



SkillSharpener Web Extra

"Nice" isn't enough: The science and art of delivering great service

Take a nice, well-mannered individual with a pleasant phone voice and what do you have? Well, a nice, well-mannered individual with a pleasant phone voice — but not necessarily a great customer service rep.

One of Richard Gallagher's pet peeves is the assumption that nice people provide excellent customer service. "Customer service is more than just an attitude — it's both a science and an art. Above all," says the author of *The Customer Service Survival Kit*, "it's a serious profession."

One of the most important skills for service professionals is knowing how to defuse potentially explosive situations.

"Most difficult cases fall into a half-dozen or so known situations," he says. "There are ways to understand and manage each of those situations that really work if you practice them." For instance, a worst-case scenario would be dealing with a customer who's very angry. In this instance, Gallagher suggests following a structured procedure of allowing the customer to vent, asking what they would like your company to do for them, and using a process he calls "staging."

The staging process works like this:

■ Introduce what you're going to say. ("I'm accessing your order status right now. Let me explain why your shipment is late.")

■ Explain what you say as you're saying it. ("Unfortunately, over the last two days, there was severe weather in your area, which caused a lot of flight cancellations. I see that your shipment was

rerouted to a nearby airport yesterday evening, and was loaded onto the first flight out this morning at 6 a.m. You should receive it by 3 o'clock today.")

■ Empathize with the customer's feelings after you've said it. ("I'm sorry you weren't able to get your shipment on Tuesday. I can certainly understand how frustrating this delay must be for you.")

"Staging can help CSRs turn a situation from 'you vs. me' into 'you and me vs. the problem,'" he says.

Another type of difficult customer is the caller who will not stop talking. "Most people either suffer in silence until the caller runs out of steam or create bad feelings by cutting him or her off," Gallagher says. Instead, he suggests using a structured technique that he calls the "acknowledging close." Here's how:

1. Break in.
2. Acknowledge the last thing the customer said.
3. Take control of the conversation with yes-or-no questions to bring the transaction to a close with good feelings on both sides.

Source: Richard Gallagher, email rsgassoc@aol.com; website www.sditrain.com. *Delivering Legendary Customer Service*, published by Oasis Press (800-228-2275), is also available through online book retailers and bookstores. ■

