure we can do that” or “I don't know if we could possibly make an exception,” you leave the caller thinking there is a possibility if the issue is pushed harder. Sometimes, they become louder and more demanding due to the tentative way you have responded to their request.
3. **Apologize and explain why.** Saying you are sorry and giving the reason why you can't do something goes a long way with the caller. If you simply say, “No,” that's not possible,” a caller is likely to challenge you. With an apology and an explanation, the caller is more receptive to your point. “Gee, I am sorry you were expecting to return this item. The reason we can't take this back is that it was custom-colored. Obviously, it would be difficult to sell the item to someone else.”
4. **Protect the relationship.** If you have the latitude to provide some kind of compensation for the customer, such as offering a discount on the next order, you protect the relationship and show you value the person. “I am sorry there is a cost you weren't expecting. What I can offer you, because we certainly appreciate your business, is a 10% discount on any new purchases for up to a year.” Most individuals will respond in a positive manner to your generosity.
5. **Polite repetition.** If the customer keeps insisting on something that is unreasonable or impossible, politely repeat your explanation. Do not say things like, “if you would just listen,” “you need to calm down,” or “don't take it out on me.” Such statements will only exacerbate the situation.
6. **Tone of voice is critical.** Obviously, it is a lot easier for people to be aggressive or abusive on the phone. If you sound empathetic and sincere, callers are more likely to respond in an appropriate manner.

While saying “No,” is difficult, learning to do it well will earn you the respect of others. Customers know it is not possible to always hear “Yes.” When you show respect and have confidence in your voice, they will be more receptive and less likely to make unreasonable demands.

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. When you have to have impact, phone (847) 438-4480 or visit our website, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.