

HANDLING IRATE CUSTOMERS

AND DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

DISTINGUISH YOUR ORGANIZATION FROM THE COMPETITION IN THE WAY IT HANDLES CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS.

Learn how to:

- *Diffuse irate customer encounters*
- *Overcome difficult situations with customers*
- *Develop a routine to handle problems*
- *Recover following stressful encounters*

Improve your interactions with everyone in your organization, from your customers and co-workers to your supervisors.

Success under pressure will help you take the next step up the ladder within your organization.

Facing off with a screaming, unreasonable, irrational customer represents the ultimate test of any employee's service skills. It can take you to your breaking point if you are not aware and careful. Staying grounded and above the fray requires you to find inner strength, and persevere beyond the initial difficulties. You may not even know if you possess that strength, but this program will help draw it out of you.

Dealing with irate customers is one of the most pressure-packed experiences you will ever encounter on any job, but always remember:

- *Every customer is a different person with a unique set of circumstances and personality traits.*
- *Irate customer encounters can emerge out of nowhere—the key is to be ready.*
- *You represent an opportunity to set things right.*
- *Compassion is essential.*
- *Despite your best efforts, sometimes there is nothing that can save a situation.*

AS A CONFIDENT AND WELL-TRAINED EMPLOYEE, YOU WILL KNOW: **1)** NO CUSTOMER WILL INTIMIDATE YOU, **2)** YOU WILL NOT TRADE INSULTS, **3)** YOU WILL RISE ABOVE THE SITUATION, AND **4)** MOST IMPORTANT, YOUR COMPANY VALUES YOU.

The 4 C's of Handlingirate Customers and Difficult Situations

EXPLORE THE IMPORTANCE OF STAYING CALM AND CONTROLLED—IN EVERY SITUATION—PREVENTING IT FROM SPIRALING OUT OF CONTROL. THERE'S NO ONE THING THAT PUSHES A CUSTOMER OVER THE EDGE.

It's all about:

- **Compassion**
– *Listen carefully and react to their words, not just their behavior. Examine the facts.*
- **Calm** – *Remain calm and don't lose your cool.*
- **Confidence**
– *Handle the situation knowing you are following company guidelines—and serve the customer.*
- **Competence**
– *Save the customer with your competent handling of the situation so he or she continues to be a customer.*

IMPORTANT: Sometimes those irate customers just want to have their say, be listened to, and have their problem solved. However, other times, they want to vent, and then be done doing business with you.

Stay on Target—4 Steps to Dealing With Difficult Situations

When working through difficult situations, your primary goal is solving the problem. Four specific steps will help you take an “action-oriented” approach:

- 1. Act quickly,**
- 2. Take responsibility,**
- 3. Make an empowered decision, and**
- 4. Compensate.**

There is not just one way to solve a problem situation, so rely on yourself and your own good judgment.

Remember... difficult situations can go from bad to worse in a hurry. Prepare yourself for the possibility by

- 1)** staying informed about new company systems and policies,
- 2)** using professional development to increase your confidence, and
- 3)** knowing when and how to properly ask for help.

Employees— Take Care of Yourself



- **Dealing with irate customers will drain you physically and emotionally, and put your skills to the test.**
- **Compassion helps you better understand what customers want and need.**
- **When you lose your cool, you lose.**
- **Build up your confidence with continued training, practice, and positive self-talk.**
- **Effectively and efficiently working toward solutions shows your customers that their needs matter to you.**

After you have had to deal with a customer's outburst, you must find ways to take care of yourself. As part of your "recovery time," know that dealing with irate customers is mainly about examining and managing their emotional state, and for you, the employee, it is about taking care of yourself.

- RECOVERY AND EVALUATION ALLOWS YOU TO RELAX, RECHARGE AND ASSESS YOUR ROLE.
- RECOVERY SEPARATES YOU FROM THE SITUATION, AND GIVES YOU A CHANCE TO BREATHE.
- EVALUATION ALLOWS YOU TO EXAMINE YOUR ACTIONS AND IMPROVE YOUR SKILLS.
- SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENT CAN ASSIST YOUR EVALUATION OF AN ENCOUNTER.

These encounters put your service skills and personal fortitude to the ultimate test. How you deal with it separates you from everyone else in the eyes of your co-workers, supervisors and customers.

Some simple guidelines should be part of your company's employee handbook:

Do not lie to your customer, no matter how heated it gets.

Understand the basics of how to handle an irate customer. Keep a level head.

Respond to the customer's specific needs.

Work to solve the problem.

Remember YOU are the point of first contact, and you will set the tone of the entire encounter, and affect what happens next.

NEVER: You will never win if you respond to their insults with your own angry attitude.

Rebuilding Yourself Through Positive Self-Talk

Difficult situations can drain you and leave you feeling empty so use positive self-talk, a series of short declarative statements written by you that define you. When you expend the energy and focus needed to accomplish your goal, many people feel exhausted. Even worse, they are left with diminished self-esteem. Removing yourself from the situation and using positive self-talk can help you overcome the barriers that have just recently been constructed around your psyche and self-esteem.

You know yourself better than anyone, and you know what you need to hear to recharge your confidence and overcome the anxiety left behind after a difficult situation or an irate customer encounter. Positive self-talk pumps you up with the truth. When writing positive self-talk statements, be honest about your abilities, be open about your strengths, and be candid with yourself about your limitations.

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“It’s NOT my fault.”

It’s human nature to sometimes avoid apologizing because our standard reaction when facing blame is to defend ourselves—whether we are at fault or not. Defensiveness can leave your irate customer looking for a target to blame for their concerns.

6 Steps to Handle Irate Customers

(Use these six steps in order, based on the situation)

- 1.** Listen carefully and with interest—but also try to listen to what they are “not” saying.
- 2.** Put yourself in your customer’s place—how would you feel in a similar situation?
- 3.** Ask questions and actively listen to the answers. Use open-ended questions to elicit more than one-word answers like yes or no. This allows you to get raw information—not just feelings or emotions.
- 4.** Suggest alternatives that address their concerns, and always do so with sincere empathy.
- 5.** Apologize without laying blame for it might not be your fault.
- 6.** Solve the problem quickly and efficiently—and give your customer a chance to vent, which will allow you to better understand their emotion and their position.

“Regardless of how a problem is solved, getting it done now is the best way to stop the bleeding, and to bring an irate customer around. You need to show your customer that, as an employee and as the face of your organization, you are invested in solving the problem.” John Tschohl



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JOHN TSCHOHL IS PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER OF SERVICE QUALITY INSTITUTE, THE GLOBAL LEADER IN HELPING ORGANIZATIONS KEEP CUSTOMERS, BUILD MARKET SHARE AND IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE ENTIRE WORK FORCE BY DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF DELIVERING SUPERIOR CUSTOMER SERVICE.



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