

Extraordinary Customer-Service Situations

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Extraordinary Customer-Service Problems

Many of the situations that a customer service worker (CSW) handles will pose a certain degree of difficulty, which is why the company has hired and trained a professional such as you to fill the post. A customer might be extremely agitated from dealing with a defective product or service. The customer might have been referred to several different workers or departments before they wind up with the customer service team, increasing their agitation even further. There may have been a miscommunication of a company's offer, and many expectant customers must be redirected or turned away. Alternatively, probably the worst scenario, someone may have been injured by your company's product.

Sometimes, the customer's problem can be more challenging than his or her reaction to it. Here are some of the more sensitive problems that a CSW might encounter:

- An urgent order was not delivered on time, causing extreme inconvenience and even great expense to a business customer.
- Your company shipped the wrong part, and now your customer is faced with a time-consuming return and re-send process.
- One of your team members mistreated a customer.
- False assurances or promises were offered to a customer that must now be rectified.
- A customer has suffered repeated breakdowns of purchased equipment.
- Your company failed to fulfill a special request.

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It is essential to respond to these special problems with care, even if the customer does not seem to be particularly upset over the situation. Rather than complaining, about half of all customers who experience service problems will simply take their business elsewhere. The average business loses approximately 15% of customers each year due to unsatisfactory service. A customer's problem might also indicate a greater issue within your company that needs addressed, before even more customers are impacted.

Furthermore, you can assume unsatisfied customers will be sharing their unhappy experiences with their colleagues and friends, and that may cost a company considerably more in bad public relations. This is especially critical since the word of past customers can carry much more weight than a company's best advertising efforts. Moreover, with customer ratings available on many online sources, each bad comment can reach vast numbers of current and potential customers.

Fixing Extraordinary Customer –Service Problems

Most special problems can be remedied with the same basic tactics you apply to any customer service situation: Listen to your customer's explanation of an issue clearly, take ownership of the problem, and turn the problem's solution into a partnership—you and the customer working together to achieve a speedy resolution and satisfaction. As with every other aspect of customer service, this requires effective communication, a positive attitude, and your demonstrated commitment to fix whatever is wrong.

You might also need to take the issue to a higher level, especially in the event that a problem could result in legal liability for your company. During your training phase for a customer service position, you likely will be instructed on the situations that warrant an immediate referral to a supervisor.

Among the very first steps once you have identified your customer's special problem is to offer an apology, with sincere remorse for a customer's inconvenience. Then, apologize again. A simple apology may go a long way in defusing a customer's agitation. Don't argue with the customer, don't try to make excuses, and certainly don't try to place blame for a situation back on the customer.

Ultimately, you should try to counter the depth of a customer's disappointment and inconvenience with a sufficient level of remediation, equal to the customer's loss. Your company's policies might detail possible remedies and compensations, such as a full and immediate refund, a discount on service for a given period, or a discount on a future

purchase. Offering these and other alternatives may require assistance from your supervisor.

As you identify possible solutions to your customer's problem, you should carefully help your customer assess and choose among the options that may be available. By bringing your customers into the process as a participating partner, you empower them and given them a sense they still have control over a situation that may have left them feeling powerless.

As you resolve service problems, try to exceed your customer's expectations, to the extent possible. Most importantly, try to return your customer to a reasonable state of satisfaction, and be sure to provide a follow-up to ensure that your customer remains satisfied. And keep in mind, the results of an unresolved customer problem can have ramifications and costs far beyond the immediate issue at hand.

Summary:

- Some customer service issues are routine such as return of a defective product. Other problems may pose special issues that need to be handled with extra care.
- Companies may lose 15% of their customers every year due to poorly resolved problems.
- Unsatisfied customers who complain to friends and online may cost a company even more business.
- A sincere apology can help alleviate a customer's agitation.
- The resolution to a customer's problem should equal or exceed the customer's loss.