



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Managing Difficult Customers

Customer service representatives working in call centers come across many demanding customers who often take out their troubles on them.

Rage

Rage is irrational anger beyond control. To get emotions back under control, rage needs to be diffused. Appropriate training makes it possible to address a customer complaint without demoralizing the customer representatives. There are a variety of ways to diffuse rage.

Types of reactions

Remaining passive most of the time can damage a customer representative's self-esteem while continued aggressive behavior might damage the physical health of the representative.

Assertive behavior, on the other hand, is thoughtful without being reactive and therefore does not damage either the representative's or the customer's self-esteem. Learning techniques that shift a customer representative's behavior towards assertiveness can teach him or her to handle difficult and confrontational situations.

PCAR

The PCAR (Pause, Acknowledge, Clarify, Respond) technique provides the total framework for managing such emotions.

The PCAR helps one gain control by dealing with the caller's problem instead of his rage.

Pause!

By bearing in mind that the anger is not directed at him or her personally, a customer representative can hold back his/her reactive response. Breathing out quietly can reduce tension and allow the customer to vent his or her rage.

Acknowledge

The customer representative can acknowledge he/she is listening by reflecting the customer's words and feelings with phrases such as "I appreciate why you are upset," or "I understand how upsetting this must be." It is a good idea to use the caller's name occasionally.

Clarify

The customer representative must ask for details of the problem by linking the request with the benefits that can be provided. Review what has been covered and to where it is leading. Then, highlight how it is leading to the solution.



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Respond

Offer solutions and suggestions confidently, and when something cannot be done, suggest and justify alternatives.

If the customer is persistent, explain why a particular solution is not viable and involve the customer in working out alternate solutions. Before thanking the customer for the call, confirm what the next step is going to be.