



Effective Communication with Difficult Customers

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What is the classic difficult customer?

- Excessive Demands
- Constant Complaints
- Rude Language
- Refusal to Compromise
- Inconsistent Communication
- Others



How to handle difficult customers

It Depends

- **Practice empathy:** Try to understand their frustration and show that you understand their situation
- **Stay calm:** Try not to confront the customer, but instead help them find a resolution
- **Summarize next steps:** Let the customer know what to expect and what you will do next
- **Follow through on promises:** Keep your promises, even if you don't have an update
- **Provide accurate information:** Consider the details of their issue and provide accurate information
- **Recognize difficult clients:** Try to identify difficult clients early in your relationships

How do you handle difficult customers

Legitimate
complaints

Product
performance
expectations

Security
issues

Collections

Legitimate complaint

Does the complaint pass the sniff test?

Do you have the ability to solve the persons issue?

Don't pass the buck.

Be overly empathetical and/or apologetic.

Don't admit fault until you know who's at fault.

Give yourself time to do fact finding.

If need to follow up, give a time frame that you will, and do it, even if you don't have all your answers.

Product performance expectations

- Does it make sense
- Gather as much info as possible
- Don't admit fault until fault is known
- Follow up
- If complaint is founded, help to resolve the issues, or put them in contact who can.
- If the complaint is unfounded, try to explain why, when that doesn't work, have someone else do the same.

Collections

- What's the simple definition of Collections?
- Customers will use anger as a defense mechanism.
 - Lamb or Lion
- Let the customer know you are seeking solutions not ways to punish them.
- Get the customer to agree to something.
 - Do you want to get resolution to this situation.



How do conversations with difficult customers start? (What's the leading indicators?)

- Customer starts out by yelling.
- Customer is very conditioning or sarcastic.
- Gives limited to NO information about them.
- May start pleasant, but turn manipulative.
- Does name dropping.



What not to do when talking to a difficult customer.

- Get into an argument.
- Get upset, the customer is mad at the situation not necessary you.
- Get into name calling.
- Speak ill of a fellow employee or even a past employee.



What to do when you recognize a difficult customer.

- Slow down and get your fact correct before you supply them to the customer.
- Do not share speculations with the customer.
- Take extremely detailed notes.
- Gather as much information from the customer and look for inconsistencies in the customers story, but NEVER call the customer a liar.
- Stay positive, try to smile even when on the phone.






Communicating with the customer.

- Step 1 – Exchange pleasantries
- Step 2 – Find out the situation
- Step 3 – Minimize how much you say
- Step 4 – Apologies
- Step 5 – Fact finding
- Step 6 – Come to an agreement
- Step 7 – Follow up
- Step 8 – Resolution




Step 1 – Exchange pleasantries

- Offer a good morning or good afternoon and sound positive
- This is part of American lexicon
- This will set the tone for the rest of the conversation



Step 2 – Find out the situation

- Let the customer explain the situation in their own words
- Take notes
- Look for inconsistencies in the story
 - Why?
- Let the customer talk as long as possible (This could help diffuse the situation.)
- Don't interrupt as bad as you want too



Step 3 – Minimize how much you say

- Silents will let the customer talk longer.
 - Ask short open-ended questions.
 - The customer may be venting.
 - Its uncomfortable, so use it as best you can.
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Step 4 – Apologies

- Sometimes that's all they want.
- Be careful of what you're apologizing for, you don't want to get your self in trouble.
 - An apology can be viewed as an admission of guilt.
 - Don't ever apologies for something that you know is not the company's or your fault.
- Use generic apologies such as:
 - I am sorry that you feel that way.
 - I am sorry that we did not live up to your standards
 - I am sorry that your upset

Step 5 - Fact finding

- Try to get as many details as possible.
- Let the customer answer questions. Don't assume.
- If there is inconsistency's, call the customer out, BUT DON'T EVER CALL THE CUSOMER STATEMENT A LIE.
 - I'm sorry but you said this, and then this...
 - Can you help me understand this, when you said this but then you said....



Step 6 – Come to an agreement

- This agreement should be simple
- Sometimes you have to think outside the box.
 - Do you want to resolve the situation?
 - You do owe something?
- This agreement is the foundation on what you are going to build the settlement on.
- If you can not come to an agreement, go back to step 4.



Step 7 - Follow up (If necessary)

- If you need to do research on your side say that.
 - You or the customer may just need a break. Give your self a chance to calm down.
 - Set a timeline for a follow up.
 - If you don't get all your answers, and your timeline is up, contact the customer and tell them that you need more time.
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Step 8 - Resolution

- If your or your company is at fault, admit it, however, be careful of the details. Don't throw anyone under the bus.
- The customer is not always right....
- Sometimes Resolution could mean the termination of a customer.
 - And that's ok...
- In collections situation, let the customer know the next steps.

What to do when it doesn't work

- Take a step back and try again at a later date.
 - Have someone else try.
 - Don't get bullied.
 - In a collections situation...
 - Agree to disagree.
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