

10 strategies for dealing with difficult customers

Here are 10 tips on how to turn a bad customer service situation into an opportunity to improve your business.

1. **First and foremost, listen.** Do not try to talk over the customer or argue with them. Let the customer have their say, even if you know what they are going to say next, that they don't have all the information or that they are mistaken. As you listen, take the opportunity to build rapport with the customer.
2. **Build rapport through empathy.** Put yourself in the customer's shoes. Echo the source of their frustration and show that you understand their position and situation. If you can empathize with a customer's problem, it will help calm them down.
3. **Lower your voice.** If the customer gets louder, speak slowly, in a low tone. Your calm demeanor can carry over to them and help them to settle down. As you approach the situation with a calm, clear mind, unaffected by the customer's tone or volume, their anger will generally dissipate.
4. **Respond as if all your customers are watching.** Pretend you are not talking only to the customer but to an audience that is watching the interaction. This shift in perspective can provide an emotional buffer if the customer is being verbally abusive and will allow you to think more clearly when responding. Since an unruly customer can be a negative referral, assume they'll repeat the conversation to other potential customers; this mindset can help you do your best to address their concerns in a calming way.
5. **Know when to give in.** If it is apparent that satisfying a rude customer is going to take two hours and a bottle of aspirin and still result in negative referrals, it may be better to take the high road and compromise in their favor. This will give you more time to nurture other, more productive customer relationships. Keep in mind that the interaction is atypical of customers and you're dealing with an exception.
6. **Stay calm.** If the customer is swearing or being verbally abusive, take a deep breath and continue as if you didn't hear them. Responding in kind will not solve anything, and it will usually escalate the situation. Instead, remind the customer that you are there to help them and are their best immediate chance of resolving the situation. This simple statement often helps defuse the situation.
7. **Don't take it personally.** Always speak to the issue at hand and do not get personal, even if the customer does. Remember that the customer doesn't know you and is just venting frustration at you as a representative of your company. Gently guide the conversation back to the issue and how you intend to resolve it.
8. **Remember that you're interacting with a human.** Everyone has an occasional bad day. Maybe your rude customer had a fight with their spouse, got a traffic ticket that morning or had a recent run of bad luck. We've all been there, to some degree. Try to empathize and make their day better by being a pleasant, calming voice – it'll make you feel good, too.
9. **If you promise a callback, call back!** Even if you promised an update that you don't have yet, call the customer at the scheduled time anyway. The customer will be reassured that you are not trying to dodge them and will appreciate the follow-up.
10. **Summarize the next steps.** At the end of the call, let the customer know exactly what to expect, and then be sure to follow through on your promises. Document the call to ensure you're well prepared for the next interaction.

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