

How to Manage Customer Misbehaviour.

It is impossible to completely prevent all customer incivility, abuse and aggression. So, we need to know how to deal with them when they do arise. We need to consider how to reduce their intensity, how to deflect the problem, de-escalate conflict, and disarm difficult customers.

Important Note: Not all of these things are relevant or are do-able in all situations. They all are of value sometimes, but not all of the time. So, consider which of them are most likely to be applicable and successful in your particular work contexts.



› What to Observe

- Clear and obvious signs of anger.
- More subtle signs of impatience, frustration, annoyance (early warning signs).
- Reasons (sources) of customer annoyance - can anything be done about them?
- Possible sources of other emotions (e.g., disappointment, embarrassment, humiliation).
 - › Try to neutralise these, try to help the customer 'save face.'
- Other customers, and how they are reacting.
- Resources that you may draw upon if needed.
 - › Colleagues, distractions, peace offerings.
- Observe yourself and your reactions.
 - › Know your triggers, acknowledge, and practise resisting.



› What to Think

- Think of complaints as being about the product/ policy as just that - and not personal attacks on you.
- The role that your thoughts play in your emotional experience.
- Put yourself in the customer's shoes:
think from their perspective: e.g., think about what knowledge and skills they may be lacking.
- Think of each customer as a new case: don't put them all in a box.
- Think about *how can I do the best for this customer with what I have.*
- Consider: which of my behaviours could be a trigger for their anger and for possible escalation?
- Engage in some positive self-talk.
 - › You have knowledge and skills, you have the training, you have 'back up.'
- Catch your negative thoughts and challenge them.
- Recall a positive customer interaction.



› What to Say

- Ignore minor one-offs – say nothing, don't take the bait.
- “Actively” listen – maintain eye contact, nod occasionally, offer encouragement, etc.
- Politely and patiently ask for clarification of the problem.
- If unclear, patiently ask for clarification to check your understanding.
- Acknowledge the customer's concerns, their point of view.
 - › “I can see that you are really frustrated that this product is not available.”
 - › “I appreciate what you're saying. That must have been very difficult for you.”
 - › “Yes, it is quite expensive.”
- Express appreciation for feedback.
- Be respectful and super-polite (don't give them another reason to be angry).
- Be diplomatic – never directly criticise the customer or use sarcasm.
- Allow the customer to vent.
- Be empathic and demonstrate your understanding.
 - › “I have been there. It has happened to me too, and I wasn't at all happy.”
- Respond to their shouting and rapid speech by lowering your voice and slowing your pace.
- Don't argue back – just listen.
- Don't respond with denial, defensiveness or resistance.
- Politely express desire to help the customer.
- Use a circuit breaker.
- Offer an apology.
- Offer an explanation (preferably one that accepts some of the responsibility).
- Don't dwell overly long on the cause - focus on a solution and move forward.



All types of customer misbehaviour should be reported. Remember:

- Being abused is not “part of the job.”
 - You will not be blamed for being the victim of abuse.
 - These incidents are less likely to reoccur in the future if they are consistently reported and immediately followed up.
- Seek an acceptable solution
 - › Throw it back to the customer – ask questions.
 - › Give options/ choices.
 - › Step out the solution with responsibilities for you both.
 - › Provide a quick and fair response.
 - If no give-and-take is evident, specify the actions you will take and warn of consequences – be assertive.



› What to Do

- Ignore minor one-offs – do nothing, don't take the bait.
- Try to minimise frustrations, provocations, disappointments, and injustices.
- Be aware of the environment and try to minimise risk factors of aggression.
- Stay calm, keep cool.
 - › Breathe deeply and slowly.
 - › Move slowly with relaxed rather than jerky or agitated gestures.
 - › Practise positive self-talk.
 - › Use imagery/ visualisation.
- Use body language effectively.
- Behave in flexible ways.
- Try to be nice to the customer – slow the escalation.
- Offer compensation/ credit/ refund/ discount when deserved and empowered to do so.
- Exit the situation if a colleague “taps you out.”
- When possible, take a break/escape the situation.
- Use a distraction to minimise escalation.
- When required, call for others (colleague, supervisor, security staff) to intervene.
- If distressing, terminate the conversation.
- Report the incident.