

**The following are examples of strategies you may consider using
with difficult Customers**

Dealing with customers frustration quickly and professionally are all part of providing a high quality customer service level. Everyone has his or her own personal customer service nightmare story. So it's easy to understand how a customer may perceive things from their side of the counter when they confront you looking for satisfaction.

The next time you encounter a difficult customer relation situation either on the phone or in person consider the following steps:

Step 1: Remain Calm Yourself

When a customer begins to vent their frustration it is important to remain calm yourself. Staff may take things personally and assume that the customer's anger is directed at them and so then it is natural to become defensive.

**Realize that in most situations the customer is likely angry at the situation and not you.*

Step 2: Allow the Customer to Vent Their Frustration:

Do this without interrupting. If you would like to defuse the customer's anger, try apologizing. You could use such phrases as,

- "I'm sorry you had to go through this."
- "I can understand why that would be so upsetting."

Usually when you apologize, the customer's anger is immediately dissipated. You may feel uncomfortable for apologizing for something that you are not responsible for.

**However, keep in mind that you are apologizing on behalf of the facility not yourself.*

Step 3: Paraphrase The Problem

In your own words, paraphrase what the customer is saying and feeling.

**Show you are truly sympathetic with the customer's problem.*

Step 4: Resolve The Problem

Once you have gained the customers confidence, you are in a position to resolve the problem. It's a common mistake to try to solve the problem while the customer is still angry. The customer is often looking for an apology first, then a resolution to the problem. Record and report the incident to your supervisor. This can assist them in determining if the problem is a common issue for customers that needs possible changes to the operation to avoid future situation and /or if follow up is required with the customer.

**In some circumstance you may not be able to resolve the customers concern. Record the details and forward them to your supervisor for follow-up. This will assure that all that can be done will be...*

Here are some further techniques for dealing with an upset customer:

Technique 1: Keep It Impersonal and Professional

It is important not to antagonize the customer by the way you speak to them. For example, if you have to inform them that they did not interpret the swim schedule correctly. Never say, *“You didn’t read it correctly.”* Instead say, *“There are a few areas on the schedule that could be improved upon.”*

**Can you see the difference in the way the message could be sent and received? It’s as if the customer was not at fault.*

Technique 2: “I Versus You”

Imagine an upset customer trying to explain something to an employee that does not understand. The employee says, *“You are confusing me.”* This statement makes the customer feel more frustrated. Instead of saying, *“Excuse me but I am confused”* or *“Let me see if I have this straight.”*

**Using “I” instead of “you” avoids angering the customer further, and will help, as opposed to hinder, the communications process.*

Technique 3: Avoid Saying, “But It’s _____ Policy”

Nothing frustrates a customer more than to hear the phrase *“It’s our policy”* To the customer this suggests that the organization comes first and the customer comes second. Think how some banks treat customers these days and you will visualize the frustration that your customers will experience with a statement like that.

**Instead take the time to explain why such a decision has been made.*

Technique 4: Take Responsibility

How many times have you experienced an employee say, *“It’s not my job”*, When you ask them a question, or you ask the clerk where a certain item is located in a store, and you are told where you can find it, instead of being escorted to it.

**Always take the steps to ensure the customer’s needs.*

Technique 5: Keep The Customer Informed

Sometimes when a problem arises that cannot be resolved immediately, you can tell them that you or your supervisor will get back to them by a certain time. Even if you don’t have that problem solved by that time, call the customer back to advise them that you are working on it.

**The customer will respect you and the facility for keeping in touch.*

Technique 6: “You Have To…”

A customer doesn’t have to do anything. The customer is doing us a favor, not the other way around. Instead of saying, *“You have to do this”* say, *“Would you mind doing this so we may resolve the problem quickly”*.

**The customer will see that you recognize the importance of resolving the issue quickly and will likely support your request of them.*

In the height of busy times, it is sometimes difficult to follow these steps and techniques, but if you have had a bad experience, review these suggestions and see how you may have handled things differently.

A few words to consider...

Our Customers

Customers are the most important people ...in person on the phone or by mail.

Customers are not dependent on us ... we are dependent on them.

Customers are not an interruption of our work... they are the purpose of it. We are not doing them a favor by serving them... they are doing us a favor by giving us an opportunity to do so.

Customers are not someone to argue or match wits with. Nobody ever won an argument with a customer.

Customers are people who bring us their wants. It is our job to handle them profitably, to them and to ourselves.

A sign displayed in many locations at L.L. Bean Company