

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Coping with Impossible Customers? There is a Way

by Carol Hartman, M.B.A

Regardless of your type of business, odds are that every once in awhile you'll encounter a "customer from hell". You know their types. They only know one volume (loud. Or, they only know one communication style – attack. Or they don't understand why everything can't be done today no matter what.

Is it possible to manage a relationship with these difficult customers? According to Ron Zemke and Kristin Anderson, the answer is "yes". In fact, these acclaimed Customer Service gurus contend that there are no "bad customers" (just a few that are harder to please than others.

Impossible customers do require special care and handling. Here are some tried and true tactics from Zemke and Anderson's excellent publication *Delivering Knock Your Socks Off Service* to help you and your employees deal with obnoxious customers:

- Some customers who verbally attack you want you to attack back. Don't feed on their reactions. It does nothing to solve the situation at hand. Simply ignore their rude words and actions. Gain the upper hand by not letting them intimidate you.
- Master the art of staying calm. Remember that the nasty customer is actually not mad at you personally. They are just vastly unhappy about the situation. Move forward as quickly as possible from confrontation to solving the problem.
- Know when to draw the line. You or your employees are never obligated to take profanity or physical abuse. As a business owner, you do have the right to choose who you want to do business with.
- Keep perspective. Remember that most customers are basically delightful people who truly want to develop a good working relationship with you and your company. Relatively speaking, there are very few customers who are a nightmare to deal with.

Oftentimes obnoxious people simply don't know how to appropriately cope with problems or disappointments. If they had better skills in these areas, they'd probably use them. In the words of Henry Ford, when dealing with nightmarish customers: "Don't find a fault. Find a remedy".



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