



## Handling and Dealing with Difficult Customers

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### Session Objectives

- Customer Complaints and Reactions to Complaints
- Steps to Handle Complaints
- Handling Confrontations and Dealing with Aggression
- Common Triggers
- Delivering a Difficult Message
- Phrases to Avoid



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Why is Customer Service Important?



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### Why do Customers Complain?

- Their expectations have not been met
- They feel “wronged” or “slighted”
- They have a problem and don’t understand why
  - High bill - do not understand the information on the bill; 2 consumption readings, etc.
- Perception vs. reality




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### Customer’s Needs When They Complain

**Needs as individuals:**

- To be heard
- To be understood
- To be respected
- To be treated fairly
- To feel valued and validated



**Needs relating to the complaint:**

- To have their concern dealt with quickly, fairly and properly
- To be given what they have been denied and acknowledgement of issue (apology)
- To have action taken to fix a problem or address

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### Reactions to Complaints

**Uncontrolled:**

- Ignore complaints
- Defensiveness
- Anger
- Hindrance – wish they would just go away!
- Not believe some or all of what the customer was saying



**Controlled:**

- Remain calm
- Speak in soft even tone
- Express concern for the person’s problem
- Avoid defensiveness and anger
- Remember this is not personal

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## Steps to Effectively Handle Complaints

### Step 1 - What is Going On? – Determine the reason for the complaint

- Assure Customer you are going to help and do all you can to solve the problem
- Restate the Customer's opening statement/concern
- Listen very carefully and attentively
- Display empathy

### Step 2 - What Can You Do to Diffuse? – Identify ways to calm the customer

- Remain calm
- Do not interrupt
- Hear the Customer out, Let them vent
- Display empathy
- Apologize




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## Steps to Effectively Handle Complaints

### Step 3 - What Caused It? – Identify the root cause of the problem

- Investigate the situation
- Determine if customer has a valid complaint
- Explain what happened

### Step 4 - What Can I Do? – Rectify the situation

- Tell the Customer what you are going to do to solve the problem
- Focus on what you can do
- Offer solution(s)
- Never assign blame – when you offer solution, do not fault the customer, or anyone else on your team
- Gauge if solution is satisfactory




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## Steps to Effectively Handle Complaints

### Step 5 - What Can I Say? – Acknowledge the problem

- Thank the Customer for allowing you to make things right
- Break complex issues down for easy understanding
- Tell what you will do to avoid future problems

### Step 6 - What Needs to be Done?

- Analyze what went wrong
- Share the problem/issue appropriately to prevent from happening again
- Recommend a review of policies or procedures
- Change what can be changed to make things better




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*When a customer complains, look at it as an opportunity to improve!*



### Handling Confrontations

- If you are the focus of someone's anger or if you are becoming angry – distance yourself
- Have someone else takeover for you; Have them get the information for research and follow up
- Do not use words or gestures that can be seen as insulting or aggressive
- Avoid denying the problem or complaint
- Try to diffuse the situation
- Offer options for solutions




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### Dealing with Aggression

- Try to remain calm
- Do not respond with the same level of aggression
- Be patient, the abusive language or behavior may cease, once the customer has vented
- Do not take comments and situation personally
- Ask the person to stop
- Warn them it's not acceptable
- Bring Supervisor into the situation, if appropriate
- Do not become upset




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### Avoid 'Triggers'

- Customer feels ignored, made fun of, humiliated or treated in a disrespectful manner
- Customer feels singled out, wrongly accused or victimized
- Customer feels distressed about being deprived of a service they feel they are entitled to
- Customer feels frustrated or angry because of waiting for a service or being treated with indifference




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### Delivering a Difficult Message

- Apologize
- Demonstrate empathy
- "Understand" customer's perspective/situation
- Stick to your position without placing blame
- Explain the solution
- Seek to develop an understanding from the customer
- If necessary, seek help from Supervisor – as a last resort




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### Phrases to Avoid

- Avoid distractions; Avoid perception of being too busy to assist customer
- "No"
- "I don't know"
- "That's not my job/department"
- "You are right – that is bad"
- "Calm down"
- "That's not my fault"
- "You need to talk to my Supervisor"
- "That's against our POLICY"




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### Common Sense to Customer Service

If someone is already angry or frustrated:

- Do not make sustained eye contact (can be seen as aggressive)
- Do not get drawn into arguments
- Do not talk over them or talk them down
- Do not give the impression that you do not care
- Do not be sarcastic
- Do not point or direct your finger at them
- Do not shake your head, while the person is explaining
- Do not sigh or roll your eyes




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### Reminders...

- Be polite and considerate
- Give your full attention to customers you are interacting with
- Be aware of the warning signs
- Try to avoid triggers
- Know when/how to involve others
- Focus on the problem and resolution, not the person's attitude or behavior
- Own it – customers want someone to be accountable for resolution
- Be a part of the solution, not the problem – do not complicate the situation more



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### questions?

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Thank you for your time and participation!

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