

DEALING WITH ANGRY CUSTOMERS

By Lydia Ramsey

A day in the life of a business person can be filled with joy and satisfaction or it can be frustrating and stressful. When things go wrong, some people lose control. Holding emotions in check and reacting professionally under fire are not always easy. It is particularly difficult to be nice to people who are not being nice to you.

So what do you do to keep your cool when the customer is chewing you out? Most of the time, it is not even your fault. It could be that the problem was with a product or a service delivered by someone else in your organization. You're getting the blame because the unhappy person found you first, and it's not pleasant. When faced with angry people, there are four key steps that will help diffuse the situation.

Step one is to apologize

"But," you say, "it's not my fault." It doesn't matter who's to blame; apologize anyway. As a representative of your company you have a responsibility to see that things go well. Your willingness to be accountable will have a positive effect. After all, it takes two to have an argument. If one of you refuses to be disagreeable you can't have a disagreement. You are not accepting blame -- you are simply saying, "I'm sorry about the problem." You are wasting your breath unless you apologize with complete sincerity so be sure that your tone of voice matches your words.

Step two is to sympathize with the irate customer

Let the person know that you can identify with his feelings. Say that you understand the frustration of receiving a faulty product or poor service. The angry person begins to feel better as soon as his reaction is validated.

Step three is to accept responsibility for the situation

Be accountable to the customer. Let him know that you intend to do whatever it takes to make things right. You can't help what has already happened, but you will come up with a solution to the problem or you will find someone who can.

The last step is to take action

Decide what you can do and tell the customer. You will replace the defective or incorrect product as quickly as possible. If the issue was poor service deliver better service. Whenever you can offer a bonus of some sort or waive fees, the tiger before you is transformed into a pussycat. Use the acronym "ASAP" to remember these four steps for calming upset customers. Each letter stands for part of the process.

A is "apologize."

S represents "sympathize."

A stands for "accept responsibility."

P means "prepare to take action."

Nothing will be solved by becoming argumentative and reactionary. Instead, diffuse the client's anger by being apologetic and sympathetic and focus on positive steps that will resolve the situation. Before you know it, your adversaries will become your allies.

Oh yes, remember to smile. It will make everyone feel better and behave better.