

Handling Difficult Customers

By T. Scott Gross

Okay, I admit it. I was going to title this Handling Jerks. But the truth is, most customers, even the tough to love ones are just like us. They didn't start out to make things difficult. It just happens.

So, what do you do to make things better?

Well, the first step is to keep them from going downhill in the first place! I recommend that you go on a scavenger hunt of your operation and try to spot all the little things we do that really irritate customers.

Little things like an employee of the month parking space that sits empty while customers walk from the far stretches of the lot. Or maybe it's as simple as being left on hold too long. And doesn't it just gripe you to be told that something that should be really common is out of stock?

When things have gotten out of hand there are four simple points to remember:

- * Get angry...with the customer.
- * Ask the customer for a solution.
- * Take them to your leader.
- * Never pass the buck.

Get angry with, but never at, the customer. If you get angry at the same thing that makes the customer angry it's almost impossible for the customer to be angry with you!

You should get even angrier than the customer. This is so powerful on many

occasions I've had customers attempt to calm me down!

Ask the customer what it will take to make things right. We've discovered that in most cases the customer will ask you for less than you would have settled for. Get it? The easiest, and usually the cheapest solution comes from simply saying that you are sorry and asking the customer what it will take to set things right.

"I'm so sorry this happened. But now that things have gone wrong, what can we do right now to make things better?"

Most of the time they are so happy to hear you quickly and freely admit that you goofed they don't ask for anything!

Take them to your leader. Why? Because the boss can often say yes when you have to say no. If the customer is asking for something you just can't approve, don't hassle just take them to the boss.

"I'm really not authorized to approve this. In fact, I could get in big trouble if I did. Would you mind if we talked to my boss?"

Take them to the boss before they think of asking to see her.

Whatever you do, never pass the buck. When a problem comes to you with a problem, you own it. Never say, "That's not my job." Never suggest that they ask someone else. And if you truly are unable to solve the problem, the problem still belongs to you until someone else takes ownership.

Angry customers aren't bad people. They just have a problem that with a little understanding and sometimes a bit of creativity you can solve...and turn difficult customers into friends!

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