

## **Does it say “Customer Service” on your badge?**

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Guest Relations Training Expert

The ad said, “\$50 mail-in rebate and \$20 in-store rebate.” That was enough to convince me it was time to buy my new software.

When I got to Micro Center, they had a sign posted above the software that said, “\$20 mail-in rebate and \$50 in-store rebate.” “Even better,” I said to myself. But when I got to the counter to purchase the software, the cashier said he couldn’t give me the discount. His name tag said “Mike - Cashier” and clearly, that was his only responsibility. “Lady, I can’t help you. It’s store policy; I can’t change what the computer says so I have to charge you full price.”

In a very polite voice I replied, “Mike, as a customer service representative of your company I would at least expect you to check with someone who can authorize the correction.” I’ll never forget his reply as he grabbed his name tag, pulled it away from his shirt and asked, “Does it SAY Customer Service on my badge?”

How can you avoid a similar situation when working with your clients? Consider the following

### 11 Steps to Calming Upset Customers

#### **1. Listen and acknowledge that you are listening.**

One way to calm upset customers is to demonstrate that you’re listening. The best way to do this is to repeat back what they’ve said for confirmation. When you demonstrate that you’ve listened, the customer will be more apt to fully listen to what *you* have to say when it’s your turn to speak. Consistent eye contact, nodding, and repeating key words also reinforce that you’re paying attention.

*That means that when a coach from a softball league comes storming into your office to complain that the sprinklers came on in the middle of the game, you need to keep a straight face (no matter how ridiculous the complaint may seem to you), listen to his entire story (no matter how long winded it may be), and then repeat the details to make sure you’ve paid attention. You might say something like, “Last Wednesday at 6:45 in the evening, Field #7.” Once the coach is assured that you got the correct information, tell him your plans for avoiding the situation in the future.*

#### **2. Don’t interrupt.**

No matter how difficult it is to hear the whole story, avoid the temptation to interrupt. Even if you think you know where a complaint is “heading,” it’s important to allow your customers the chance to express their concerns. Upset customers want to feel heard; you develop a psychological truth with them when you allow them to tell you all the details of why they are unhappy.

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*When you have a screaming mom who can't register for the session of swimming lessons around which she has planned her summer schedule, it's as important to listen to her entire story as it is to offer some kind of solution. Once she is finished, don't make excuses, however valid. She isn't interested in hearing about your staffing issues or how popular that particular time slot is. The focus should be on offering some kind of alternative that can help improve the situation. In this case, you might consider offering her private lessons that can be scheduled around her summer plans.*

**3. Use the Two-Second Rule.**

After the customer has finished telling his or her side of the story, count to two before you begin talking. This guarantees that the customer has time to finish and gives you a few seconds to prepare what you are going to say. If you are thinking of your response while the customer is speaking, you aren't listening carefully—that's a fact.

*So after the annual pass holder calls to complain that, when you shut down the outdoor pool because of a lightning storm, his kids had to come home early, pause for two seconds to make sure you have the right words ready. (And don't say... "Listen, I'm not your babysitter"...even though you may be thinking it!)*

**4. Speak respectfully.**

Body language, voice tone and other nuances can make the difference between whether customers see you as respectful—or not. For instance, it's a natural tendency to sigh as you turn to walk away from an over-demanding customer. Chances are, the customer will hear or see you sighing—and that is sure to just make them even angrier.

*After coaching swimming 20 years, I have a "coach's voice" and I don't hesitate to use it when I need someone's attention. Unfortunately when you have a powerful voice, sometimes it comes out at the wrong time. Trust me: I have scared small animals and children with that voice. The last thing a customer needs or wants is that "coach's voice" in their face. Remember to check your tone before you speak.*

**5. Choose your words carefully.**

The right phrase can do a lot to diffuse a tense situation. Instead of using words like "policy" and "can't," choose a more pleasing response. The chart below provides some helpful suggestions.

<b>Popular Phrases</b>	<b>More Positive Responses</b>
I'll try	I will
Our policy	Our guidelines
Your problem	The situation
You'll have to...	The best thing to do is ...

We can't do that!	What I CAN do for you is ...
He's not here!	That person is not available at the moment, how can I help you?
That's not my department! You'll have to call someone else!	For future reference, the person who handles that service is ...
That information is in our brochure!	Let me show you where that information is in our brochure!
I don't know!	Let me find out for you!

**6. Represent your organization – not yourself.**

Always respond with “we” instead of “I”. When you represent yourself as part of the bigger picture, you have stronger backing and more credibility than when you use “I” and appear to be acting on your own.

**7. Apologize to the customer.**

If a customer comes to you with a complaint and the error is a result of an oversight on your company's part, don't hesitate to apologize. However, if you have done nothing wrong and the company is not at fault, do not feel obligated to apologize; just fix the situation as quickly as you can. It is more important to appease the customer than it is to fight about who was right and who was wrong.

**8. Resolve the situation quickly and in a positive manner.**

Minimal response time is imperative to a positive end result. Immediately let your customers know what you CAN do for them. If you need to get approval from someone else in your company, let your customers know the specific steps you plan to take on their behalf. If it takes you longer than expected, provide an update and let them know you are still working on it.

*For instance, when Joe Soccer calls to ask permission to use his snow blower to clear the field so his kids can have practice, it won't help to spend time discussing the potential damage to the turf. Instead let him know what you CAN do for him. In this case, see if the gym or racquetball court is available so the team can practice indoors until the snow melts off the field.*

**9. Remember the customer's name and use it frequently.**

When you use your customers' names in the conversation, it demonstrates that you care—and by extension shows them that you are likely to help them with their needs.

**10. Move to a more private area.**

Whenever a customer is upset, ask him or her to step aside so that you can talk privately. If you believe the situation is unsafe or volatile, always remain calm and call for back up assistance.

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*If you have an angry patron in a long line of people waiting for admission, the worst thing you can do is leave the person to yell in front of an audience who could turn ugly on you. Move the patron away from the crowd so you can discuss the issue with them in private.*

### **11. Thank the Guest.**

It may feel odd to thank a customer for complaining, particularly if the exchange is unpleasant. However, your customer is doing you a favor by bringing the issue to your attention. It gives you the opportunity to address the problem before it affects other customers.

*As a facility manager I loved to immediately call someone who had submitted a patron concern form. Even if I didn't have an answer for them, I would thank them for bringing the issue to our attention. Then I would explain the steps I planned to take to resolve the issue. If I was able to get an answer for them, I'd call back and leave a message on their voice mail so that they would know the problem had been quickly resolved.*

Back to Good ole Mike – remember him? Well I am not sure he works at Micro Center anymore. Certainly, it didn't seem like he was cut out for a service oriented position. But the story has a happy ending—at least for me.

After Mike's unhelpful response, I asked to speak with a manager, who knew something about customer service. He listened thoroughly to my dilemma, allowed me to show him the sign offering the rebate, and then quickly apologized by saying, "That sign has been up there for five weeks and you're the first person to notice the error. Thanks for bringing it to our attention. I will be happy to honor the posting. Can I ring you up?" Of course I couldn't leave the store with a clear conscience without telling the manager about Mike's response. And of course, I gave him my card and explained that I teach customer service for a living – encouraging him to call when he is ready for training.

**Ruby Newell-Legner, CSP** is known as the Queen of Customer Service in the Leisure Industry. To sign up for Ruby's free electronic newsletter "Great Customer Service for Leisure Professionals" visit <http://www.GuestRelationsTraining.com>.

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