

DEALING WITH ANGRY CUSTOMERS

Angry customers often vent their frustration over a situation by shouting and threatening the receiver of their call, particularly if the receiver is a call centre operative. The best way to deal with this is to remain calm and to have a plan to deal with such behaviour which will help you face the situation and resolve the problem.

You may feel that this is easier said than done and you may well be right, but certain perspectives on the call may help:

- Understand that more often than not the caller is not abusing you personally, but the lack of expected level of service from the organisation which you represent and it may also help to realise that the caller themselves may well be under pressure from another source whom they have let down due to this lack of service
- They may be on the move between appointments, phoning on a mobile phone and therefore under pressure of time or the circumstances in which they find themselves. Assume the customer is always right and it is your duty to satisfy the customer.

Once you can come to terms with these ideas you will find it easier to devise a plan of action.

A few pointers towards a successful approach are:

- **Remain Calm.** Try to face the onslaught of anger in a calm and measured way, even when the caller is being abusive and swearing at you remain respectful. By doing this the customer will eventually become calmer themselves and you will stand a better chance of winning them over.
- **Listen.** You have two ears and only one mouth so use the ears more! By listening carefully you are more likely to understand why the customer is complaining and have a better chance of correcting the situation. If you talk over an angry person their anger and frustration will increase and may reach a point where they cannot be helped so the situation moves out of your control.
- **Show You Care.** At the point where an angry caller stops to draw breath seize the opportunity to express your understanding of and empathy for their situation. Show you care and assure them you will do everything you possibly can to rectify the problem. Use any positive feedback towards building a resolution to the problem.
- **De-Stress.** Dealing with irate people is stressful and it is important you learn how to relax and to release the tension. A hot drink and a chat with colleagues may help, listening to certain music and laughter are ways of releasing tension.
- **Be Patient.** Being patient will help you stay calm, which will lessen the tension and stress you feel due to the abuse being hurled at you. Patience will help you override your emotional response to the customers unreasonable and perhaps personal accusations and it helps you to remain friendly and cooperative.

- **Be Positive.** Maintain a positive mindset and believe situations can be resolved. Put forward your point of view and suggestions assertively, without aggression or offence to the customer.
- **Control Anger.** Anger is a natural response to being abused. Learn to control it and hide it from your customer. It may be that their main aim is to pick an argument, but you must keep control of the situation and not allow this to happen. Once a situation has been addressed and the customer has calmed down sufficiently it may be possible to remind them of their unreasonable accusations in a jokey way and possibly even receive an apology, but you will have to be very sure of your ground before you take this approach. You will probably be better advised to see the successful outcome as reward for your restraint.

It is important to appreciate that you are on the front-line when you receive an angry phone call and are likely to bear the full brunt of the customer's frustration and disappointment. The secret of success is to remain calm and dignified, show respect and empathy to the customer by listening patiently and then put forward your point of view clearly and respectfully. You need to develop the hide of a rhinoceros (metaphorically speaking) to prevent abuse from hurting your feelings and find ways of releasing the tension that builds during such confrontations. Once you can manage these things you are well on the way to success.

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