

# Faculty and Employee Assistance Program Newsletter

## Dealing with a Difficult Customer

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***“Make the best use of what is in your power, and take the rest as it happens.” Epictetus***

Nothing can ruin your day like dealing with a difficult customer. Luckily, most customers (depending on your job) are pleasant. So, what can we do to help prevent burnout and increased stress as we deal with the difficult customer?



### **What you can say to yourself:**

I will not allow the difficult, unpleasant person to make me upset, angry, or frustrated. I will not allow this person (who I hardly even know) to ruin my day, or make me unhappy, because in the scheme of things this person is not important enough to control my life (is anybody, really?)

Be clear about your goals when dealing with a difficult customer. A normal reaction may be to want to get even, but will usually have a negative effect. Instead, be practical and realistic here. For example:  
Goals: I want to deal with this person professionally. I want to end this nasty interaction as quickly as possible (which means NOT throwing gasoline on the fire).

You do not have to like the nasty person, but for your own benefit you should continue to act professionally and calmly, and to avoid anything that will prolong the interaction. It is to your benefit to do so.

Successful employees often take a mindset similar to: When this customer is gone, I want to look back at the way I acted (regardless of how it turned out), and say, with pride, that I acted professionally, and constructively, and did not stoop to the childish (aggressive, nasty, etc.) level of the unpleasant customer. I never ever want to feel that I acted badly.

The reason you should work to learn how to defuse angry people is **FOR YOU**. The benefits and advantages of doing so are overwhelming in terms of reducing stress, enjoying the job, and feeling a sense of job satisfaction.

Information from <http://www.work911.com/articles/customer2.htm>



***“No one can drive us crazy unless we give them the keys.” Doug Horton***

Tips on handling difficult customers while retaining your sanity and your self-respect:

- **Make sure you’re not the one being difficult:** If you occasionally encounter difficult customers, that’s simply the price of doing business. But if most of your customers are being difficult, perhaps you should have a little talk with the person in the mirror.

- **If a difficult customer wants to “pick a fight,” don’t be drawn into his or her craziness:** it’s not worth it, and besides, you can’t win.
- **Remain calm:** a few deep breaths and some rational self-talk should help.
- **If you’re not sure how to respond, don’t say anything:** resist the temptation to make the best speech you’ll ever regret.
- **Don’t let one customer ruin your day:** after the unpleasantness is over, forget about it and get on with your life. And don’t waste time thinking about what you “should have said.”
- **Think of all the great customers you serve and forget about the lousy ones:** Most people are basically good, thank goodness!

Information from [http://www.quotedoctor.com/difficult\\_customers.htm](http://www.quotedoctor.com/difficult_customers.htm)



### Process for Helping Difficult Customers

The following describes a process that can help as you deal with difficult customers:

#### Let customers vent

- Find out what is on the customers’ mind (listen).
- Discover what the customers think will resolve the issue.

#### Offer to help

- Once customers have stopped venting, they are ready to get down to resolving the problem. Your offer of help signals your willingness to participate in the process of resolving their problem.
- “Let’s see if we can work together to help you”.

#### Get to the root of the problem

- Active listening, Asking open-ended questions.

#### Define success for the interaction

- Success may not be defined by total resolution of the problem or question.

#### Offer a solution

- Paraphrase the customers’ problem and its cause as you understand it.
- Identify the solution you are ready to implement. This can be either the total resolution of the issue or the success you can give the customer at this time. Remember the success must match the customers and be something they will value.
- Explain why the success leads to getting the customers’ problem resolved.

#### Gain verbal agreement

- “Do you think my proposed step will resolve this problem for you?”

#### Present a roadmap of the next steps

Information from <http://www.salesmba.com/articles1/cssp04.htm>

**TIP: Once finishing with a difficult customer, if possible, take a few minutes to regroup before working with your next customer.**



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