



**INNOVEST SME**

Accelerating Small Business

# How To Deal *with a* DIFFICULT CUSTOMER

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# PREFACE

At first glance, handling a difficult customer may seem like a thankless job. Fortunately, you can develop skills to adapt to the challenges difficult customers pose and extend these skills to handling difficult people and situations throughout your daily life. By improving the focus of your thoughts and feelings, how you manage stress, and how well you listen to and empathize with others, you will be better able to meet the challenges other people pose in both your professional and personal life. Implementing the guidelines in this book is the first step in a process towards forever changing how you interact with others.

*Keep your face  
always towards the  
sunshine-and shadows  
will fall behind you*

WALT WHITMAN



# THE RIGHT ATTITUDE STARTS WITH YOU

Keeping a positive mental attitude in the face of difficulty isn't easy. In fact, according to psychologists, our brains seem to be hardwired to focus on the negative, as studies have shown. However, here is some positivity to focus on: many studies have also demonstrated that cultivating an "attitude of gratitude" and engaging in regular exercise and meditations have dramatic effects on our sense of wellbeing.

## BE GRATEFUL

It's natural and easy to focus on the negative things that happen in our lives. When a reckless driver cuts you off on the highway, your pulse races and your adrenaline begins to flow. Maybe you start to shake, and it's likely that this feeling stays with you for a while. However the good things in life often escape our notice, whether it's the person who greets you with a smile or holds the door open for you. Taking note of the good things in your life involves a conscious decision, but it has a huge payoff. Oprah Winfrey once noted that the single most important thing she's ever done was to write five things that she's grateful for in a journal at the beginning of each day. And the science backs her up. Psychologists from the universities of California and Miami performed an experiment in

2003 that found that keeping a daily journal of what you're grateful for can increase your own sense of wellbeing throughout your life.

## **MAKE GRATITUDE A HABIT**

Sustaining a positive outlook requires consistent practice. If taking a moment to note what's going right can give you a good feeling, imagine the cumulative effect of doing so daily. In order to do so, you have to cultivate a habit.

### **Forming a habit:**

- Use a reminder. For example, at the beginning of your workday before (or after) you clock in. Let this act as a cue to list five things you're grateful for in a gratitude journal.
- Have a routine. Try to write in your gratitude journal at the same time every day.
- Reward yourself. Although developing a cumulative sense of gratitude is its own reward, the act of setting up a specific reward helps to divide a large task into many small tasks. For example, for after a week of successively keeping your journal, pick a small reward for yourself.
- Doing something consistently becomes automatic over time, but that time can vary between 18 and 254 days to do so. The average amount of time to make a habit automatic is around two months.

- If you miss a day, don't beat yourself up. Take note however why you missed it as well as any strategies to counteract whatever caused you to miss it. Be aware that a change in routine can disrupt habitual behavior and may require the development of a new reminder and routine.

## **KEEP YOUR BODY HEALTHY**

Regular exercise is crucial for producing a positive attitude. It stimulates the production of pleasure chemicals in our brain called endorphins, and has been shown to combat depression effectively.

### **Important aspects of good exercise:**

- Never exercise beyond your physical capabilities.
- The ideal exercise plan includes flexibility, strength, balance, and endurance training.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Vary your routine from time to time by replacing old exercises with new ones.
- Avoid exercise within the three hours before you go to sleep

## **INVOKE INNER PEACE**

Cultivating positive thinking is also a process of invoking inner peace within. Here are some ways to do so:

- Identify negative and automatic thoughts and counter them with alternatives. Typically these thoughts frame situations in terms of black and white and either/or terms. They also tend to make logical leaps. For example, your boss may have a look of disapproval. An automatic thought might be to assume she is angry because you were late to work. But you were only late to work by a couple of minutes, and you're always on time if not early, so it's ridiculous that your boss should be so angry. And the train of assumptions can go on indefinitely. When you encounter such thoughts, reframe your assessment from terms that this is the case to this may be the case along with other possibilities. Consider other possibilities, including those that have nothing to do with you. Practice reality testing by asking your boss if she is upset with you and what can you do to improve the situation.
- Practice meditation regularly. This helps you to focus on the moment as well as to feel more relaxed, and even doing as little as 10 minutes a day can have powerful effects throughout your day.
- Keep a journal of your thoughts and feelings. This can be particularly helpful during times of stress. It can help you to both articulate and organize your thoughts. One study found that writing about an intensely positive experience for three consecutive days still contributed to positive moods three months later.

*Source: Burton, Chad M. & King, Laura A. (2004) "The health benefits of writing about intensely positive experiences" Journal of Research in Personality Vol 38 (2).*

- Schedule time for play. Make sure to take time to relax and enjoy life on a regular basis. This will not only help develop a positive outlook but also increase your creativity

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Monica was experiencing some big challenges in her life. She had just graduated from college with a mountain of student loan debt. She had no job, despite the fact that she had been looking for months. Her savings was dwindling fast, and to top it all off, she had a nagging toothache and knew a trip to the dentist would cost a small fortune, especially since she had no insurance. When she thought about all the problems facing her, it became overwhelming. She grew depressed. Her life consisted of wasting away on the couch and watching reruns of Oprah Winfrey. When she saw the episode about gratitude, Monica decided to give it a try. She did have some things going right in her life, after all. She now had a degree. She had a working car. Best of all, Monica had family and friends who encouraged her, including a professor who was willing to recommend her for an office job. The more she focused on what she did have, the better she felt. In fact, instead of feeling depressed over everything that lay before her, Monica started to feel enthusiastic about the potential the future held.

*Knowing your own  
darkness is the best method  
for dealing with the  
darkness's of other people.*

CARL JUNG



# STRESS MANAGEMENT (INTERNAL STRESSORS)

Life is dynamic and constantly changing. This simple fact creates emotional, mental, and physical stress. It's not possible to avoid stress entirely. Instead, you have to learn how to manage stress and navigate through the situations that trigger stress. Often it is the stressful situations in life that bring out our best.

There are two types of stressors: internal stressors and external stressors. External stressors relate to your environment. They can involve a wide variety of things from screaming alarm clocks to crowded elevators to high pressure situations such as a work deadline, caring for a sick loved one, and even positive events such as gaining recognition for achievement. Often, external stressors represent things that are beyond our control.

Internal stressors are those stress triggers that are internal to each person. These can range from feeling irritable to feeling tired or unappreciated. Negative thoughts and automatic thinking are forms of internal stressors.

## IRRITABILITY

Emotions are universal. Everyone has them. Emotions are intrinsically good because they provide information; therefore emotions are valid. For example, everyone feels irritable at times. Irritation is a sign of anger, which tells you that something is wrong or anxiety, which tells you that you don't know an outcome. These emotions are called swing emotions because they can either improve or damage your performance. Irritation, when not addressed, can snowball and reinforce negative thoughts and feelings. Managing swing emotions involves slowing down your thoughts. Here are some steps:

- Listen to self-talk. Take note of “I” statements vs. “you” statements. “I” statements imply agency while “you” statements imply blame. Are your thoughts fast or slow? Fast thinking indicates arousal and the narrowing of focus while slow thinking expands your focus and relaxes you. Are you thinking in complete sentences or shorthand? Turn shorthand thoughts into complete sentences. Take note of distorted thinking styles.

### **These are:**

- 1) magnification, thinking that something is bigger than it is,
- 2) destructive labeling, assessing someone or something negatively, and,
- 3) imperative thinking, belief that something or someone should do or be a certain way.

- Use your thoughts as instructional self-statements. When you notice negative thoughts, try countering them with different statements about your situation. If your thinking involves magnification, then put things in a different perspective. If your thinking involves destructive labeling, be more specific. If your thinking involves imperatives, counter with more flexibility and consider other options.
- Take a time out. Anger, anxiety, and frustration all narrow our focus. A break away from a situation can help you approach again with a fresh perspective. When taking a time out, it's often good to have a plan on how to make use of your time out. For example, if taking a time out from a situation where you felt angry, try using up that arousal energy by going for a run or some other type of exercise.

## **UNHAPPINESS WITH YOUR JOB**

Everyone can feel unhappy with their job at times, and this can yield frustration, which is an emotional cue that something isn't working. Frustration results from problems that appear unsolvable. You may think you know the solution, but if you're still feeling frustrated, it's a sign that your solution is the problem. In order to combat frustration, you have to reframe the problem. A simple way to do this is to frame the problem with this sentence:

The real problem isn't \_\_\_\_\_ the real problem is \_\_\_\_\_.

This allows you the flexibility to consider a whole new range of solutions.

## FEELING UNDERAPPRECIATED

Feeling underappreciated involves the emotions of dejection, depression, or disappointment. These emotions lead to poorer performance, unlike the swing emotions, which can go either way. Known as blue emotions, these are marked by a lack of arousal and self-talk that is too slow. To counter these, you need to instill emotions that arouse your energy level, such as enthusiasm, confidence, optimism, and tenacity. These emotions unlike swing emotions or blue emotions actually enhance performance.

All emotions have three components that work together, and you can think of them as a triangle:

- At the top of the triangle is cognition. The way you self-talk when angry is different from the way you self-talk when enthusiastic or when disappointed.
- At the bottom left corner is the arousal level of an emotion. Both high performance emotions and swing emotions are high arousal emotions whereas blue emotions dampen arousal. The arousal level allows emotions to act as cues to signal behavior.
- At the right corner is the behavior or reaction to an emotion. Mood management involves using cognition (your thoughts and assessment of a situation) to develop better strategies for reacting to your emotions.

Emotions also have a quality of being contagious. For example, when someone smiles at you, you feel an urge to smile back. When you feel

underappreciated, this is a cue that you may not be appreciating yourself. Finding ways to increase your own enthusiasm and confidence makes you appreciate yourself more and this emotional state gets communicated to others. Here are some strategies to increase your high performance emotions of enthusiasm, confidence, optimism, and tenacity.

- Acknowledge and celebrate successes.
- Listen to upbeat music that makes you happy.
- Look for and appreciate humor wherever you find it. A good belly laugh can change your outlook for the better.
- Acknowledge what is going well (such as in a daily gratitude journal).
- Before you go to bed each night, write down on an index card three statements that will put you in a good mood, and place it on a night stand or table so that you look at it when you wake up. This way you start out each day on a positive note.

## **NOT WELL RESTED**

Football icon Vince Lombardi once said, *“Fatigue makes cowards of us all.”* The quickest way to lose focus and have poor performance throughout your life is to not have enough rest. The amount of rest you need varies per individual. When you can awaken without the need for an alarm clock, this is a sign that you are getting an adequate amount of rest. Sleep disorders such as insomnia can interfere with getting a good night’s sleep. Here are some approaches to dealing with insomnia:

- Don't try to force sleep. Let it come passively. One strategy is to read a book until you feel sleepy.
- Avoid late meals or exercising late at night.
- If you are feeling anxiety, which can cause your thoughts to race, try meditation to quiet your thoughts. Writing in a journal is another strategy. Often the antidote to anxiety is information. If something unknown is making you anxious, develop a strategy to find answers, and remember that sometimes, the passage of time is the only way to get an answer.
- Try taking a hot bath, but do so thirty minutes before sleeping. Although a hot bath is quite relaxing, immediately after getting out of the bath, your body temperature will lower. Allowing thirty minutes before bed time gives your body temperature a chance to level off.
- Go to sleep and wake up on a regular schedule every day, whether it's a day off or not.

Being well rested throughout the day is not solely a matter of physical sleep either. Another form of rest involves taking breaks and getting briefly away from your work. When feeling tired during the day, stretching and doing a few minutes of vigorous exercise can help to recharge your batteries.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Jennifer rides the subway home from work every day. After a long day of work, Jennifer got on the subway, and at the next stop, a well-dressed man with three well-dressed kids gets on the bus. The kids keep running around and being rowdy, while the man ignores them with his head in his hands. Jennifer can't take it anymore and snaps at the man: "You need to control your children!"

The man replies, "You're right. I'm sorry. We're coming back from a funeral for their mother, and I guess I can't bring myself to discipline them right now."

Jennifer reconsiders her earlier anger and calls the children to her. They play a game of "I spy" for the rest of the trip home.

*When one door is shut,  
another opens.*

MIGUEL CERVANTES



# STRESS MANAGEMENT (EXTERNAL STRESSORS)

External stressors can often be a source of frustration. You have limited control over the things that come at you in life. When managing stress resulting from external stressors, adaptability and understanding what you can control are vital.

## MANAGE YOUR WORK SPACE

An uncomfortable work space can be a constant form of stress. Sometimes, the stress is obvious: not having functioning equipment, for example. Sometimes, the stress is more invisible: equipment that isn't ergonomically sound. Fortunately, you do have some control over how to arrange your work space. Make sure that you have working and ergonomically sound equipment, so that these do not interrupt your ability to be productive.

It may seem innocuous, but clutter has very real and damaging effects. It will increase stress and create distractions that damage your creative process while encouraging procrastination. Simply getting rid of unnecessary clutter is enough to prevent procrastination in many instances. Create a clutter free environment by removing all nonessential items from the workspace. This includes trash, old papers, and gadgets. You should feel

free, however, to keep inspirational items such as art to encourage you in your own creative process.

### **Steps to being Clutter Free:**

- Remove unnecessary items.
- Clean up the area at the end of each workday.
- Keep everything organized and put things back where they go.
- Do not allow other people to clutter up your office.
- Have space chosen for items before you bring them into your work area.

## **LOUD WORK ENVIRONMENT**

Another external stressor that can affect your ability to be productive is a loud work environment. Loud sounds that aren't specifically related to our tasks can serve as distractions, making it difficult to think and do your work. When handling a challenging customer, loud noises in the background can undermine the rapport you build with your customer. Identifying the source of the disturbance is the first step towards handling a loud environment. However, when addressing it, proceed respectfully.

## CO-WORKER RELATIONS

Most of us aren't saints, and it's inevitable that you will run across people with whom you clash. However when you are actively in conflict with someone else, this can spill over into the rest of your life. If you cannot resolve differences with coworkers in a constructive way, how can you hope to handle challenging customers? When you are angry and in conflict with someone, it's rare for it to be one-sided. Consequently, when resolving a conflict with a coworker, it's important to be willing to meet the other person half-way. Conflict is not the sort of circumstance where you can win unless the person you're in conflict with is winning too. Here are some strategies for resolving conflicts in a way where everyone wins:

- Consider anger styles. Are you the type of person who needs to squash a conflict immediately or are you the type of person who needs a time out in order to understand the situation better? How about the person you're in conflict with? Perhaps they need time to reflect or perhaps they need an immediate acknowledgement that there is a conflict and that you are interested in resolving it, even though you need time to reflect. If you need a time out, be sure to follow up with the other people.
- Watch out for distorted and negative thinking styles in yourself (see Chapter 2). During conflict with another person, it's real easy to fall into the trap that they are a jerk, impossible, or selfish or any number of negative traits. Rather than labeling another person destructively, try identifying specific behaviors or incidents and focus on how you felt during these.

- Be assertive and direct. Avoid aggressive, passive-aggressive, or even passive behaviors. Be aware of your non-verbal communication, and avoid escalating behaviors.
- Be flexible and willing to meet the other person or people halfway. Listen and try to understand their point of view. Reflect back empathy when you can honestly do so. (“I can see where that might have upset you.”)
- If necessary, seek out a third party to act as a neutral arbitrator. When doing so, try to involve the person with whom you are in conflict on the decision of an arbitrator. That way, you can avoid the temptation or perception that you are seeking someone to turn against the other person.

## **DEMANDING SUPERVISOR**

A demanding boss can be another powerful external source of stress. However usually they have a load of stress on them, whether it's from their bosses or your customers, who are in effect everyone's boss. Not to mention whatever other stress points they have in their life. A helpful approach is to consider their needs and concerns as well as yours.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Angela's supervisor, Yolanda, assigned a new project to Angela. Unfortunately, Angela's regular workload was so high that she didn't see any way she would be able to complete the project on time. Her first

thought was that Yolanda didn't like her and wanted to punish her. Angela recognized the destructive labeling of the situation and countered with a specific, that Yolanda might have a problem with how Angela manages her time. Even after developing a schedule, Angela still could not find the time to complete her regular work and the project on time as well. She sent Yolanda an email asking if she could schedule a meeting after lunch to discuss the project and ways Angela could better manage her time. During the meeting, Yolanda told Angela that she assigned her the project because Angela is one of her best workers. Together they went over Angela's schedule to find any areas where she could improve her time management. Yolanda also reassigned one of Angela's daily tasks to another co-worker.

*And in the end,  
the love you take is equal  
to the love you make.*

THE BEATLES



# TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

Our focus thus far has been on developing ourselves into positive-oriented individuals who can manage our moods and stress levels and adapt to unpleasant circumstances in a constructive way. Now we begin to focus our attention on the interactions we have with others. Conceiving of human interaction as a series of transactions where we have positive and negative rewards is a helpful approach towards understanding our relations with customers. Transactional Analysis builds on this conception.

## WHAT IS TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS

Transactional Analysis is an approach to psychology that developed in the wake of two competing schools of psychology: psychoanalysis and behaviorism. Psychoanalysis was concerned with the inner workings of the mind, called the psyche. Behaviorism was concerned with outward behaviors and how to change them. Transactional Analysis focuses on interrelations among people, including both outward behavior and inner motivations. Whereas behaviorism and psychoanalysis focus on inward and outward aspects of an individual, Transactional Analysis focuses on one's relation with others.

## **PARENT**

Transactional Analysis divides our behavior and motivations with others into three styles of behavior: Parent, Child, and Adult. The Parent style can be thought of as the killjoy. The Parent style is our mimicking of parental behavior in our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. For example, when we talk to someone as if they are a child, or someone talks to us as if we were children, this is the person acting in the Parent style. Communications in this style often exhibit distorted thinking styles, particularly thinking in imperatives that are filtered through our past experiences.

## **CHILD**

The Child style involves behavior that focuses on fun and avoids responsibility. If someone ever responded to you with a reply such as “Stop bringing me down,” or “I don’t want to,” or they cussed at you, chances are they are operating within the Child style or Child aspect of themselves.

## **ADULT**

Transactional Analysis considers the Adult mode to be the best mode to operate in when it comes to problem solving, including challenging interactions with other people. Rather than focusing on the way things should be, as the Parent mode does, or the way you want things to be, as the Child mode does, the Adult mode focuses on the way things are and how to adapt oneself to them.

Transactions between others can be characterized as complementary or crossed. Complementary transactions include Child to Child, Child to Adult (and vice versa), Parent to Parent, and Adult to Adult. Communication that is complementary can continue in this fashion indefinitely. Here are some examples:

**Adult** *Is the report finished?* to Adult *I've finished it and am about to deliver it to you.*

**Parent** *Why haven't you cleaned your room yet? I've told you repeatedly.* to Child *You always nag me.*

**Child** *Hey, let's skip work and go to the park.* to Child *Yes. Work is boring anyway.*

**Parent** *You should stop procrastinating* to Parent *You should mind your own business.*

Crossed transactions interrupt the back and forth flow of complementary transactions. Crossed transactions include Adult to Child, Adult to Parent, Child to Adult, and Parent to Adult. Not all complementary transactions are beneficial, nor are all crossed transactions negative. Crossed transactions merely change the nature of the relationship flow. Here are some examples:

**Adult** *Is the report finished?* to Child *Why are you always nagging me?* The conversation can then turn into a complementary Child to Child interaction or Parent to Child interaction.

**Adult** *I'm cleaning up my room now.* to Parent *I shouldn't have to remind you.* The conversation can then turn into a complementary Parent to Child or Parent to Parent interaction.

**Child** *Let's skip work and go to the movies* to Adult *I can't afford to miss work. My rent is due.* An Adult response can in turn elicit a complementary Adult response, such as *Yeah, I need to work, too.*

**Parent** *You should have finished that report already* to Adult *You're right. Here is my plan to improve my efficiency* or *You're right. Here is the report. How can I improve to get it done faster?* This Adult response can eventually lead to a complementary Adult response, *That sounds like a good plan.* or *Here's how you can improve.*

While it's true that crossed transactions can continue as such, they eventually resolve into complementary transactions. Consequently, when you interact with a customer who is in Parent mode or Child mode, the best way to break the chain of negative complementary responses is to respond and stay in Adult mode yourself.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Agnes and her friend Miriam were having an argument because Agnes was supposed to pick up Miriam from work. Agnes got stuck in traffic and her phone was dead. When Agnes finally picked up Miriam over an hour late, Miriam was upset. "An hour late? Come on, Agnes" Miriam said. "You just can't be reliable, can you?"

“I’m not unreliable,” Agnes said, “I’m here. Why do you have to come down on me? Buzz off.”

“I just can’t trust you to do a simple favor,” Miriam said.

Agnes took a few deep breaths. She realized that Miriam had probably had a tough day at work and just wanted to get home. Even though Agnes was tempted to remind Miriam that she was doing her a favor after all, Agnes knew that if she pointed it out, it would only escalate matters. Instead she replied, “I’m really sorry. My phone was dead. I probably should have charged it, but I got caught up doing other things.”

“It’s okay,” Miriam said. She remembered Agnes was helping her by giving her a ride. Being late wasn’t totally Agnes’ fault. Miriam realized the real problem wasn’t that Agnes was late. The real problem was that Miriam was tired and needed to get off her feet and away from work. Now that Agnes was here, she could do that, and for that she was grateful. “These things happen sometimes. I’m sorry I snapped at you.”

*All happy families are  
alike; each unhappy family  
is unhappy in its own way.*

LEO TOLSTOY



# WHY ARE SOME CUSTOMERS DIFFICULT?

While many of your interactions with customers will be pleasant and positive, you inevitably will have to interact with customers who are difficult in some way. Keep in mind that just as all of your emotions communicate to you so you can assess your situation, this is also the case for the difficult customer. Regardless of why they are angry or upset, their feelings are valid. Understanding the different reasons behind their behavior can help you to resolve their difficulty.

## **THEY HAVE TRULY HAD A BAD EXPERIENCE AND WANT TO VENT**

Venting swing emotions such as anxiety and anger can be a useful strategy towards slowing down thoughts and reaching a more calm emotional state. When customers want to vent, they want a solution, but what may be more important is that they feel that they are heard, that their concerns are valid. Listening actively with empathy can help customers who need to vent in order to de-escalate their emotional state to a less aroused state.

*“Empathy is the faculty to resonate with the feelings of others. When we meet someone who is joyful, we smile. When we witness someone in pain, we suffer in resonance with his or her suffering.”*

*-Matthieu Ricard*

## **WANT SOMEONE TO BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE**

Customers looking for accountability feel anxious and angry. Will anyone resolve their problem? Keep in mind that being accountable is not the same thing as accepting blame. An Adult mode assessment of reality might understand that you personally did not cause their problem, but a Parent mode assessment might perceive everyone at your business as incompetent as evidenced by the customer's problem. Customers who are looking for accountability may speak in terms of blame and fault. This however is not truly being accountable. To be held accountable is to acknowledge that you can be responsible for where things go from here. When you take responsibility, you are saying that you are able to respond to the situation rather than saying the situation is your fault. Often when you reassure a customer that you are going to help them, and you offer a specific strategy on how you will do so, this helps the customer feel less anxious. By providing specific information, you help customers to de-escalate their anxiety. By showing a willingness to take responsibility you speak to the customer's Parent mode response, and shift them back into Adult mode.

## **THEY HAVE TRULY HAD A BAD EXPERIENCE AND WANT RESOLUTION**

When customers express that they are looking for a resolution, they are operating in the Adult mode. Even if they are angry or expressing frustration, they can quickly de-escalate when they know that you are working towards a resolution. Sometimes conflicts can arise when the resolution is not what the customer wants or expects, including the idea that a complete resolution may take time. In this case, being honest and offering multiple options can help a customer accept the range of resolutions being offered. Remember that the emotion of frustration tells us that something isn't working. Providing multiple options to a customer can let them know that you are looking for a solution that will work.

## **THEY ARE GENERALLY UNHAPPY**

Customers who are generally unhappy people can be exceptionally difficult. When you ask what is wrong, they can launch into an entire laundry list. Often unhappy people pursue negative rewards in their interactions. Consequently, they may want you to slip into a Child or Parent mode to complement their corresponding Child or Parent mode, because this confirms their negative view of life. Destructive labeling is a common distorted thinking pattern that you'll find with this type of customer. When dealing with generally unhappy people, you can help them by refocusing their attention on the here and now and the problem at hand. Rather than asking what is wrong, you can ask, how can I help you today, or look for specific steps you can take to resolve a specific issue. Remember

that the way to counteract destructive labeling in yourself is to focus on specifics. This focus on a specific and resolvable problem in your impossible-to-please customer can aid in counteracting their destructive labeling. You may find that they continuously resist and try to lure you into a Child or Parent state. If possible, you may have to call a time out to regroup yourself. The most important step in dealing with generally unhappy customers is to remain authentically positive and in the Adult mode. Dealing with this type of customer can be a source of frustration, so be prepared to reframe the problem when you identify this emotion in yourself or your customer.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Ginny's cell phone continued to drop calls and shut off on its own. This created some friction with her parents and her boyfriend because calls had been dropped during particularly tense discussions. She had called customer service twice and spent over two hours on the phone with them, including over an hour on hold. Yet she still hadn't had her problem fixed. Ginny resolved to let the next customer service person she talked to really have it because she was angry and wanted this problem resolved yesterday.

When Roger, the customer service representative, answered Ginny's call, she said, "You guys are awful." Ginny launched into a long rant about the evils of her cell phone provider. Roger listened to Ginny vent without interruption, except to offer empathy for what she was going through. He could understand why she would be so angry and frustrated after

spending so much of her time dealing with her phone and not finding a resolution. When Ginny had finished venting, Roger paused a few seconds and replied, “I’m very sorry that you have had to go through all of that. I will help you to have a working phone as soon as possible.” Roger looked through Ginny’s account notes and found an order had been entered for a new phone, but the order never completed. He saw that the call had dropped with both of the previous representatives. Hmm, Roger thought, the real problem isn’t her phone not working; the real problem is that she’s on that phone when she calls us, so we are never able to complete her order. Roger asked her if there was an alternative number he could call her back at if the call dropped. Roger assured Ginny that he was on this and would continue to work with her until they found a workable resolution. Ginny was starting to feel better about the situation and gave Roger the phone number to her parents. Ginny said, “I guess you guys aren’t all bad.”

*Remember that a  
person's name is to that  
person the sweetest and  
most important sound in  
any language.*

DALE CARNEGIE



# DEALING WITH THE CUSTOMER OVER THE PHONE

When you eliminate one of your five senses, your other senses tend to become sharper. This is an important fact to consider when working with a customer over the phone. Since you cannot see the customer nor they you, the audio aspects of the interaction become magnified, including such aspects as your tone of voice and any noises occurring in the background on either side of the line.

### **LISTEN TO THE CUSTOMER'S COMPLAINT**

The value of listening cannot be overestimated. However, listening involves more than simply hearing the words the customer says. Developing the skills of active listening can make sure you can not only hear the words your customers say, but it can also help you understand your customers' concerns on a deeper level, as well as being the first step towards building a rapport with your customers. Here are the different aspects of active listening:

- Use (minimal) encouragers. Encouragers are short words or phrases that indicate to a speaker that you are paying attention to

what they are saying. Words, phrases, and sounds such as *Yes, Uh huh, Go on, Mmm, So what happened next?* etc. encourage speakers to continue speaking. You can't overdo this, however, or you run the risk of disrupting communication through interruption.

- Repeat key phrases. This is another way to encourage the speaker to continue and to make them feel heard. Here's an example: the speaker says, "Yesterday, I went to the store to buy a loaf of bread." The listener can combine a repetition of a key phrase with an encourager, "A loaf of bread. Okay, go on."
- Paraphrase and summarize the speaker's key points. *So what I'm hearing you say is ...*
- Offer empathy. *That must have been really tough or I can see why you would be angry.*
- Stay in the moment and listen fully. It might be tempting to interrupt because you've anticipated what else the customer is going to say. Keep in mind, however, that while you may have heard the same issue over and over from different customers, your interaction with this customer is a unique experience with a unique individual. Even if their experience is exactly like what everyone else has told you throughout the day, this customer may need to fully articulate their experience in order to feel heard.
- Listening fully also involves taking note of volume and tone of voice and pace of speech. These indicate the emotional state of your customer. Higher volume, tone, and pace indicate an arousal

emotion, enthusiasm, perhaps, but also anger, frustration, or anxiety. Context matters.

- Keeping a pen and pad of paper handy to write down any questions or thoughts you might have can counter the temptation to formulate a response as the speaker is talking. However, this can take you out of the immediate moment, and out of actually listening to the customer. Use this strategy sparingly when an issue is particularly complex. Think of it as taking notes on what the speaker is telling you.
- Probe with open ended questions. Open ended questions are the opposite of close-ended questions, which can be answered in a word. For example, *Were you able to login?* (close ended question with a yes/no answer) vs *When you entered your username and password and hit enter, what did the screen show?* (open ended question with a more involved answer).
- Be genuine. Active listening is not about using vocal and communication tricks to give the illusion that you care. Active listening means you are fully present in the interaction and that you truly care about what the customer is going through.

## **BUILD RAPPORT**

Active listening is only the first step towards building a rapport with your customer. A rapport is a state of harmony between you and another person or group. Here are some strategies towards building a rapport:

- Address the other person by name early, and reinforce that where appropriate. While addressing a person by name can come across awkwardly if overdone, too much in this case is better than not enough.
- Have a smile in your voice. When you smile as you speak, you insert a note of positivity into the interaction. However, a fake smile can communicate sarcasm instead, which brings us to our next point.
- Use “we” language to indicate the collaborative nature of the interaction. Remember that as a customer service representative, you are acting as a partner with your customer to find a solution to a problem.
- Employ (selectively) non-threatening ice breakers and small talk topics. Politics and religion are subjects to avoid. Remember that making small talk isn’t always the best approach, especially if your customer sounds excessively angry or impatient.
- Be honest and genuine. If you truly do not know the answer to a question, be up front about that, but also demonstrate a willingness to find that answer. Using specifics helps.
- Demonstrate empathy and actively listen.
- Speaking with an even pace and in a lower tone of voice helps to build a rapport.
- Be attentive to silence. Prolonged silence can be uncomfortable for some people, but a short silence allows you the opportunity

to digest what the customer is telling you, and it indicates to the customer that you are thinking about what they said.

- Show agreement with the customer when you do genuinely agree, but after acknowledging agreement, express specifically why you agree.
- If you must disagree with a customer, give your reasons first before expressing disagreement.
- Be polite in your interactions. You can offer compliments, when genuine, but don't overdo it. Avoid offering criticism. Instead, offer alternatives in the form of a question: *What if we tried this ...*

## **DO NOT RESPOND WITH NEGATIVE WORDS OR EMOTION**

When working in the customer service field, you will frequently encounter negativity from your customers. If you respond with negative words or emotions, this can reinforce that negativity. While responding with empathy often requires that you acknowledge a customer's negative emotions, your choice of words can set the tone for the remainder of the conversation. For example, to acknowledge that your customer has had a frustrating experience, using the word "challenging" rather than "frustrating" can communicate that the problem is a solvable one rather than insolvable.

## **OFFER A VERBAL SOLUTION TO YOUR CUSTOMER**

Offering a solution or a range of solutions helps to diminish a customer's anxiety because this provides specific information. People like to know where they stand in a situation. By offering verbal solutions, you speak to this need. When you offer your solutions, make sure to be specific and set realistic expectations. When offering a range of solutions, indicate your preferred solution and why it's preferred. Confirm that your customers are on board by asking, "Does this work for you?" If the answer is no, probe further to determine your customer's objections.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Theresa works in a call center for a cable service provider. One day she received a phone call from Frank, who was frustrated because he had bought a pay per view movie but was charged twice for it on his bill. Theresa listened to Frank describe his reaction to opening his bill and finding it was more than he had planned for because of the extra charge. He didn't have enough money to pay his bill on time if the charge stood. Theresa replied, "Yes, Frank, I can understand why you feel concerned about paying too much, especially since you can't afford it."

Theresa knew that it would take a minute to find the extra charge in Frank's account records. She said, "I'll just need to look at your account and see if we can remove the extra charge. It might take a minute. I see that you're calling from Cleveland. How's the weather been lately?"

Frank and Theresa discussed the weather while Theresa looked at Frank's account and saw that he had been charged twice. She said, "You're right, Frank. You have been double charged. I'm sorry you had to experience that. It looks like I am unable to remove the charge at this time, but what I can do is add a credit to your bill." She told him what the bill was without the extra charge and asked if he could afford to pay that. Frank confirmed this. "So," Theresa said, "if I apply the credit to your bill, that should put you up to date once you've paid the remainder. Will that work for you?"

Frank said yes, and Theresa asked if there was anything else she could help Frank with today. Frank said no, thanked her, and hung up.

*Your most unhappy  
customers are your greatest  
source of learning.*

BILL GATES



# DEALING WITH THE CUSTOMER IN PERSON

When you interact with a customer in person, you have both greater challenges and greater opportunities to build a rapport with that customer than you have when speaking with them over the phone. Consequently, nearly everything said about handling a customer over the phone is in play, along with additional approaches.

## **LISTEN TO THE CUSTOMER'S CONCERNS**

Actively listening to your customer involves a little bit more than what's involved when listening to a customer over the phone. Distractions become more obvious, for example, so in this case, keeping a notebook handy to write in while listening to the customer becomes more detrimental than helpful. When interacting with a customer in person, non-verbal communication can supersede verbal indicators that you are listening and engaged. Here are some non-verbal aspects of active listening that work in conjunction with verbal aspects of active listening:

- Make eye contact, but avoid staring. The appropriate amount of eye contact varies from person to person and culture to culture. Keeping eye contact for approximately 60% of the time is a good baseline, but adjust this to fewer instances of eye contact when

dealing with shyer individuals because too much eye contact can intimidate.

- An attentive posture involves leaning slightly towards the speaker or tilting your head towards the speaker.
- Use non-verbal encouragers such as nodding, holding a thumbs-up sign, or other gestures that communicate the same idea as verbal encouragers such as *go on* or *yes*.
- Listen fully by paying attention to your customer's body language and posture.
- Reflect back your customer's expressions when you can do so genuinely. A willed and conscious reflection or mirroring can indicate inattentiveness, so this is something you must not fake. Automatic mirroring, however, reinforces the idea that you are engrossed in what the other person is saying.
- Allowing yourself to be distracted can completely negate customers' beliefs that you are listening to them. Avoid looking at the clock or your cell phone, writing or doodling, or playing with your hair or picking your fingernails.

## **BUILD RAPPORT**

Building a rapport face to face involves three additional components: your customer's physical presence, including appearance, body language, expressions, and mannerisms; as well as yours; and the environment where you interact. All of these aspects of one's physical presence convey

a ton of information that people frequently process unconsciously. In order to build a rapport with someone, you have to consciously adopt a neutral position and avoid making assumptions. You must also be aware of what your physical presence communicates and use positive and open expressions and postures, such as facing someone directly without having your arms or legs crossed, looking them in the eye, and smiling. Your environment can also affect rapport building. For example, a desk or counter between you and your customer can close communication to some degree. This is why people stand and step away from their desks when greeting new customers. Communication without physical barriers in place facilitates building a rapport.

## **RESPOND WITH POSITIVE WORDS AND BODY LANGUAGE**

People tend to synchronize their behavior when they interact, which is why mirroring another's expressions, posture, body language can be effective in building a rapport. It is also why responding to negativity with positivity can defuse a customer's negativity. Following up expressions of genuine empathy with positive words and body language that convey enthusiasm, confidence, optimism, and tenacity, and it can open up an opportunity for the customer to synchronize to your positivity.

While faking empathy can convey phoniness, faking confidence is a situation where the advice *fake it till you make it* applies. From a psychological point of view, acting with the self-confidence that you want will actually help increase your confidence. If you believe that you can do

something, you create a self-fulfilling prophecy. The greater your belief, the more likely you are to succeed.

### **Steps:**

- Dress the part that you want to play.
- Relax and smile.
- Be aware of your body and posture.
- Use the appropriate vocabulary.

### **ASIDE FROM WORDS**

When a customer indicates in words that the situation is resolved, this may not be the case. Good customer service means you have to go deeper to find true resolution. When body language, tone of voice, and the words one uses are all in agreement, this indicates a true resolution has been reached. If a customer answers yes to your question about whether their issue is resolved, but the customer is responding with curt one word answers in a flat tone of voice, or they roll their eyes or sigh loudly, they probably have not found a resolution. Make sure that tone, inflection, verbal, and non-verbal behaviors are all in agreement before determining that a resolution has been reached.

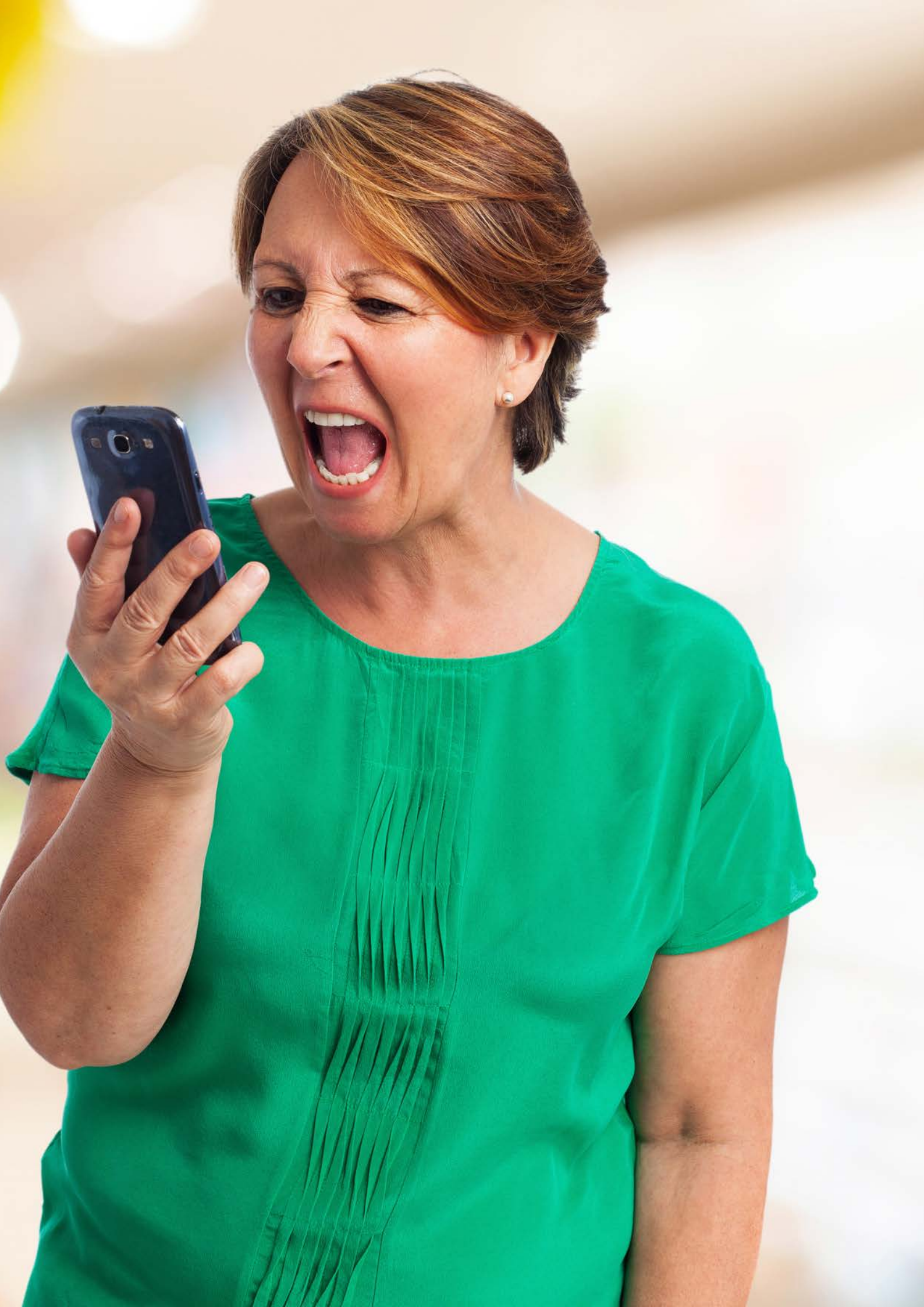
### **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

George has an office at a used car dealership. When Joe, a customer who was wearing torn jeans, a dirty t-shirt, came in, none of George's

co-workers wanted to take the customer because they were afraid they wouldn't get a big enough commission because Joe, to their minds, was obviously too poor. Instead they continued throwing a Nerf football to each other across the show room. George walked over, introduced himself to Joe, looked him in the eye and smiled. He shook Joe's hand firmly. Joe wanted to buy a car but needed to discuss financing issues. Since the environment in the showroom was too distracting, George invited Joe into his office. Instead of sitting down at the desk, George picked a chair beside the one he motioned Joe to sit down in. George leaned in towards Joe and asked him to discuss his financial needs, and how George could help him.

*I am everyday people.*

S L Y   A N D   T H E   F A M I L Y   S T O N E



# SENSITIVITY IN DEALING WITH CUSTOMERS

Customer service professionals will inevitably interact with customers who provide specific kinds of challenges. Becoming sensitive to the types of customers you will deal with, and developing strategies for specific customer situations will make those difficult customer situations less challenging. This chapter offers examples of the types of challenging customers that you will face, along with specific approaches that can make those interactions not only less challenging, but more rewarding as well.

## CUSTOMERS WHO ARE ANGRY

Dealing with a customer who is angry requires patience and the utmost care in managing your own mood. An angry customer can discombobulate you or arouse your own anger. Here are some steps you can take when handling an angry customer:

- Don't take it personally. Whatever reason the customer has for being angry, it probably did not involve you personally. You can

own the problem, as well as the solution, without owning the blame for the situation.

- Beware of your own auto-defense mechanisms. Defensive thoughts such as *I won't be treated this way* or *If I don't stand up to this person, I will fail* tend to engage when you feel under attack. Remember that these types of thoughts often display distorted thinking patterns.
- Remain calm. Take deep breaths to relax and slow your own arousal levels.
- No matter how outrageous your customer's ranting may be coming across, look for and note any kernels of truth in their statements. Listen actively and ask questions when appropriate to understand the real problem.
- Use a brief moment of silence to allow your customer to finish venting and to allow yourself to regroup.
- Once you respond, express agreement with your customer about any of the truth you noted. Express empathy, and offer an apology for their experience (this allows you to apologize without expressing any wrongdoing or accepting blame), and express willingness to find a solution.

## **CUSTOMERS WHO ARE RUDE**

A customer who is rude to you can make it very difficult for you to do your job. Rude and abusive comments can be discombobulating. In addition

to implementing the suggestions above for handling an angry customer, you may have to take additional steps to handle customers who are rude and abusive to you. Here are some suggestions:

- Remember that your role as a customer service representative is to act as a partner with the customer in resolving the customer's issue. This helps to keep you in the Adult mode in the transaction even when the other person is operating in the Child mode.
- When a customer is being directly abusive towards you, it may become necessary to remind the customer that personal attacks aren't helpful towards resolving the situation. However, this must be done delicately. When you point out such behavior to the customer, make sure that you do so from a place of calm and optimism. You could remind the customer that you are dedicated to helping them resolve their issue.
- Consult with your company or supervisor regarding business policies towards customers making personal attacks. Many companies have a "three strikes, you're out" policy. However, keep in mind that taking a step such as this may escalate the issue rather than de-escalate the issue. Applying a "three strikes, you're out" approach must be used sparingly and with careful consideration of your immediate goal of helping customers resolve their issues.
- If you find yourself in a position where you must warn a customer about abusive language, try to do so without snapping or being curt

yourself. Rather than de-escalating, snapping at a customer can put them on the defensive and encourage escalating behaviors.

## **CUSTOMERS WITH DIFFERENT CULTURAL VALUES**

We all come from different cultural backgrounds, and the differences in these backgrounds can put you in a position as a customer service representative where you are dealing with someone with a completely different set of values. How people express anger, for example, differs widely. Some may take the approach that they need to “whip the other person into shape” or that sarcasm and ridicule can shame someone into providing the other person what they want. For example, a Japanese woman might express anger to her mother-in-law by arranging flowers on the dinner table haphazardly or improperly, whereas the same situation in the US might include shouting. Remain open to the notion that different cultures are just as valid as your own. Recognize any distorted thinking patterns in your reaction to a customer of a different culture. Reactions such as imperative thinking are common and should be countered in your own thinking when you recognize them.

## **CUSTOMERS WHO CANNOT BE SATISFIED**

There are times when you will have to interact with a customer who won't be satisfied no matter what you do. With customers with this mindset, it may be impossible to find a resolution that they are happy with. Nevertheless, you still have to try. As with any other type of challenging customer, your first step is to remain calm and functioning in the Adult mode in the transaction. Here are some additional strategies:

- Ask the customer directly what a successful resolution would look like to them. They may or may not be able to articulate this. If what they require is something beyond your capability, you should be up front about this. For example a customer may not be satisfied unless they receive a full year of your product at no cost. Most likely, from your position as a customer service representative, this is something you would not be able to authorize.
- Remember if you begin to feel frustrated, what the real problem is. Sometimes, reframing the problem may point to a viable solution that you had not previously considered.
- Offer a range of solutions that are within your purview. If they want something that you can't deliver, offer alternatives that you can deliver.
- Occasionally what a customer is looking for in terms of resolution is something you cannot do, but your supervisor can. However, you should try to exhaust all possibilities and refrain from suggesting a supervisor as an ad hoc solution. If the customer requests a supervisor, follow your company's policies regarding escalation procedures, but try to exhaust all possible alternatives within your power.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Eddie stormed into the auto parts store and stopped in front of Daniel, a sales associate. Eddie was red-faced and when Daniel asked how he could help Eddie, Eddie replied, "You better believe you're going to help

me. I've been back to the store three times to buy this same part, and you idiots keep selling me the wrong part!"

Daniel apologized for Eddie's experience, and Eddie replied, "Yeah, well I'm sorry all you're all a bunch of incompetent idiots. You going to help me or are you another incompetent?"

Daniel took a deep breath, paused for a second, and then looked Eddie in the eye and smiled. Daniel said, "Well, Eddie, you're in luck because they discontinued our incompetency training sessions before I started working here, so I'm sure we can get it right."

Daniel's smile and joke made Eddie smile for a second, and then he said, "A wise guy, huh? Well, just fix my problem."

Daniel asked Eddie what vehicle he had, and then re-examined the part Eddie was returning. Daniel realized that the part had been put in the wrong place, so that all the parts hanging there were the wrong ones. "Let me find the right part in the back," Daniel said, and then found the correct part and brought it out. He compared the part with the other one and confirmed that he was giving Eddie the correct part. "If you have the car in the parking lot, I can come with you and make certain that this is the right part."

Eddie agreed and they went out to the parking lot to test the new part.

*Well done is better  
than well said.*

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN



29.  
~~WRITER~~

# SCENARIOS OF DEALING WITH A DIFFICULT CUSTOMER

In order to handle certain types of scenarios when dealing with difficult customers, it's important to have a strategy in place before you find yourself in that situation. By engaging in role playing beforehand, you can practice what strategies you would employ and how best to implement them.

## ANGRY CUSTOMER

Consider the following scenario. You work at an Internet service provider firm. A road construction crew accidentally cut a cable that allows your company to provide Internet connections for your company. You have not been given a timetable on when this should be fixed. A customer calls the help line and gets you. He's angry because his business relies upon the Internet. Each hour the Internet is down means a loss of revenue for his business. When you tell him you don't have an estimated time for a fix, he begins to shout at you.

- Explore how you would address this customer's issue.
- What kinds of alternative solutions could you provide?

- What kinds of strategies would you use to de-escalate the situation?

## **RUDE CUSTOMER**

Here is a scenario where you would have to deal with a customer who is being rude and abusive. You work for as a customer service representative at a call center for a company that makes exercise equipment. A customer calls in complaining that her treadmill motor is smoking. She has called in previously and was informed that her warranty has been voided because she did not follow the maintenance instructions in the handbook for her machine. She is upset because no one ever told her about maintenance when she bought the machine. She starts calling you a crook for robbing her, and continues to call you names (including some we can't print).

- Explore what steps you would take in this situation to remain calm and relaxed.
- How would you go about de-escalating the situation?
- How do you avoid correcting the customer and putting her on the defensive?
- If it became absolutely necessary, how would you phrase a warning to refrain from personal attacks?

## **A CUSTOMER FROM ANOTHER CULTURE**

You are a customer service representative who is dealing with a customer over the phone who has a thick accent. His culture values haggling and

deal making. When you suggest a possible solution he automatically discounts it.

- What strategies would you employ to make sure you can understand the customer?
- If you realize the customer is trying to haggle with you, but you are only authorized to allow so much as a solution, what strategies would you employ to address this cultural difference?

## **AN IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE CUSTOMER**

You work for a cell phone company that is experiencing an outage in a specific area of town. A customer calls in to complain. She has a sick mother and needs her phone to work so that she can contact emergency services. When you ask her what solution she is looking for, she replies that she needs her phone to work right now and she wants your company to pay for her service for the next year.

- How would you express empathy with this customer?
- While the scenario appears unsolvable, what alternatives could you offer to help this difficult to please customer?
- What would you do if the customer demands to speak to the CEO of your company?

## PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION

Sue walked into the office for her electric company and asked for some assistance. She had a thick Chinese accent that made it difficult to understand her. Amy, the customer service representative, repeated back what she heard Sue say to make sure she understood her. Sue's bill showed that she hadn't paid her previous month's bill, but Sue insisted that she had, and showed Amy the bank statement that showed her check had been processed. Amy knew that she could not credit the bill but would have to send the issue on to her billing department for further research. When she informed Sue of the situation and asked if this was an acceptable solution, Sue frowned, but said yes. Amy recognized the disagreement between Sue's body language and her verbal statement. Amy said, "What if I call you in two days so that I can give our billing department a chance to review the situation, but this way I can let you know where things are at without you having to come back out to our office?"

Sue smiled and shook her head yes. She told Amy she appreciated her for taking responsibility for the problem.

*Customer satisfaction  
is worthless. Customer  
loyalty is priceless.*

J E F F R E Y G I T O M E R



# FOLLOWING UP WITH A CUSTOMER ONCE YOU HAVE ADDRESSED THEIR ISSUE

The difference between having a customer who is satisfied and a customer who will remain loyal can be determined in the steps you take to follow-up with that customer. Once you have resolved a customer's issue, before you end the transaction, take a moment to summarize for the customer what the issue was and what the resolution was as well. Ask the customer if the situation is resolved and how you may further assist them.

## CALL THE CUSTOMER

If a customer thinks the situation is resolved and it appears to be so, imagine how they would feel if after you end your interaction with them, the problem comes up again. In addition to maintaining a positive relationship between the company and the customer, it's a good idea to follow up later and make sure their issue is still resolved. It's also a good way to show that you genuinely care about your customer's circumstances.

## **SEND THE CUSTOMER AN EMAIL**

Some companies prefer that you do not call a customer to follow up. Another option is to send the customer a follow up email. Try to let at least 24 hours pass before doing so, to allow time for a problem to come back up. Another advantage of sending an email is that it can be less time consuming than a phone call.

## **MAIL THE CUSTOMER A SMALL TOKEN**

When a customer has gone through a difficult challenge, a small token such as a gift certificate or a coupon can help ease a bad memory. Make sure that whatever you send is appropriate and within your company's policies.

## **SNAIL-MAIL A HANDWRITTEN OR TYPED LETTER**

A letter sent through the mail has an added advantage of allowing time to pass between the initial interaction and the moment your customer receives your letter. This period in between allows a customer to be certain that an issue has been resolved. A handwritten letter is also a good personal touch that gives customers a sense that they are cared for as individuals.

## **PRACTICAL ILLUSTRATION**

Ashley had worked with a customer over the course of a few weeks over resolving a particularly difficult to solve issue. In the course of several

phone calls, she learned that Janine, her customer, was to finish working on her PhD in the coming week. Ashley was relieved that the issue had been finally resolved, even though it had been a trying circumstance for both her and Janine. Ashley wrote out a hand-written letter that thanked Janine for her patience and congratulated Janine on her success in school. Three weeks later Ashley received an autographed picture of Janine in her cap and gown that said, “Customer for Life. Thank you, Ashley.”

*Fall seven times  
and stand up eight.*

JAPANESE PROVERB

# CLOSING THOUGHTS

- **I Ching (The Classic of Changes):** No situation can become favorable until one is able to adapt to it and does not wear oneself out with mistaken resistance.
- **Charles Darwin:** It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change.
- **Mother Teresa:** Kind words may be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are endless.
- **Mahatma Gandhi:** A customer is the most important visitor on our premises; he is not dependent on us. We are dependent on him. He is not an interruption in our work. He is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider in our business. He is part of it. We are not doing him a favor by serving him. He is doing us a favor by giving us an opportunity to do so.



**Rick Chisholm** made history when he single-handedly changed the professional Audio Visual industry by breaking all the rules and capitalised over 50% market share in Australia with very little capital, no partners, mergers or lenders and set up the first franchise operation of its kind in the world in the late 1990's and early 2000's.

As a 7x founder of companies and 30x businesses such as Innovest, AI Machine, Lightsounds, LSW, Light Emotion with revenue in excess of \$300 million and having employed more than 1,000 staff over the last 35 years. Rick is known as the Start-Up and SME Guru and is Author of a number of books including Business Success for Life. Unlike many mentors, he actually walks the talk and has a number of businesses under management in such areas as Automation, Events management, Importing, Distribution, Retailing and E-commerce.

His BIG passion is Business Education empowering Businesses Owners through knowledge and skills. Whilst Rick has experienced great success, he has also endured many failures. Rick has faced and overcome the exact same challenges you are facing now.



**Tala Chisholm** is an SME specialist who has owned and managed several small to medium sized businesses in the last 20 years, several of which were eventually sold. She has extensive experience in the fields of retail, franchising, licensing, dealerships, education, importing, distribution and consulting.

Her expertise lies in building and implementing customised cross-platform database and software solutions for businesses, automation, IT, web marketing, advertising, graphic design, business administration, process refinement and implementation. Her business experience ranges from bricks-and-mortar Giftware retailing to highly technical fields such as Security, CCTV, Entertainment Lighting and Audio sales, hire and installations as well as e-commerce.

Throughout her career she also trained and mentored Franchise business owners as well as internal division managers. Some areas of training included retail operations, management practices, business strategy, accounting, cash-flow, marketing, customer service and IT. She has also headed up the drafting of Operating Compliance Manuals for Franchise operations and implementation of all the elements involved.



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