

Getting customers to listen to “no”

with

Eleanor Shakiba



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Sometimes you can't give a customer what they want. But you still need to keep them happy.

Here are four simple ways to manage impossible requests.

1. Acknowledge the customer's position

Say, “Thanks for drawing this to my attention” then summarise what they've said. By doing this the customer is more likely to feel:

- you have listened properly
- they are being taken seriously
- calmer, if they were getting angry

Acknowledge that the issue is important to the customer - and to you.

2. Explain the process used to handle this type of situation

This lets the customer know they will be dealt with fairly. It also sets boundaries about how far you can go to help them.

3. Describe what you can do for them

Focusing on what can't be done creates customer resentment. Instead, offer positive options and choices - it makes the customer feel more powerful.

4. Follow with an explanation of any relevant policy

Also explain logic behind the policy - e.g. “To ensure all our clients have equal access to computers, we restrict use to one hour during peak times.”

Promptly refer the customer to a manager if they continue to make unreasonable demands. Often talking to someone in authority is all it takes to calm down an irate customer.

Need more tips on how to handle your customers?

Find out how our client, Terence Humphreys, handled a customer who had bitten into a biscuit full of weevils. Megan Hills interviews Terence about using NLP to calm angry clients.

Enjoy reading and taking action on what you learn this month.

Eleanor Shakiba, Director

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Connect with your clients

by Hedley Galt

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Want to improve your relationship with a difficult customer? Listening to them will help you do it.

Here are my favourite tips for high impact listening.

1. Stop talking

Do whatever it takes to stop yourself from interrupting your customer. Let them talk, then let them talk some more until they have absolutely nothing left to say.

You can gather valuable information about your customer's true expectations and needs that aren't always so obvious in the beginning.

2. Build Rapport

If your customer feels rapport with you (i.e. a common ground), they are more likely to trust you. Build rapport by finding something to agree with early in the conversation.

3. Listen

While this sounds like common sense it isn't always easy. Listening means actively using your whole body to engage in what the person is saying. Do it by:

- maintaining eye contact
- using followers - e.g. nodding, 'ah-ha' and 'mmm'
- mirroring their body language
- looking for non-verbal and verbal messages.

4. Ask open-ended questions

The questions we ask our customers will determine the quality of the relationship. Asking more questions that inspire thoughtful responses from our customers will help to build trust and ultimately lead to a happier outcome.

Contact us to learn more about active listening to get better results from any conversation.

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Interview with
Terence Humphreys
Training Officer Weight Watchers Australia
by Megan Hills



Staying calm when customers abuse you

Terence is an expert in customer service. At one stage of his career, he was working in the complaints section of a food manufacturer. He received a phone call from an irate customer. The customer's son had started to eat a snack bar from a supermarket and discovered he had weevils in his mouth. His mother was very upset.

Terence says there had been a widespread outbreak of weevils in supermarkets at the time. He didn't know if the manufacturer was at fault, or even if what the customer was saying was true. He used these tips to handle the customer:

Terence's KEY TIPS for staying calm

1. Focus on solutions

Keep the conversation future-focused. Discuss what the solution would feel like so they can imagine it. Being too problem-focused just increases their anger.

2. Use gentle questioning skills

End your questions and statements with a light inflection so they feel easily included.

3. Match your body language

If you are face-to-face with the customer, subtly and slowly match your physical position to theirs (warning: if you mimic 100% the customer might notice it as trickery).

Example 1: If they have their arms crossed, put your hand on your elbow, then gradually influence their body language over ten minutes, moving them away from the defensive pose by shifting your own.

Example 2: Subtly lead the customer away from the angry point where they are standing over a period of 10 minutes, as shifting location within a room can make a difference.

4. Agree where possible

You can always find something you can say the word "yes" explicitly to.

5. Remember: it is not about you

Anger is generally about self-protection, so try not to take a customer's mood personally.

Ultimately, the customer appreciated that Terence was trying to help her and the situation was settled.

What Terence has learned from Eleanor's courses

"That the only thing you really have control over is yourself"

Terence explains that there are things that press our buttons - people yelling at us is one of them! We do have the ability to change our response to that - by visualising, deep breathing and imagining the other person in their underwear, etc.

Learning to handle customer complaints helps you to:

- represent your company well
- feel calm
- be able to say to yourself "Wow, I actually helped that person get out of that angry mood"

Find out more about how to handle difficult clients and customers - Contact us

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