

THE WORST THINGS YOU CAN SAY TO DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS AND WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD



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Welcome!

This Eguide will be a real eye opener for any teams, managers or members of staff who find themselves dealing with difficult or complaining customers.





From our 20 years of supporting clients with their complaints handling challenges, and the many hours of mystery shopping and listening to call recordings that we undertake before designing our programmes we have a 'little black book' of what not to say.

So I'm revealing here our top ten from our list of frequently said phrases and sentences which should be avoided at all costs. I've also decided to share as a bonus, some great tips and techniques for successful communication in a variety of situations. Read on to discover more!

Please feel free to send this out to your staff, by the way.

These don't work when handling complaints and difficult customers:

“I’m going to put you on hold”

“That’s up to you”

“I’m trying to explain...”

“If you could just calm down, I’ll...”

“There’s not much I can do”

“Our response was within service standards”

“You are not listening”

“It’s not our fault”

“You really ought to...”

“I hear what you are saying but...”

These phrases are known as 'red rags'. They have the exact effect that you can imagine the term 'red rag' conjures up. Rather than diffuse the situation with the difficult or complaining customer, these phrases are guaranteed to wind the person up further, escalate the situation, or at the very least cause the customer to leave the interaction in a dissatisfied frame of mind.

In terms of what to say instead, please bear in mind that what works best is context specific and may require some quick thinking on your feet. To get you started, here's some positive alternatives:

“Would you mind holding while I check out...for you or shall I call you back?”

“Of course, you can... However, let's see if we can resolve this now”

“May I explain what...”

“I can see (or hear) how angry this has made you. This is what I can do for you now to resolve...”

“Let's look at what we can do...”

“We clearly haven't met your expectations on this occasion. Let's see how we can progress....”

“Let's recap....”

“I can see this hasn't worked for you. What we can do now is...”

“The best way forward may be to....”

“I do understand that you feel...However....”

Here's the bonus I promised too. It's a list of very useful checkpoints as a reminder for successful phone or face to face communication with customers, particularly if they are upset, stressed, angry or complaining.

- ✓ Verbal nods
- ✓ Let them know you are there to help
- ✓ "Let's try and sort this out for you"
- ✓ "Thanks for that."
- ✓ Use their name
- ✓ "What I can do for you is to..."
- ✓ Summarising – what they've said
- ✓ Reflecting back – feelings/what's not said
- ✓ Allow letting off of steam if they are stressed
- ✓ Well-paced
- ✓ Mellow tone
- ✓ 'Smile' – relaxes vocal chords



- ✓ Use of pause
- ✓ Directional questions “Tell me briefly...”
- ✓ Politeness
- ✓ “Sell” the benefits or seek permission for e.g. putting the customer on hold or transferring them/or bringing in another member of staff if this is vital
- ✓ Give choices e.g. when putting on hold/waiting (on hold only if necessary)
- ✓ Upbeat tone and manner
- ✓ Signposting: “I’m now going to see...”
 - “What I’m going to do”
 - “I’m glad we’ve resolved.....”
- ✓ Compensate for being in the dark when on the phone
- ✓ Tell them what you are doing
- ✓ Be clear on actions
- ✓ Summarise at the end



Why not jot down some action points as a result of this guide to help with those tricky conversations in the future.

A lot of these tips and alternatives for successful communication have some psychology behind them. It explains why these don't work and what alternatives are available that can work like a magic wand with people who are upset, aggressive or complaining. If you'd like to learn more or book a training course, then please get in touch and we'll be happy to chat through options that can really make a difference to you, your staff and your customers.

If you are also looking for development programmes on Customer Service, Improving Your Customer Experience, Handling Difficult Situations or Complaints Handling Training then why not get in touch too and I will personally have a chat with you to explore alternatives.

Call me on 0845 165 6269 or email: alison@leadinglightlearning.com

Kindest regards

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CONTACT US

