

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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