

How to deal with difficult customers

How do you provide quality customer service when you're faced with a bad attitude? Keep your cool with these tips.

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Successful retailers don't just sell products. Today, quality customer service may be what differentiates a company from its rivals. Retailers with poor customer service risk losing revenues, profits and even going out of business.

But retail pros know that they're going to be dealing with angry customers, the very customers who make offering high-quality service difficult. Here are a few different types of angry customers and how to deal with them as a customer service representative.

Types of difficult customers

Difficult customers come in several varieties, including:

- Angry
- Impatient
- Intimidating
- Talkative
- Demanding
- Indecisive

Dealing with them professionally

First, realize you can't control anyone else's behavior. You have control only over your own actions. But you can influence how customers respond to you to some degree.

Dealing with angry customers:

When a customer tries to intimidate you, stay calm and ask, "What can we do to help?" This kind of question can also help you get away faster from a chatty, finicky or confused customer who monopolizes your time.

Before you offer solutions, ask the customer how he would like the problem to be resolved. Offer choices whenever possible. ("Would you prefer to speak to the manager, or wait until I can finish ringing up these customers' purchases so I can give you more time?")

- **Get Control of Yourself:** Never argue with customers when they are angry, displeased or complaining. If you allow a customer to push your buttons and lose control of yourself, you've lost control of the situation. Remember, you can lose a good customer if you show boredom, irritation, disdain or displeasure.
- **Listen and Let the Customer Vent:** Tune in to the customer; don't look for the nearest exit. The customer wants to be listened to, acknowledged and understood. Maintain eye contact. Show your attentiveness by standing or sitting up straight; lolling or slouching makes you seem inattentive and disinterested. Uncross your arms -- this indicates you are listening with an open mind. Let the person talk, and pay close attention. Repeat or paraphrase some of what you hear.
- **Show the Customer You Care:** Show concern for the customer's feelings. Maintain a concerned, sincere and interested facial expression. Your voice, as well as your body language and expression, communicates your attitude. People respond more to how you say something than what you say.
- **Don't Blame the Customer or the Company:** When explaining your store's policy or trying to clarify what went wrong, use either the indirect approach ("There are a few questions before I can give you a refund.") or "I" statements ("I need additional information.") as much as possible. Don't acknowledge that you or your company is to blame. That could lead to lawsuits.
- **Try to Solve the Problem, or Get Someone Who Can:** Even if solving the customer's problem isn't among your job duties, never say this to the customer. Get all the facts you can, and then tell the customer how you can help.
- **Finally, don't make promises you can't keep.** Get help from someone who knows more, is calmer, or has more power and authority.

From the manager's side, how to provide support

Retail managers must decide on a case-by-case basis when to step in and take over for the associate. They should always intervene if the customer is not merely difficult, but abusive. It's important that the manager handle the situation in a way that does not make the associate appear incompetent, while explaining to the customer that the associate has been following store policies.

Don't take it personally

Retailers know that some customers will be difficult no matter what. So don't take it personally. Remember that helping customers is your job. Make sure your attitude is always "I'm here to help as best I can."