

Remember the lessons you learned in pre-school? They apply to handling difficult customers!

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Think back to when you were a preschooler. Most of us had some important life messages drilled into us by our parents, our teachers or our coaches. If we use the wisdom of these messages and apply them to our most difficult callers, we will see an immediate positive result.

Lesson #1 Do unto others, as we would have them do unto you.

Customers expect to be treated with respect, not condescension, not suspicion. No one wants to be told a problem is their fault. No one wants to be chastised for not following directions. No one wants to feel stupid for not understanding what you are talking about. As you probe your caller for information, be sure to be respectful. As you give information to your customer, be sure to simplify language and eliminate technical jargon so that people feel you care about helping them. Treat them in the same way you would treat a family member or yourself.

Lesson # 2 Do not interrupt. Just listen.

No one likes to be interrupted, especially when they are trying to make a point. Be sure you fully allow your customers to describe a problem and its effect on them. When people are upset, they want to say what is on their mind, and they just want you to listen. Resist the temptation to speed up the call. When an upset customer is interrupted, they have a tendency to get louder and to begin all over. In the long run, interrupting lengthens the call.

Lesson # 3 Say you're sorry.

When people feel you have wronged them, they expect you to take responsibility and say you are sorry. When we haven't personally done anything wrong as a customer ser-

vice or technical support rep, it can seem unnecessary to apologize. But that is not acceptable to our customers. Moreover, if people don't receive an apology, they often become more aggressive or upset. Often, they insist on escalating the call. Your acknowledgement on behalf of the company or the person the customer dealt with can immediately diffuse a hostile situation. **Any-time** customers talk about their inconvenience, be sure you again apologize. The more you repeat the acknowledgement; the more the customer believes you hear their pain.

Lesson #4 Always say please and thank-you.

There are times we have to access account numbers or verify addresses. There are also times that we have to place the customer on hold or transfer the call to another department. Before we ask for information, place callers on hold, or transfer people, it is always a good idea to ask permission. If you tell the customer approximately how long they may be placed on hold or the reason you are requesting information, they become more amenable to your requests. They also appreciate it if you stay on the line when transferring the call and update the new rep on the problem. Common courtesies are very important when someone is upset.

Lesson # 5 Haste makes waste.

If you are rushing through the call, chances are you will miss information or record data incorrectly and worsen an already bad situation. In addition, customers will demand to escalate the call if they feel you are rushing to get them off the phone. While customers want you to resolve a problem quickly, they never want to feel you are just trying to get onto the next caller. They feel that their problem is unique even if you hear it sixteen times each day. Customers get the impres-

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sion that you are rushing the call if you speak quickly. Slow down your pace by adding distinct pauses at the end of your statements. Your pauses will help the customer digest what you have just said and make them believe that the problem will be resolved to their satisfaction.

Lesson# 6 Tell the truth.

People realize mistakes happen. What they don't like is someone lying to them. Never make up a lie to cover up problem. Obviously, no company would not be happy if we bad-mouthed their product. That isn't necessary. What we can do is admit that there have been problems with a product, stressing the steps that the company is taking to rectify the situation. Customers will accept that and applaud the company's efforts.

Lesson # 7 Don't make promises you can't keep.

It is always better to under-promise and over-deliver than vice versa. It is important that you deliver on any promise you make. Be sure you have the authority or approval of management before opening your mouth. You can bet that if a customer has to call back because you didn't deliver what you promised, they will be very upset.

These seven lessons may seem simplistic. However, they are the keys to not only diffusing, but satisfying, an upset customer. Every time you pick up the phone, bear these principles in mind, and you will start to feel a lot more comfortable handling angry callers.

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.