

HANDLING IRATE CUSTOMERS

AND DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations! You've been chosen to act as a Group Leader for Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations. You've been selected to help yourself and those around you succeed at work and life, and to help your organization as well.

If you've never done this before, you're probably a bit nervous. There's a good amount of material and it's natural to feel some stage fright.

The material is well organized. Your participants know less about the topic than you, so no one will question your knowledge. Besides, the participants do much of the work themselves. Leading this session will help you overcome that stage fright. When you properly prepare for your role as Group Leader, you'll find people praising how well you've performed.

This is easy, and it's well worth it to you, the participants, and the organization as a whole.

Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations is a system designed to help employees improve their skills in dealing with irate customer encounters. It is structured to dramatically increase self-confidence and competence during high-pressure situations by focusing on their own skills, talents, and abilities as well as identifying areas for improvement and further development.

Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations will have a powerful impact on employee success and performance. Committed participation and support from you and your co-workers is essential. This Leader's Guide is designed to provide the tools you need to generate that support.

HANDLING IRATE CUSTOMERS AND DIFFICULT SITUATIONS PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The goals of the Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations program are:

To increase the confidence and competence of every employee in your organization when dealing with irate customers;

And

To develop concrete strategies that help employees' positively affect outcomes and adequately recover following difficult and stressful on the job situations.

To achieve these objectives, Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations should be conducted in a systematic, organized manner. At the same time, these sessions should be relaxed and informal. The program is designed for between eight and 15 participants and each session should run approximately three hours (four hours in developing countries).

If at all possible, an executive, manager, or supervisor with peer respect should lead the Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations sessions. Employees will find that their relations with the Group Leader will be improved by the frank, open approach of the Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations program. They'll appreciate the interest and enthusiasm you bring to the discussions, and translate that interest and enthusiasm into very personal terms.

Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations will help all employees and we recommend that everyone within the organization be invited to participate. There's enough material in each group session to give you and your co-workers plenty of stimulation for constructive group discussion. The more everyone participates in the discussions, the better everyone will understand, remember, and apply Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations program has three components:

- 1) Two DVD's (totaling approximately 55 minutes of vignettes and instructional information)
- 2) A Leader's Guide
- 3) The Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations Participant Package (Participant Book, Technique Card, Certificate of Accomplishment, Performance Standards).

Video

The video, shot on location at various businesses, features realistic, everyday scenes of employee situations and interactions.

The video corresponds to the program by section: For instance, Session 1: Section 1 on the video corresponds to Session 1: Section 1 in the Leader's Guide.

At the end of each video segment, the Group Leader is directed to turn off the video and turn to the next exercise or activity.

Leader's Guide

The Leader's Guide is divided into 14 parts: the Leader's Introduction and 13 training sections.

The introduction provides you with the information you need to get the program up and running effectively.

The Leader's Guide includes:

- *A complete transcript of each video*
- *All exercises, and in-class activities*
- *Suggested leader text or key points for the leader to cover*
- *Sample or likely participant responses to questions and activities*
- *Implementation suggestions and training hints*
- *Additional follow-up questions*
- *Space to record sample participant responses to questions*

Types of Questions and Exercises

Throughout Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations, the following method is used to distinguish the kinds of questions the leader will ask participants.

- *Questions in the form Participant Book Question # correspond to the questions within the numbered exercises in the Participant Book.*
- *Questions in the form Discussion Question refer to questions that are not within the numbered exercises in the Participant Book and may include follow-up questions. Participants will not have these questions in their books.*
- *The Participant Book contains Assignments at the end of each reading session. Participants are asked to complete these assignments as part of the work between sessions.*

When going over numbered exercises, the Group Leader is encouraged to refer participants to specific Participant Book questions by question number.

Participant Book

The Participant Book is rich in examples, illustrations, and strategies that support the videos and discussions.

The Participant Book is the activity guide and resource for each participant who goes through the program. It includes an array of techniques, strategies, exercises, activities, and assessments. Like the Leader's Guide, the Participant Book is divided into sections. Each section includes introductory and resource information to supplement and expand on material presented in the video segments. Also included are all program exercises and suggested assignments, optional exercises, skill practice, etc.

The Participant Book material is rich in examples, illustrations, and strategies that support and expand upon the video segments and exercises in each section. As a Group Leader, you can take advantage of this material when introducing new topics or when providing answers to participant questions.

The Participant Book is often referred to throughout the program. Encourage participants to read the book at home at their own pace and highlight key ideas for discussion. Make notes throughout the Leader's Guide that reference the Participant Book, then refer participants to the Participant Book when you think important ideas or principles can support their learning. The participants will be asked to complete all of the exercises and assignments throughout the Participant Book; the necessary page numbers for each activity are included in the Leader's Guide for easy navigation.

The Participant Book serves as an ongoing reference and resource long after the program is over. By referring participants to specific pages in the book, you create awareness of the wealth of information it contains. Participants are urged to take advantage of the interactive benefits of the program by writing in their books and using them fully. Participants are likely to refer back to the step-by-step tips and techniques when needed.

THE HANDLING IRATE CUSTOMERS AND DIFFICULT SITUATIONS PARTICIPANT BOOK — KEY ELEMENT OF THE PROGRAM

The Participant Book is designed to explore in much greater detail the points covered in the videos and in the group discussions. It is an important part of the Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations program. In some cases, participants will respond far better to the written word than they will to either the videos or the group sessions.

As a Group Leader, you must emphasize the importance of the Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations Participant Book to participants. There is no way to force participants to read the chapters or to complete the exercises, but take every opportunity to encourage them to do so.

- *Read the participant book yourself to thoroughly understand the content. Highlight key ideas and concepts to help you propel the discussions.*
- *In your group sessions make sure each participant has their own copy of the Participant Book and that they write their name on Page 1 and complete all the included exercises. Encourage participants to highlight key ideas and concepts as they read the book.*
- *Assign Chapters 1–11 of the Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations Participant Book at the conclusion of Session 1. Assign the Session Review at the end of Chapter 5. Ask participants to complete the session review and hand it in to you at the start of Session 2.*
- *Review the participants' understanding of the Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations Participant Book at the start of Session 2. Encourage discussion of the questions.*
- *At the conclusion of Session 2 allow the participants to complete the second Session Review at the end of Chapter 11. Go over their understanding of the Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations concepts at the end of the program.*

The Participant Book is rich in examples, illustrations, and strategies that support the videos and discussions.

All of the print and video materials in Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations are copyrighted and may not be reproduced in any form. The Participant Book represents a license for one employee to experience the Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations program.

Leader's Guide at a Glance

Adjacent example
box 1

The full transcripts
of the videos are
included in the
Leader's Guide.

The following section provides sample formats of the main components of the Leader's Guide.

VIDEO SCRIPT OF SESSION 1: SECTION 2

Running Time: 3 minutes, 25 seconds

NARRATOR: Have you ever considered what makes a customer irate? What causes them to lose their cool and take it out on you or one of your co-workers? Consider the following scenario.

Employee: Good afternoon Mr.-

Customer: Don't even start with that condescending smile. You can wipe it right off your face. I don't even want to see it.

Adjacent example
box 3

Suggestions for
Leader's Text are
printed inside
shaded boxes.

LEADER TEXT: Welcome to Session 1 of Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations. For those of you who don't know me, my name is (YOUR NAME), and I'll be acting as Group Leader during this session. As Group Leader, I'll be providing some framework for our discussions, but each of you will be helping one another as we go along.

Now that you know me, I'm going to have each of you introduce yourselves, but a little differently. You will each introduce yourselves using the most stressful customer situation you have ever encountered. You will pair up with another participant and you will play the part of the customer, while your partner will do their best to deal with the situation.

So take a minute to think about your most stressful, hated, and difficult customer situation. It can be anything. The more irrational the better.

(Give participants a few minutes to take notes if they need to.)

Adjacent example box 3

All exercises from the session are included in the Leader's Guide.

Adjacent example box 3

Hints and notes for the leader accompany the exercises.

Adjacent example box 3

Corresponding questions from the Participant Book are enclosed in shaded boxes.

Adjacent example box 3

Questions are followed by sample participant responses in parentheses and by one or more blank lines for the leader to add additional sample responses or notes.

Participant Book Question 1: Have you ever lost your cool (or wanted to) when interacting with an employee at any of the businesses that you patronize? Describe the situation.

Participant Book Question 2: What do you think drove you to have such an extreme reaction?

Honesty is essential at this stage. Try to create a safe place where participants don't fear judgments or reprisal from you or the other participants. Try to make it causal and fun by sharing a situation of your own as well as your feelings. Highlighting your own shortcomings and embarrassment can create a collegial sense of openness and sharing within the group and the participants should respond in kind.

Participant Book Question 3: How much of losing your cool was based on what the employees you interacted with did? How much was based on outside factors? How much was based on any personal struggles?

Try to group the reactions accordingly and remember these answers as examples for use during the next exercise.

PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Conduct the Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations program in a comfortable, well-ventilated room or space, with plenty of light. Select a room that is large enough to allow the participants to stretch out a bit. A comfortable group will be far more receptive to the Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations message. Make sure the program is free of interruptions so you and the participants won't be distracted. This is particularly true if you're a manager or a supervisor who tends to have many people trying to reach you. During Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations you will be creating a learning mood, which can be easily compromised by interruptions. Make sure all participants have pens and paper.

Locate and test the video equipment you'll be using for Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations. The program is available on DVD, so be aware of which type of equipment you will need to have on hand for your session. Avoid equipment with inferior speakers or poor resolution. Technical flaws like these will distract the participants.

Allow plenty of room for the equipment you'll need. Even if you know all the participants on a first-name basis, make name tags or table tents so everyone can see all the participants' names. During the sessions, it's very important to address the participants by name to establish a warm and friendly environment.

Make certain that before the program, each participant has his or her own personal copy of the Participant Book. Encourage participants to take notes inside of the book; as well as, underline key ideas. The more time they invest in understanding the key concepts of the book, the more likely they are to execute the information in their professional lives. You and the participants will refer to it frequently, so be sure to read the appropriate sections and complete assignments before the program.

Make sure that everyone can hear you. Speak clearly and distinctly without straining your voice. Don't allow participants to gravitate toward the back of the meeting room.