

How to Deal with a Difficult Customer

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Get the Feelings out of the Way first

- Compose yourself and let the other person speak. It is highly likely that they want to vent, so let them. If you interrupt before they are finished, they are likely to want to start all over again.
 - Listen & empathise with the feelings of the other person.
 - Say “thank you” or “thanks for bringing this to our attention” and explain why you appreciate being told. Remember, this is an opportunity for you to put things right & learn from the situation.
 - Apologise for the fact that the customer has had this problem. You need to apologise, even if it wasn't you that made the mistake. You are apologising on behalf of the organisation.
 - An immediate greeting only takes a second, but it puts the customer at ease and gets you started on the right foot.
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Determine everything that is Required to Fix the situation

- Promise to do something about it immediately. This doesn't mean that you have to fix the situation immediately, but you do have to start the process. This ensures that the customer knows you are serious about resolving the issue.
 - Offer solution options, where possible.
 - Agree on a solution and take action promptly. It's no good determining that there are options available, if both you and the customer don't agree on the optimal way forward.
 - Thank the customer again for bringing you their concern - apologise again if appropriate.
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Get all of the Facts in the Situation out in the open

- Clarify the problem.
 - Ask Questions - make sure they are open ended questions to ensure you get as much information as possible.
 - Get the facts and supporting information to fix their concerns.
 - If there is documentation involved, make sure that you get copies of all the documentation.
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Follow-up when required

- Follow-up and check that the customer is satisfied. This ensures that there are no lingering issues that haven't been resolved and can further damage your relationship with the customer and potentially your reputation in the marketplace.
 - Learn from the complaints - what do we need to do better, differently or more consistently next time? This is an opportunity to ensure that there are no systemic issues within your organisation that are causing major problems, not just for one customer, but for many.
 - Share this information with others who may be concerned. If you have established a good way to solve a particular issue, then make sure you share it with your colleagues so that they can resolve it quickly if the issue arises with them.
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The goal as a company is to have customer service that is not just the best, but legendary.

– Sam Walton (Founder & Chairman of Wal-Mart)

