

## Five Strategies to Deal with an Unsatisfied Customer

Customer service is the backbone to every business, right? So why do the majority of retail people lack customer service skills? I believe the root of the problems lies in the fact that many organizations do not teach their employees how to deal with customers who have a problem. Here are five strategies that will help you manage the situation when you find yourself face-to-face with an unsatisfied customer.

First, apologize. Regardless of how minor or severe the situation, make sure you apologize. In many cases, this simple step is enough to resolve the situation. I remember buying a dozen bagels one Sunday afternoon. The shop was extremely busy and things were hectic. When I arrived home with my bag of bagels I discovered that I had received someone else's order. I was a bit frustrated but understood that mistakes happen. However, this did mean that I had to return to the store, wait in line and explain the situation, taking up precious time on a much-needed day off. Time is a precious commodity to me and I wanted someone at the store to apologize for the inconvenience. I was disappointed. Sure, they replaced my order without hesitation but the employee showed no concern for the mistake or the inconvenience it caused me. It was a long time before I returned to that store again.

When I first began selling products from my website I quickly learned that not everyone is experienced at ordering on-line. This caused some confusion and several upset customers. Fortunately, a sincere apology and quick response to each situation helped resolve the issues.

The second strategy is to listen to the customer. Let them tell you about their situation. This tends to be the most challenging aspect of dealing with unsatisfied customers because they often lose their temper and become difficult to listen to. However, it is an extremely effective strategy because it gives the customer time to vent their emotions. Until their emotions are addressed, you won't make much headway in solving their concern. It is also critical that you do not interrupt them while they express their anger and frustration. Although it may seem like it takes forever for them to tell you their problem, most people run out of steam in less than a minute.

Some people tend to use profanity when they get angry. Here is an effective technique I learned from a video to diffuse this situation. Substitute the offensive word – usually beginning with the letter 'F' – with the word "pumpkin." Although it sounds funny, the rationale is that words by themselves are not offensive; it is our interpretation of them. So, when we use a substitute word we reduce the emotion component of the offensive word. Stay calm and don't take the abuse personally. In the end, you will come up the winner.

Third, take responsibility for the problem. In my customer service workshops we discuss the importance of assuming responsibility for the mistake even if it was caused by someone else – which is usually the case. Your customers don't care who is at fault. They just want their problem fixed. Several years ago I returned a rental car at an

airport and was presented a bill that was more than I had been quoted when I made the reservation. Instead of quickly resolving the issue – I had a flight to catch which compounded the situation – the counter person and several of her coworkers tried to figure out how the mistake occurred and who was responsible for it. In fact, the supervisor also got involved and subtly accused me of making up the price to save some money. It was not until I threatened to complain to their head office that the problem was remedied. And, it was done quickly. The employees spent 15 minutes trying to figure out who to blame and less than 60 seconds to actually correct the problem.

The fourth technique is to avoid specific hot phrases such as; “that’s our policy,” “I can’t do that,” and “you should have…” No one likes to hear statements such as these even if they are appropriate to use.

Fifth, put yourself in the customer’s position. How would you be reacting if the same situation happened to you? While you may not respond in the same manner, this approach can help you better understand the problem or concern by giving you a different perspective. Be cognizant of your tone of voice and body language. Make sure that what you say and how you say reflects the severity of the situation.

Delivering great customer service in today’s retail world of big-box stores will help give you a competitive advantage. It is much easier to teach a team of five or ten employees the concepts mentioned above than it is to execute them consistently with a staff of a hundred or more.

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