

HANDLING IRATE CUSTOMERS

AND DIFFICULT SITUATIONS



PARTICIPANT BOOK



Service Quality Institute
The Global Leader in Customer Service

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AND DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

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First Edition

Printed in the United States of America

0 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION



Welcome!

Congratulations on being selected to participate in Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations, a valuable program designed to help you overcome one of the most difficult aspects of any service oriented industry... dealing with irate customers and overcoming problem situations. The lessons and techniques described in this program can help you improve your interactions with your customers, develop a routine for overcoming difficult situations that arise on the job, and recover following stressful encounters. In addition, this program offers a management approach to help distinguish your organization from the competition.

Successful companies set themselves apart with the service they provide to their clients and customers even at the most difficult times. The training and techniques outlined in this program can help you improve your interactions with everyone at your organization from your customers and co-workers to your supervisors. In addition, the skills necessary to succeed under pressure will help you take that next step up the ladder within your organization.

Facing off with a screaming, unreasonable, irrational customer represents the ultimate test of any employee's service skills. It can take you to your breaking point if you are not aware and careful. Staying grounded and above the fray requires you to find inner strength and persevere beyond the initial difficulties. You may not even know if you possess that strength, but this program will help draw it out of you.

Dealing with irate customers is among the most pressure packed experiences you will ever encounter on any job. When you can perform with the odds stacked against you people will take notice. Co-workers will trip over themselves to work with you on an upcoming project, supervisors will put you in charge, and your customers will happily allow you to help them, knowing you will do whatever it takes to satisfy their needs.

Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations provides concrete exercises to help you better diffuse and manage angry customer encounters. It also offers strategies you can use to affect success in those instances when a situation spirals out of control. It also explores the importance of staying calm and controlled and projecting an even demeanor and sound expertise during those difficult situations.

Handling Irate Customers & Difficult Situations is all about

- *Compassion,*
- *Confidence, and*
- *Calm,*
- *Competence.*

During this program you will learn how to look at situations and even yourself differently. We invite you to evaluate your attitude, your actions, and your skills on the job. Think about how you interact with customers when things get tough. How do you respond to customer complaints? How do you react to personal attacks? As a customer yourself, have you ever been in a difficult situation? How did you respond? How was the situation resolved? This introspection will help you focus on those difficult encounters and use them to learn, grow, and succeed in the workplace.

Program Objectives

In this program you will learn:

- *Who is the irate customer and what is their mindset?*
- *The importance of diffusing the situation*
- *6 steps for handling irate customers*
- *Tools you can use to recover from stressful encounters and then to evaluate your performance*



- *What are difficult situations?*
- *The importance of remembering and relying on your training*
- *4 steps for dealing with problem situations*
- *What to do when things get even worse*
- *How to rebuild your self esteem and sense of self-worth*

Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations requires skills beyond simply navigating a nerve-wracking encounter with a screaming customer. It demands that you build a strong sense of self-esteem. It requires that you possess the confidence to rely on your skills and training to overcome any situation. So often employees faced with an irate customer crumble under the intensity of the moment. They don't feel strong enough to handle the abusive language, or sure enough of themselves to solve the problem appropriately. This program aims to give you that strength, little by little, but in the end strength is something that must come from you. It's a product of your confidence.

Your group leader will direct you through each section of the program and facilitate a series of discussions over the next two sessions. The success of Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations hinges on the openness and sincerity of each and every participant. Ask questions as often as possible, and try to provide honest answers based on your personal experiences - there are no right or wrong answers or questions.

During each section of the program, you will see a series of video presentations that depict common scenarios that you may encounter on the job. You will also perform a few written assignments and participate in valuable role-play exercises.

The Participant Book

Your Handling Irate Customers and Difficult Situations participant book guides you through each session and section of the program. Use it to follow along, take notes, and locate presentation material and exercises. Once you complete the program, keep the participant book for future reference and practice. Use this book to capture important notes and tips, it will prove to be a valuable resource when your memory of the workshop itself has faded. So take notes, capture your thoughts and remember what you learn.

You may be familiar with some of the themes we will discuss. Others may be new to you. When we are done you will have the knowledge and skills you need to confidently and effectively handle any irate customer encounter you might face on the job.

Handling irate customers can be difficult and take an extraordinary amount of patience and time, but in the end it benefits everyone in your organization, and your customers as well.



CHAPTER 1

REVIEW: Points to Remember

- *Dealing with irate customers is among the most pressure packed experiences on any job.*
- *Successful companies set themselves apart with the service they provide to their clients and customers even at the most difficult times.*
- *Techniques can help you improve your interactions with everyone at your organization.*
- *The skills necessary to succeed under pressure will help you take that next step up the ladder within your organization.*
- *Handling irate customers requires:*
 - *Compassion*
 - *Calm*
 - *Confidence*
 - *Competence*

CHAPTER 2:

IT'S NOT YOU, IT'S THEM – THE MINDSET OF THE IRATE CUSTOMER

What annoys a customer?

Getting passed over in a long line. Getting a fast food order incorrect. Being talked down to. Being put on hold. Being shifted and passed from one customer service representative to another.

What angers a customer?

Wasting time. Incompetence. Not being understood. Being ignored. Not being valued. Not getting their money's worth. Being treated like a thief or a child. Not being believed. Being put on hold... again.

Now think about what makes a customer truly irate?

The answer to that question may not be so obvious.

What causes them to lose their cool and take it out on you or one of your co-workers? There is no “one thing” that pushes a customer over the edge, but you can do your best to examine the situation and speculate. It can sometimes be any of the above insults taken to the nth degree, or a combination of them. Any customer would become irate after being put on hold again... and again... and again... and again.

Every customer you encounter every day is a different person with a unique set of circumstances and personality traits driving them. You can't know everything that goes on in their lives. You will never have a complete understanding of all of the events, the personal histories, the failed attempts at restitution that bring them to you on a random Tuesday to scream in your face. But you don't need to know everything. You need to dissect the situation in front of you to understand what the customer has already gone through.



Think about a customer experiencing any of the following:

- *They have recently been laid off and feel constant stress about money and security for their entire family.*
- *Their sewer backed up into the basement.*
- *They cannot afford to make their rent payment this month.*
- *They are relocating a small business.*
- *They suffer from chronic back pain.*
- *They have a rebellious and underachieving teenager at home.*
- *Their car broke down and they are paying thousands in repair costs.*
- *A bird in the parking lot pooped on their shirt.*
- *They are trying to sell their house.*
- *They provide primary care for an elderly parent.*
- *They are seeing a marriage counselor.*
- *Their credit cards are all maxed out.*
- *They have an equally stressful job that brings them face to face with irate customers.*

Any of those stressors can take a customer right to the edge of their personal limit. Some customers experience none of these types of stressors but still blow up at the drop of a hat. Others deal with even more hardship, but manage to hold it together. There is no certain rule to base your customer service on that will prevent or preclude any and all irate customer encounters. They will happen and sometimes they will materialize out of the blue. The key is to be ready when they do occur.

You may find yourself face to face with a level of ire and bitter criticism you are not used to handling everyday. By staying prepared you can move past the initial shock and work toward effective resolutions that benefit everyone. It is entirely possible that an irate customer may not want to work with you. As an employee you often represent everything that an irate customer perceives to be wrong with their experience. Despite all of that you still represent an opportunity to set things right in their mind, and affect positive change.

Compassion is the first and most important step in successfully handling an irate customer. Think about all of those stressors listed above. Those events take a toll on anyone – even an irate, irrational, and offensive customer has limits. The irate situation may not really be about you, but it is all about them... It's about their needs. It's about what they aren't receiving. It's about understanding them.

Understanding the mindset of an irate customer can help you get to the crux of the matter, provide customers with a level of service they need, and resolve the difficult situation amicably. Since customers come to you with their unique stories, you will need to work hard to understand each of them. They each have different wants and different needs. They may want something specific from you or your organization, but that may translate into a different emotional need. Figuring this out on a case-by-case basis with each customer is the only way you can provide the necessary services to resolve irate customer encounters.

What do they want?

A refund? A more equitable resolution? A conversation with someone who can solve their problem? An acknowledgement of their time, effort, and expense? A little restitution for their inconvenience?

What do they need?

An advocate? A little clarification? Some understanding? To be heard? To be believed? To be trusted? To be treated fairly and like a human being?

It's your job to figure these things out and get ahead of the oncoming tirade.