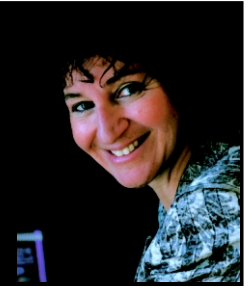


HOW TO MANAGE ANGER & ABUSE

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edutainment package.



One of the most difficult situations for a telephone operator to handle is someone who is angry or even abusive. It can create emotional and psychological reactions that cause stress - like fear, anxiety and even anger.

Why do people get so angry in the first place? And isn't it sad that some people explode at the slightest provocation and feel the need to take it out on the unseen person at the other end of the phone?

The most important thing to consider here is that usually when someone is angry there is some reason, and we need to find out what is wrong in the most professional way and fix the problem.

We need to use appropriate strategies to handle both the anger and the situation which has caused it. And we need to know how to relax and not take things personally, even when the customers get aggressive.

EIGHT SKILLS FOR MANAGING ANGER & ABUSE

1. Listen Positively

When a caller is angry the first thing to do is listen positively, no matter how much you feel like arguing back, or cutting them off, or hanging up. You need to listen and find out exactly why the customer is angry.

Listen calmly and if you need to get details to pull up their records and files, interrupt politely and explain that you want to hear their problem but you need to locate their details first.

Be sure to:

- Listen to complaint, allow person to vent
- Stay calm don't take it personally
- Don't argue, avoid confrontation
- Be aware of cultural/gender differences in reactions, eg. loud, confrontational
- Have files in front of you

2. Reduce Anger by Apologising

A lot of people have difficulty apologising, and assume (wrongly) that an apology is an admission of fault. In fact some companies instruct their staff NEVER to apologise as it assumes an acceptance of liability. I disagree.

Apologies come in different forms, and an apology is an effective strategy for reducing anger. Even though the caller may be angry about something that was not your fault, it

helps to apologise and you should do it EARLY in the call.

What do you say?

- "I'm sorry you have had this problem"
- "I apologise for the inconvenience"
- "I'm sorry this has happened"
- "I am sorry you are so upset"
- "Okay I can hear how angry you are Mr. X. I would like to apologise on behalf of the company. I can fix this problem for you right now"

Avoid...

- "I'm sorry you have decided to get angry about this"
- "Don't get angry with me, it's not my fault"

You're not apologising for your own mistakes, you're basically recognising that they may have been mistreated or misinformed in the past, or at the very least are upset by something that has been overlooked.

3. Don't Take it Personally

When callers are angry they often say things more aggressively than they normally would. You need to make sure that you don't take it personally and don't get angry yourself as this will only serve to make the situation worse. Remind yourself that the caller is not angry with you personally.

4. Stay Calm

Make sure you don't raise your voice or adopt a tone that could sound irritated. Remember that complaints are opportunities to hear customer feedback and learn from it. When a caller is angry, you need to make sure you maintain a level of professional respect.

5. Be Responsive

Callers can sometimes become even angrier if you sound insincere or dismissive. Phrases like "I understand how you feel", or "I appreciate your frustration" can sound rehearsed and automatic rather than genuine. You do need to be responsive and acknowledge that the caller is angry but, once you understand the problem, move on to find a solution. Just stay in control and focus on being positive and helpful.

You may need to offer to source appropriate information just explain what you are doing and why simply and clearly. Repeat facts if necessary, using different words not the same words spoken more loudly!

6. Outline the Plan to Help

One of the best ways to calm down an angry caller is to explain what you will do to resolve the problem outline the plan to help. Check that the information the customer gives you is correct and then state clearly what you intend to do. And confirm if need be in writing.

7. Agree on a Solution

Once you have decided what help you will provide, you need to make sure the customer is happy with the plan agree on a solution. You

might do this by repeating what you have said or ask the customer to clarify what he/she has understood.

8. Stick to the Rules and Give Warnings

Occasionally people who are angry may use abusive language or even make threats. If the customer becomes abusive, stick to the rules and, if there are threats or there is substantial swearing, give warnings before you hang up.

Say something like, "I'm afraid I'm going to have to disconnect the call if you continue to use abusive language".

To deal with threats and abuse, give three progressive warnings:

1. "Mr(or first name), I want to solve this but PLEASE DON'T swear or I cannot continue"
2. "Mr, I must warn you (or insist that you) stop the abusive (threatening) language or I will have to terminate the call"
3. FINAL WARNING; add a summary of action plans and terminate, eg. "This is the third time I have warned you to stop being abusive (threatening). I have offered ...and now I am hanging up" or invite them to call back when calm or at a time when you will call back

When dealing with such a call, be sure to:

- Talk to someone and debrief
- Notify senior manager and/or security if a threat is made follow company procedure
- Advise others that are involved and make notes for yourself and others for the record that are factual, not angry
- If face to face, remove yourself from any danger

Hotlines is available from Seven Dimensions and includes the following titles:

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