

How to cope with the irate customer

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For The New Mexican

I've watched in horror as employees typically react in two of three ways to the irate customers: aggressively or passively. However, only when an employee counters assertively do they get the results that will ultimately benefit their customer and their company.

When a staff member responds aggressively, she tends to personalize the criticism made by the customer. This employee becomes victimized as the customer complains about the compa-

ny's services or goods. The aggressive worker might turn on her customer with equal or greater venom propelled by feelings of defensiveness.

When employees engage in passive behaviors, they may slide into a pathetic redundancy of verbal apologies. These workers appear to have little or no understanding of how to begin the problem-solving process. They simply repeat, saying over and over again, "I'm sorry." Or employees may shrug off the problem and

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Cope: In most cases, customers are irate because of a legitimate concern

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simply fail to respond at all to the client's concerns. Finally, a passive worker may give away the whole store just to get rid of an irate client.

With time and practice, employees will discover the ease of defusing irate patrons by becoming assertive problem solvers. Start by determining the type of irate customer with whom you are dealing. This means that employees must be able to read the customer's body language, tone of voice and facial expressions. Workers must be conscious and alert and must know how to listen with empathy and have the confidence to respond in a manner that garners positive results.

Occasionally, you may be confronted by a customer who, no matter what you say or do, remains upset. In these

Giving the customer the opportunity to explain his concern will go a long way toward defusing anger.

instances, it is best to remove the customer from the public arena. If a customer is talking in a loud voice or shouting, you might want to ask the customer to accompany you to a private space where their concerns can be discussed confidentially. If, on the other hand, an irate customer is cursing loudly, becoming verbally abusive or appears to be under the influence of mind-altering substances, you should politely yet immediately excuse yourself. Call security or the police to have the customer removed quickly. Later, terminate the relationship, diplomatically, in writing.

become irate because they have a legitimate concern that has not been addressed. They are feeling frustrated, angry and upset. Offer your customer a quiet space and refreshment if you are able. This action allows your customer a chance to defuse momentarily and gives you the chance to remember this is not about you personally. Ask the customer if he wishes to sit down, and if he agrees, you too may take a seat. If the customer refuses to sit down, make sure you remain standing as well. The best strategy is to maintain absolute professionalism throughout the entire transaction.