



## WHAT ANGRY PEOPLE NEED AND WANT

Further to customer service, you're going to come across the hostile, angry customer more and more as money gets tighter and customers get increasingly demanding. This will be driven in part by financial stress.

In his book *Defusing Hostile Customers Workbook*, author Robert Bacal offers some advice: "When you have dealt with an angry customer, you may have asked yourself "What does this person want from me?", or even perhaps asked the customer this question. It is an important question that has a number of answers. Knowing the answers will help you calm down an angry person, and reduce hostile behaviour directed at you.

### They Want What They Want

The most obvious answer to the question, and the one most commonly mentioned in my seminars, is customers want their problem solved. In other words, the customer interacts with a particular goal in mind. Unfortunately, we cannot always do what the customer wants, since we have to work within the constraints of our jobs. We don't always have the authority, or even the ability to meet the requests of clients.

So, most of the time we can't give them what they ask for. If clients only "wanted what they wanted" we would have little chance of calming them down, since we can't always accommodate them. Luckily, there are some psychological needs that you can address. Fulfil these needs and you will reduce hostile behavior.

### They Want Help

Angry or hostile people want you to be helpful, even if you can't solve their entire problem. If they see you as making a genuine effort on their behalf, they are much less likely to be hostile towards you personally. Think about your own experience for a moment. Have you ever had the experience of going into a department store to make a purchase? You walked in and had difficulty finding the item you wanted? After searching throughout the store, you finally find a staff person. When you ask the employee where you might find the widgets, you get a response like this:

"Don't know. That's not my department."

Infuriating isn't it? Why do we get angry in this situation? Sure, it's aggravating that we can't find the item. But what really sends us through the roof is the lack of helpfulness shown by the staff member. If the employee had said:

"Golly, I don't know, but if you wait a moment I can find out".

that would be an entirely different story. We would appreciate the effort being made for us, and be less likely to harass the employee making the effort.

The same goes for your customers. When you make an effort, or appear to be trying to help, your customers are less likely to strike out at you.

### **They Want Choices**

Your clients want to feel they have choices and alternatives. They do not want to feel helpless, or trapped, or at the mercy of the "system". Make them feel they have no options, or they are trapped, and they will tend to strike out at you, even if they are the authors of their own misfortune.

Let's look at a simple example.

You answer the phone and the caller asks to speak to Jessica Jones. Ms. Jones is out of the office at the moment. You say:

"I'm sorry but Ms. Jones is away from her desk at the moment. I will take a message and she will call you back."

That's not a bad response, but note that it offers the caller no choice. Now look at another possibility.

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"I'm sorry but Ms. Jones is away from her desk. Would you like her to call you back at a particular time, or would you prefer to call again after 3:00, when she will be available?"

Much better. The difference is subtle. The first response offers no option, but the second allows the caller to choose, or in fact to suggest some other possibility that might be workable. The second example is much less likely to set the customer "off".

There are always choices to offer. And we know that customers respond positively to being offered choices. It reduces their own sense of helplessness.

### **They Want Acknowledgment**

Perhaps one of the most important things an angry person wants is to be acknowledged. People want to feel you are making the effort to understand their situation, and their emotional reactions to it. Often, the simple act of acknowledging that a person is upset will help to calm them down, provided the acknowledgment is phrased and "toned" correctly.

The most common error public servants make when dealing with an angry client is to ignore the feelings being expressed, and shift immediately into a problem solving mode. Unfortunately, customers perceive this approach as uncaring, unfeeling, and unhelpful, thus intensifying their anger.

It is critically important that you acknowledge the emotions being expressed. Later, when we talk about specific techniques and phrases, we will explain how to use empathy and active listening as ways of acknowledging the person's feelings.

In short, angry customers want you to fix their problem, but often this just isn't possible. Luckily, they also want:

- helpfulness and effort on your part
- to feel they have choices
- acknowledgment of their situation and their feelings

By recognizing these "wants", and providing for them, you can have a significant impact on the degree of hostility directed at you."

**(Source: *Take the Lead*)**