

Handling a Challenging Customer

Do not Respond with Negative Words or Emotion

When working in the customer service field, you will frequently encounter negativity from your customers. If you respond with negative words or emotions, this can reinforce that negativity. While responding with empathy often requires that you acknowledge a customer's negative emotions, your choice of words can set the tone for the remainder of the conversation. For example, to acknowledge that your customer has had a frustrating experience, using the word "challenging" rather than "frustrating" can communicate that the problem is a solvable one rather than insolvable.

Focus on Positive Thoughts

Negative thoughts and emotions narrow our focus. One result of this is we perceive that we have fewer options. Positive thoughts and emotions broaden our focus and open up a wider range of possibilities. Cultivating positive thoughts and emotions also has a cumulative effect of helping you to become more resourceful over time.

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.