

Dealing with the Irate Customer

Study Guide

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We all have our own natural reactions to dealing with an angry customer.

Introduction

It's almost unavoidable. Sooner or later, most of us will have to deal with a customer who is angry or upset.

Whether you work in a bank or a supermarket, a health clinic or an insurance company, there is always the chance that you will come face to face with a dissatisfied client or consumer. Or maybe you'll pick up the phone and find yourself taken by surprise when the person on the other end starts right off with criticizing your organization, your products, or your services.


We all have our own natural reactions to this kind of situation. Some of us tend to become defensive or even rude, arguing right back at such customers or refusing to help them resolve their complaints. Others of us will feel intimidated, and do anything we can to make the customers go away (or get off the phone), even if this means giving them more than their grievances deserve.



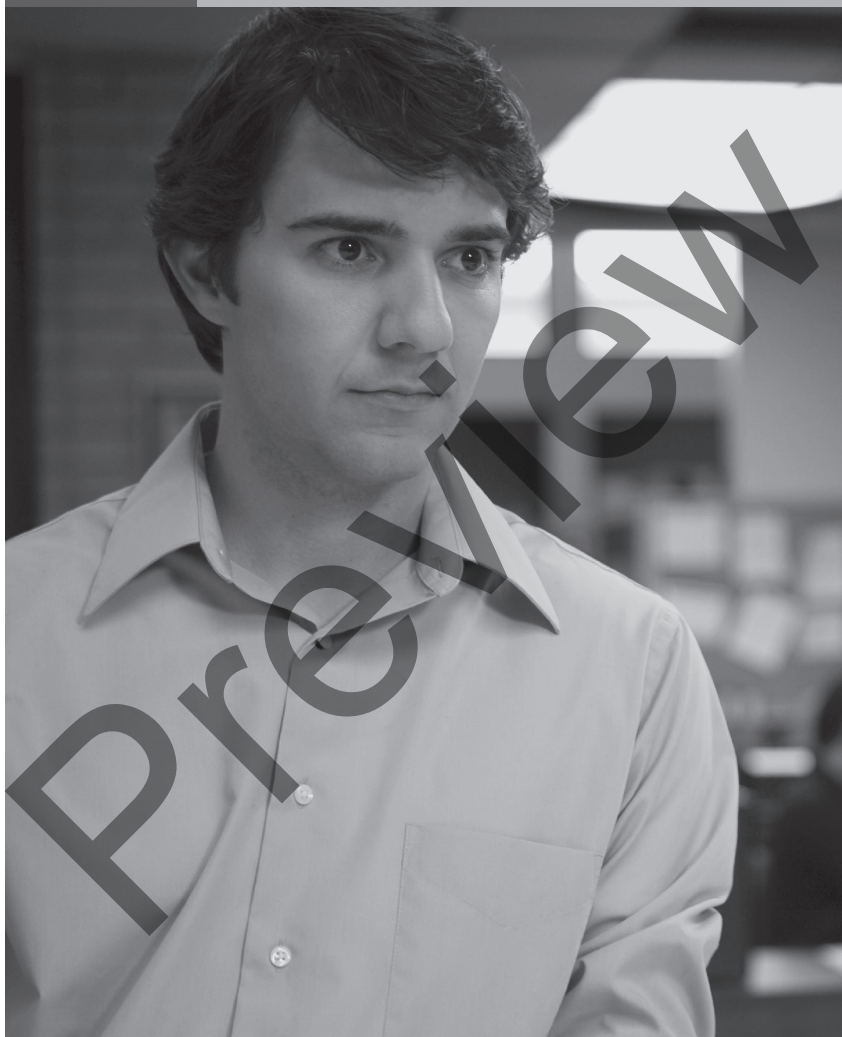
Either of these reactions is understandable, considering the stress we feel when we find ourselves in emotionally charged situations—especially if we don't have the skills right at hand to calm the customer and find a solution that is fair to all concerned.

The video program, *Dealing with the Irate Customer*, was created to provide you with simple communication techniques that can help you feel more confident and more comfortable when “the heat is on.” This program assumes that customer issues are solved more easily when you find a way to bring customers around so they join with you in fighting the problem itself, instead of feeling that you are on opposite sides, fighting each other.

When you have the skills to deal with really tough situations, you'll find that your job gets easier, more enjoyable, and more rewarding.

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- Dealing appropriately with anger makes customers feel more understood and therefore they are less demanding. This makes your job easier.
 - Employing a set of specific skills helps you feel more relaxed and in control. This makes your job more enjoyable.
 - Using your head instead of your emotions helps you get quickly to the real problem and a real solution. This makes your job more rewarding.

Once you have learned the techniques presented in this program, try practicing them at every possible opportunity so that, over time, they become your first reaction the minute you find yourself confronted by an irate customer.



It helps to remember that behavior is something that can be changed.

1. Your Own Attitude

The place to start is with your own attitude. When dealing with an angry or upset customer, it's important not to let it "get to you." This means not letting the customer's negative tone make you angry or upset, yourself. If you become emotionally involved, this almost always makes the situation worse. It causes you more stress, and it usually makes the customer dig in and push his or her point even more strongly.

Here are three new approaches that can help you keep your cool:

Don't take it personally.

Even if it feels like customers are blaming you personally for their dissatisfaction, it's important to stay focused on the facts, rather than the feelings. Conflicts are going to happen, and people do get angry. But this does not mean you have to lose your perspective.

It's not about you, it's about the customer's problem. You're not there to argue with the customer. You're there to solve the problem.

If you feel yourself reacting emotionally to a customer, that's the time to focus immediately on your problem-solving skills. Put your energy into deciding how to handle the situation instead of into figuring out how to beat the customer at his or her own game. (If you play that game, nobody wins!)

Be professional.

By remaining calm, you stay in control. You solve the problem faster and with less stress.

This can be hard to do when the customer is being obnoxious. You may feel right off the bat that you don't like this person very much. You might ask yourself, "Why should I help someone who is being rude to me?"

Here are some helpful hints:

- Remember that we all have the potential to be not very likeable when we get angry.
- Realize that the unhappy customer might be perfectly nice when he or she is not upset.
- Stick to being professional and doing a good job so that, regardless of the outcome, you can feel proud of how you handled the situation.



Cooperate and collaborate.

Once you get past the emotions, you can think about working with the customer as a team: you and the customer against the problem.

It helps to remember that behavior is something that can be changed. Just because a customer approaches you in a very unpleasant manner, it doesn't mean this person isn't capable of meeting you in the middle or seeing things your way. Of course, it may take some effort on your part to get your customer to come around. But believing it is possible—and learning the skills to help you accomplish this—can give you the motivation to try.

So try to keep the behavior separate from the person in your own mind. Perhaps the customer is overreacting, but it's also possible that he or she has good reason to be upset. Approach the confrontation as an opportunity to find some middle ground. The customer will see that you are remaining reasonable and looking for a solution, and will therefore be more likely to respond in kind.

Your thoughts:

We all react differently to angry customers. Think about your own reactions. What is it about dealing with angry customers that makes you personally feel stress? (Some possible responses might be: I don't know what to say. They scare me. It's not my fault and I don't like being blamed.)

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Your thoughts:

Which of the three new approaches expressed in this chapter will be the most helpful to you, and why?

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