

# Diffusing Anger



This highly interactive training will give delegates the confidence to be able to tackle angry customers both over the telephone and face to face. Learn how to diffuse difficult situations, limit the number of customers you may lose, learn how to be assertive without being aggressive, appreciate good telephone techniques, out-service your competitors

## **The course**

### **1 Introductions**

**2 Ten powerful steps to diffuse angry customers, address the issues and sustain customer loyalty**

**3 How do I deal with angry customers?**

**4 What is anger?**

**5 Ways to Cope with Anger**

**6 Symptoms of Anger**

**7 Questions About Your Anger**

**8 How You Handle Anger**

**9 Practice positive reactions to everyday stresses**

**10 Test paper**

# Ten powerful steps to diffuse angry customers, address the issues and sustain customer loyalty

## 1. Assume that the Customer has a Right to be Angry

Nobody makes mistakes on purpose, but they do happen. If you are working in a call center, behind a counter or in any capacity that directly interfaces with customers then you are going to encounter an irate customer at some time. The most common response is to evaluate the merit of the complaint while you are listening to it. Try to curb that common response and replace it with the assumption that the customer has a right to be angry, even before you know the details.

Perhaps the customer feels betrayed because the product or services did not meet expectations. The customer may be angry because he or she made incorrect assumptions that led to improper expectations. The customer may be angry because of previous experiences, previous contacts with your company or simply because the problem occurred at a very inconvenient time in the customer schedule. Regardless of the circumstances, acknowledge the customer has the privilege to be irate. Listen carefully to how the anger is expressed so you can find the root cause of the emotion.

## 2. Listen to Emotion without Emotion

Listen to the inflections and emphasis that the customer places on specific topics to identify the emotional catalyst. Listen to the emotion as well as the words. This will help you to identify the specific item or items that need primary attention. Resolving a technical issue may be only partially effective if it does not also address the customer emotional concerns. It may not be possible to completely resolve the emotional distress, but it is appropriate to acknowledge it.

Imagine that a customer experienced a technical malfunction when downloading digital images of a special event, wedding or family vacation. The technical issue may be related to hardware or software, but the emotional distress is related to the risk of losing precious memories. While it is necessary to correct the technical issue, it is also appropriate to acknowledge the risks that create the emotional response. Try to preserve the precious memories or at least explain why they can not be retrieved, but do not ignore the emotional catalyst. Do not respond with emotion. Remember that the customer anger is not directed at you personally, even if the customer language is directed at you. If the customer language is attacking and borderline abusive, it is because the customer is looking for acknowledgement and response to the emotional distress as well as the technical or administrative issues. It may be necessary to repeatedly acknowledge the customer emotion to diffuse the situation and reassure the customer that you are attentive to the importance of the emotional distress as well as the technical issue.

## 3. Be Patient

Customer conversations come in waves. When the customer is at the peak of expressing anger, sorrow or distress, be patient and listen. It is not effective to interrupt the customer when he or she is venting combustible sentiments. It is like pouring gasoline on a raging fire. Rath-

er, wait for the waves of emotion to recede and then use that opportunity to interject with reassuring comments.

Sometime the customer anger will erupt and return like another set of waves. When that happens, be patient and wait for the customer to run out of gas before you approach the fire again. Reiterate your compassion, acknowledge the customer right to be angry and the catalyst for the emotional distress. Takes quiet deep breaths and wait patiently for your turn to speak.

## **4. Speak Softly**

If you encounter a loud and abusive customer, respond by speaking softly and with a very steady tone. If you try to shout over the customer or interrupt, then the customer will concentrate on the verbal battle for attention and will not pay attention to the importance of your message.

If you want your message to be heard, wait for a pause in the customer tirade. Silence is your golden cue that it is time to speak your important message in a soft voice. Eventually the customer will have to lower his or her voice to hear what you are saying.

Even though it may seem that the customer does not care about what you have to say at first, remember that the customer approached you for resolution. The customer may have built up a considerable amount of emotion before reaching you, but ultimately the customer does want your advice and assistance to resolve the problem. Once the customer remembers why he or she contacted you, the customer will be receptive to your soft spoken conversation.

## **5. Reiterate**

Make sure that you are addressing the technical, administrative and emotional aspects of the customer concerns. After you have listened carefully to the customer, reiterate the priorities that you believe that you heard from the customer perspective. This will assure that you are focused on the appropriate issues and reassure the customer that you are concentrating on the proper priorities.

Use a soft, firm and inquisitive voice. Ask the customer to confirm that you have restated the facts and priorities accurately, then write them down.

## **6. Own the Problem**

It does not matter who created the problem or what transpired before the customer got to you. Tell the customer that you own the problem and will apply your personal effort to achieve results.

Sometimes it may be tempting to distance yourself from the problem by stating that you are not responsible for it, that another department will need to handle it, or that you are just a messenger. Put that temptation in a can and put a lid on it. Expressing that you do not have ownership of the problem or the potential resolution gives the customer a feeling of being

adrift and powerless. If the customer senses that he or she is communicating with someone who is powerless, it will create yet another reason to be frustrated and angry. Even if you do need to work with other departments, get manager approval or coordinate some other type of response, inform the customer that you will personally take the matter into your own hands and follow-up on the issues. The customer does not know your company, your policies or your procedures. The customer will never be able to navigate the requirements, restrictions or resolution with the same knowledge and experience as you. Reassure the customer that you will use your knowledge and experience to coordinate the best possible resolution, even if you need to get the assistance of other parties to achieve it.

## **7. Place the Customer First, Problem Second**

In most cases there are two conflicting issues that occur simultaneously when dealing with irate customers. The first issue is the customer emotional distress. The second is the technical or administrative issue that caused the emotional distress. While it may seem logical to focus first on the technical or administrative issue that cause the emotional distress, it is important to acknowledge the customer anger first and the technical issue second.

Resolving the technical issue may or may not fully resolve the root cause of the customer distress. Acknowledge the customer concerns first and try to calm down the customer enough to help you concentrate on the technical or administrative problems. Sometimes the technical problem may require much more attention because it may impact other customers. Acknowledge the individual customer emotion first, resolve the specific customer technical issue second and reserve addressing any bigger issues as independent activity.

## **8. Triage**

Once you have an opportunity to focus on technical and administrative issues, triage the root cause of the problems to determine what went wrong. Analyze the problem and provide corrective measures or detailed information in an effort to avoid duplicating the problem with other customers. It may be necessary to obtain some additional information from your customer to accurately analyze the root cause of the problem.

## **9. Correct the Issue**

Correct the issue for the specific customer and also look for long term corrective measures. It may not be feasible to give your customer a guarantee that the correction will resolve all problems permanently, but it may be appropriate to reassure the customer that you will be available to assist in the event that another different problem should occur again. Demonstrate your confidence that this specific problem is resolved and is not expected to reoccur. Demonstrate your attention to the specific customer by reiterating original concerns and actions that you took to correct the issue.

## **10. Follow Up**

When possible, follow-up with the customer after sufficient time has elapsed to demonstrate that the corrective action has been effective. A phone call or a personalized postcard demonstrates individual attention and acknowledgement. Demonstrating compassion and attentiveness thirty days after a problem has been resolved is a powerful message to show that you really do care about the individual customer. This follow-up after the anger has subsided and

the corrective action has been demonstrated as effective may be enough to retain loyal customers and earn a few new ones.

## How do I deal with angry customers?

If you wish to be successful in any business, then you have to learn how to handle angry and disgruntled customers who may not have received the level of service that they expected from the company that you are representing.

Before you devise your plan to cope with these difficult situations, it is important to try and understand the view point from both sides. You are that initial point of contact with the angry customer and they are actually expressing their concerns about the company and not about you as an individual. Try not to take it personally.

You should also remember that the customer is always right. Your aim should always be customer satisfaction, whatever the situation. How you achieve this is up to you based on your individual strengths and inter-personal skills, however, listed below are a few guidelines to help you develop your own personal strategy for dealing with angry customers:

**Never argue back:** Remember that the simple mathematical rule of ‘two negatives make a positive’ does not work in this case. You have to face a confrontational situation by calming the irate customer with your positive and professional behaviour. You must resolve to stay calm and aim to satisfy the customer even in the most difficult situations. It is only by empathising with their view point and suggesting a possible solution that you will resolve the situation and send the customer away happy.

**Use your ears more than your mouth:** Remember that you have two ears and only one mouth – so make sure you listen more than you speak. If you try to respond forcefully when your customer is angry, then the situation will certainly get out of control and you are unlikely to succeed in resolving the situation. More importantly, by listening carefully, you will be able to understand why the customer is complaining, so that satisfactory steps can be taken.

**Show that you care:** Once the anger subsides, there will be a short interval when the customer pauses for breath and that is when you have an opportunity to express your empathy and understanding. You have to show that you care and that you will do everything within your power to try and resolve the situation. This exhibition of your concern will win the customer over and half your battle will be won. There will be a significant change in their behaviour and you will be able to turn the situation around.

**De-stress yourself from time to time:** By the time you succeed in winning over the customer, you will naturally be exhausted and stressed. It is important for your own health as well as customer relations that you learn how to de-stress yourself. There is nothing like a hot cup of coffee to rejuvenate your sagging nerves. Or take some time off to listen to some music or chat with your friends in the cafeteria. Apart from music, meditation and

breathing exercises may be effective. However, these are only suggestions; there is no fixed recipe for dealing with stressful emotions – you have to find what works for you. Adopting the following measures may help too.

**Be patient:** It never pays to be impatient, in any business. Although it is not easy to control one's emotions when a customer is being unreasonable in their behaviour, you will have to remain professional, friendly and cooperative in order to succeed. Having patience with your customers and with yourself will go a long way in winning over hostile customers.

**Be positive in your approach:** Even in the worst of circumstances, try to overcome all negative tendencies and adopt a positive approach and mindset. This will also help you to manage your stress effectively so you are not weighed down by the hostile attitude of the customer. You should be gentle with yourself and try and express your point of view assertively without in any way offending your customer's feelings.

**Control your anger:** Getting angry is a common trait of human nature but you should learn to control your anger, relax and calm yourself so that you can express your anger in a subtle way without showing any emotions towards your customer. The above guidelines are very useful in every situation in life and you can successfully tackle hostile circumstances by following them.

It is very important to understand the psychology of the customer who is expressing his dissatisfaction with the company's products or services. It is natural for a customer to show their anger and express frustration and disappointment. The secret of success is to remain calm. Show respect and empathy to the customer by listening patiently and then put forward your point of view. Always let the customer know what you can do for them rather than what you can't do. Offer a possible solution and ask if the customer is happy with that solution. You will seldom find that the customer says no! If you follow the above tips, you are on your way to succeeding in your career.

## What is anger?

**Anger is an emotion. It is a signal that we think we are being treated unfairly.**

**Feelings are neither right nor wrong. It is okay to feel angry.**

**Actions can be right or wrong. It is not okay to hurt ourselves, others, or property when we feel angry.**

**So how can we deal with anger and act in healthy ways?**

**1) Recognize anger - know when you are angry and what makes you angry.**

2) Practice positive responses - practice, practice, practice until your new positive responses become good habits

## Ways to Cope with Anger

Walk away

Exercise

Talk to someone who you are not feeling angry with

Distract yourself

Count 10 breaths

Write about it

Come back and deal with it later when you feel calm

### Four Tips To Diffuse Anger

#### ***1. When you're upset, pause, and slowly count to ten.***

To offset the adrenaline surge of anger, train yourself not to lash back impulsively. Wait before you speak. Take a few deep breaths and VERY slowly, silently, count to ten (or to fifty if necessary). Use the lull of these moments to regroup before you decide what to do so you don't say something you regret

#### ***2. Take a cooling-off period.***

To further quiet your neurotransmitters, take an extended time-out, hours or even longer. When you're steaming retreat to a calm setting to lower your stress level. Reduce external stimulation. Dim the lights. Listen to soothing music. Meditate. Do some aerobic exercise or yoga to expel anger from your system.

#### ***3. Don't address anger when you're rushed.***

Make sure you have adequate time to identify what's made you angry. A Princeton study found that even after theology students heard a lecture on the Good Samaritan, they still didn't stop to help a distressed person on the street when they thought they'd be late for their next class. Thus, allotting unhurried time to resolve the conflict lets you tap into your most compassionate response.

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Since anger revs up your system, it can interfere with restful sleep and cause insomnia. The mind grinds. Better to examine your anger earlier in the day so your adrenaline can simmer down. Also being well rested makes you less prone to reacting with irritation, allows you to stay balanced.

The goal with anger is to own the moment so this emotion doesn't own you. Then you can mindfully respond rather than simply react. You'll have the lucidity to be solution oriented and therefore empower how you relate to others.

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#### ***4. Don't try to address your anger when you're tired or before sleep.***

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## **symptoms of anger —**

**How do you know when you are angry? All of us have symptoms of anger — physical and mental signs that tell us we are angry.**

### **Physical Signs**

**Fast heart beat**

**Sweating**

**Shaking**

**Clenched jaws**

**Clenched fists**

**Fast breathing**

**Headaches**

**Stomach aches**

**Upset feeling in the stomach**

**Tight chest**

**Tense muscles**

**Frowning, scowling**

**Red face**

### **Mental Signs**

**Problems concentrating**

**Confusion**

**Memory problems**

**Thoughts of doing harm**

**Angry thoughts**

**Irritability**

**Short tempered**

**Other signs**

**Yelling**

**Swearing**

**Withdrawing from others**

**Throwing things**

**Pacing**

## **Questions About Your Anger**

**How do you know when you are angry?**

**Where in your body do you feel anger? List your physical signs of being angry.**

**What is the first sign of anger you notice? List your early warning signs that tell you when you are starting to become angry.**

**What makes you angry? List all the things you can think of... all the way from small annoyances to big problems.**

## **How do you handle anger**

**How do you usually react when you feel angry?**

**Think about the last time you reacted in an unhealthy or negative way to anger. What happened right before you got angry?**

**How did you react?**

**How did you feel after you reacted?**

**What could you have done instead?**

**What would happen if you were to react in a more positive way?**

## Practice positive reactions to everyday stresses

Walk away instead of reacting in anger. It's okay to stomp your feet if you need to! Exercise. This helps get rid of the physical energy that is built up by anger.

Talk to someone who you are not feeling angry with. Phone a friend, relative, or professional. Tell them about what happened and how you are feeling.

Distract yourself. Do something you enjoy like reading, TV, music, games, going to the store, cooking a meal... and take your mind off the anger. Come back and deal with it when you are feeling calmer

Count 10 breaths. The reasons for counting your breaths are:

- 1) to calm and relax you by breathing more deeply and
- 2) to pause for a few moments instead of reacting automatically

Write about it. Get your feelings and thoughts out on paper instead of confronting the source of your anger right away.

Deal with it when you feel calm. Get away from the situation, and come back later. You will react more positively. when you are feeling calmer.

The more practice you get at reacting in positive ways, waiting until the anger goes down a little before responding, and learning new habits, the more easily you will be able to manage anger.

## A Plan for Dealing With Anger

1. Make a plan. Write down one of the situations from your anger scale . Choose one that causes you to feel a little angry. Describe how you would like to react in the future to this situation.
2. Choose a situation near the top of your anger scale. Describe how you would like to react to a situation like this.
3. What negative behaviour do you most want to avoid when you experience anger?
4. What will you do instead?
5. What will you do when you experience your early warning signs of anger?
6. How will you handle situations when you feel very angry?

The more practice you get at reacting in positive ways, waiting until the anger goes down a little before responding, and learning new habits, the more easily you will be able to manage anger.

- When dealing with angry customers what do you use more than your mouth ?

B- Name two ways to cope with anger.?

C- What should you do instead of reacting to anger.?

D- What is anger.?

E- How do you know when you are angry.?

F- Are Customers always right.?

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# Quiz

**A - When dealing with angry customers what do you use more than your mouth ?**

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