

Why are Some Customers Difficult



While many of your interactions with customers will be pleasant and positive, you inevitably will have to interact with customers who are difficult in some way. Keep in mind that just as all of your emotions communicate to you so you can assess your situation, this is also the case for the difficult customer. Regardless of why they are angry or upset, their feelings are valid. Understanding the different reasons behind their behavior can help you to resolve their difficulty.

They Have Truly Had a Bad Experience and Want to Vent



Venting swing emotions such as anxiety and anger can be a useful strategy towards slowing down thoughts and reaching a more calm emotional state. When customers want to vent, they want a solution, but what may be more important is that they feel that they are heard, that their concerns are valid. Listening actively with empathy can help customers who need to vent in order to de-escalate their emotional state to a

less aroused state.

“Empathy is the faculty to resonate with the feelings of others. When we meet someone who is joyful, we smile. When we witness someone in pain, we suffer in resonance with his or her suffering.”

-*Matthieu Ricard*

Want Someone to be Held Accountable



Customers looking for accountability feel anxious and angry. Will anyone resolve their problem? Keep in mind that being accountable is not the same thing as accepting blame. An Adult mode assessment of reality might understand that you personally did not cause their problem, but a Parent mode assessment might perceive everyone at

your business as incompetent as evidenced by the customer's problem. Customers who are looking for

accountability may speak in terms of blame and fault. This however is not truly being accountable. To be held accountable is to acknowledge that you can be responsible for where things go from here. When you take responsibility, you are saying that you are able to respond to the situation rather than saying the situation is your fault. Often when you reassure a customer that you are going to help them, and you offer a specific strategy on how you will do so, this helps the customer feel less anxious. By providing specific information, you help customers to de-escalate their anxiety. By showing a willingness to take responsibility you speak to the customer's Parent mode response, and shift them back into Adult mode.



They Have Truly Had a Bad Experience and Want Resolution

When customers express that they are looking for a resolution, they are operating in the Adult mode. Even if they are angry or expressing frustration, they can quickly de-escalate when they know that you are working towards a resolution. Sometimes conflicts can arise when the resolution is not what the customer wants or expects, including the idea that a complete resolution may take time. In this case, being honest and offering multiple options can help a customer accept the range of resolutions being offered. Remember that the emotion of frustration tells us that something isn't working. Providing multiple options to a customer can let them know that you are looking for a solution that will work.

They are Generally Unhappy



Customers who are generally unhappy people can be exceptionally difficult. When you ask what is wrong, they can launch into an entire laundry list. Often unhappy people pursue negative rewards in their interactions. Consequently, they may want you to slip into a Child or Parent mode to complement their corresponding Child or Parent mode, because this confirms their negative view of life. Destructive labeling is a common distorted thinking pattern that you'll find with this type of customer. When

dealing with generally unhappy people, you can help them by refocusing their attention on the here and now and the problem at hand. Rather than asking what is wrong, you can ask, how can I help you today, or look for specific steps you can take to resolve a specific issue. Remember that the way to counteract destructive labeling in yourself is to focus on specifics. This focus on a specific and resolvable problem in your impossible-to-please customer can aid in counteracting their destructive labeling. You may find that they continuously resist and try to lure you into a Child or Parent state. If possible, you may have to call a time out to regroup yourself. The most important step in dealing with generally unhappy customers is to remain authentically positive and in the Adult mode. Dealing with this type of customer can be a source of frustration, so be prepared to reframe the problem when you identify this emotion in yourself or your customer.

Review Questions

1. Venting is a productive way to _____
 - a) Slow down
 - b) Speed up
 - c) Rile up your enemies
 - d) Find an immediate solution to your larger problem
2. A good customer service strategy for customers who want to vent is to _____
 - a) Put them on hold until they "get a hold of themselves"
 - b) Allow them to vent and try to understand how they are feeling
 - c) Stop their complaining, so you can focus on a solution to the problem at hand
 - d) Allow them to vent while you compose a point by point rebuttal about why they are wrong
3. What does it mean to be accountable?
 - a) Accepting blame for something you didn't do
 - b) Blaming someone else for a problem
 - c) Acknowledging that you are willing and able to respond to a problem
 - d) Being good at handling numbers and balancing checkbooks
4. True or False: Apologizing for a customer's bad experience means you are accepting blame.
 - a) True, but you are just trying to placate them and don't really mean it
 - b) False, because you know who is really at fault and you will be transferring your customer to them
 - c) True, so you should never apologize or that means the company has to get lawyers involved
 - d) False, it means you are acknowledging that a customer has had a bad experience without placing blame
5. Customers who are looking for a resolution to their problem are operating in what Transactional Analysis mode?
 - a) Child
 - b) Adult
 - c) Parent
 - d) Grandparent

