

# Special Customer Service Situations

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## ***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 may be extremely agitated from dealing with a defective product or service. The customer may 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. The worst scenario is when someone may have been injured by your company's product.

Beyond how a customer may react to a problem, it is often the very nature of the problem itself that presents a special challenge. Here are some of the more sensitive problems that may be posed to you as a CSW:

- An urgent order was not delivered on time, causing extreme inconvenience and even high expense to a business customer.
- The wrong part was delivered, and now a time-consuming return and resend must be processed.

- A customer was mistreated by another member of your company's team.
- A customer was offered false assurances or promises that must now be rectified.
- A customer has suffered repeated breakdowns of purchased equipment.
- A special request wasn't fulfilled.

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 may simply take their business elsewhere. The average business loses some 15% of customers each year due to unsatisfactory service. The problem may also indicate a greater issue within your company that needs to be 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. And with customer ratings available on many online sources, each bad comment can reach vast numbers of other current and potential customers.

## ***Fixing Special Customer Problems***

Most of 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 may also well 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 will likely 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. And then apologize again. And even say you're sorry once again, if it seems useful. 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 ensure that the depth of a customer's disappointment and inconvenience is countered with a sufficient level of remedy, equal to the customer's loss. Possible remedies and compensations may be spelled out in advance by your company's policies such as a full and immediate refund, a discount on service for a given period, a discount on a future purchase, and so forth. 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 in to the process as a participating partner, you help empower them and give 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 problems that aren't resolved well.
- Unsatisfied customers who complain to friends and on online review websites 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.