

What Do You Say?

When Your Guest is Disappointed

Just a word about this before we dive into specifics. In the big scheme of things, you will save yourself and your guests a lot of stress and energy by presuming that your guest is telling you the truth. Yeah, there are some people who will lie to get something they want, but you didn't check the box "All-Knowing Judge of Character" when you filled out your job application, right? And do you really want that job? Save yourself a lot of grief by approaching each guest with the presumption of innocence. That way, you can spend all your energy getting right to the solution of the problem.

Start by saying you're sorry. Apologizing doesn't mean taking blame; it means you're sorry for the problem, for the situation and for how the guest feels. With that in mind, what do you say when your guest comes to you and says ...

"This is not what I ordered."

Even if you feel 110 percent sure that you've given your guest exactly what he ordered, the only response to this comment is a polite:

"Oh, I'm sorry for the mix-up. What were you expecting? I'll get that for you right away. Thanks for your patience."

"I don't like this. I want to return it."

It's simple. You want this guest's loyalty.

"I'm sorry that you weren't happy with it. Can I help you find a similar item?"

"This was broken when we got it out of the box."

This is one of those situations in which you need to know your company's policies on returns of damaged merchandise.

Generally, the best response is an apology for the inconvenience caused to your guest and an offer to replace or exchange the item.

“I’m sorry. That’s disappointing. Can I get you a new one or would you like to try another brand?”

Another helpful offer would be to say,

“Let’s open the box to make sure that it is in good condition before you take it home.”

Going that extra mile can turn a disappointed guest into a guest who walks out of your store feeling that she was well respected and taken care of.

“The sign said that those were on sale.”

Again, every company is different, so check out your company’s policy. Generally, the best response is something like:

“I’m sorry. That was our oversight. If the sign is still up, I will be happy to honor that price for you.”

“How do you expect anyone to fill this out!?”

Try saying:

“I’m sorry this is frustrating for you. Let’s look it over together and see if we can figure it out.”

Or you could try,

“It is kind of long. I was a little confused when I first looked at it too. Let’s take a look at it together.”

“I’m highly allergic to smoke and this room has been smoked in!”

“I’m sorry Let me find you another non-smoking room right away.”

But what if there aren’t any other non-smoking rooms available?

This is a tough situation. But if your guest is highly allergic to smoke, she can’t stay in her current room even if she’d like to. So, if you don’t have any other non-smoking rooms available, why not be the one to try to find her a room in another hotel? She’ll remember you and your outstanding guest service. And it’s likely she’ll return to stay with you again. But, as with all company policies, talk to your manager about the problem. Your hotel may have another solution.

Consider saying something like:

“I’m sorry. We’re having trouble finding another non-smoking room for you. Let me talk to my manager to see what other accommodations we can make for you.”

“You NEVER have what I want!”

Your best response is to let him know that you have heard him, by acknowledging his feelings, and then offer him some options to help solve the problem.

“I’m sorry you feel that way. Can you tell me what it is you are looking for? I’d like to try to find it for you or order it for you.”

If it turns out to be an item on sale, you might add,

“I would be happy to get you a rain check on that item, so when it comes in, you can buy it at the discounted price. Would you like to give me your name and number so I can call you when it comes in?”

Don't say this unless you're really going to do it. Other wise it does more harm than good.

"This place has the worst layout I've ever seen."

Your first response should be to apologize for the guest's obvious frustration.

"I'm sorry you feel that way. What can I find for you?"

If appropriate, walk him to what he is looking for. As you're walking, treat him like a guest by showing interest in his opinions. Consider saying something like,

"We really value your input. So if you have some ideas that you would be willing to write down and leave with our customer service staff, we'd really appreciate it."

"I pity you, man. The management here is messed up."

Again, your first response should be to apologize. Your guest is frustrated and disappointed about something that has happened. Focus on what you can do to help.

"I'm sorry you feel that way. Maybe I can help. What can I do for you?"

"I was beginning to think no one worked here."

Keep it simple with something like,

"I'm sorry you haven't gotten the help you needed. What can I do for you?"

Saying you're sorry is a good place to start because it helps diffuse most situations.

“Every time I get a bill from you, it’s screwed up.”

“I’m sorry you’re so upset. I’m sure this is frustrating. May I try to straighten things out for you? Let me pull up your record, so we can figure this out together.”

“I ordered a large and you sent me a medium.”

Whether your records show that Mr. Tate ordered a large or not, respond by saying something like,

“I apologize for our mistake, Mr. Tate. I’ll take care of this for you right now. I’ll get a medium to you and I’ll also send you a coupon for a future order. Will that be satisfactory?”

“I ordered blue and they came in neon pink.”

People are human and mistakes happen. There are times when it’s obviously a mistake is on the part of the company. If so, take complete responsibility for the problem, apologize, and offer a solution.

It’s also a good practice whenever possible to compensate your guest in some way for the inconvenience.

“I’m terribly sorry for our mistake, Ms. Lopez. That shouldn’t have happened. I can fix this by 2:00 this afternoon. Will that time frame be satisfactory? We would also like to discount this order for you by 10 percent as an apology for the inconvenience we have caused. Thanks for letting us make this right.”

“This stinks. I want to return it.”

OK. We know we don’t even have to say this, but please don’t pick it up

and smell it. Bottom line...***it doesn't matter whether you think it stinks or not.*** Your guest thinks it stinks, so it stinks. Your response should be something like,

“I'm so sorry about that. Can I help you find something else instead?”

“I don't understand why I am still waiting for my order. The people behind me have already been helped.”

It's human nature to expect fairness. Your guest is disappointed because he feels overlooked. He has had to wait, while others, in his opinion, have not. It's not appropriate, however, to comment on the validity of his opinion; that's how he feels. The best thing to do is to address his concern.

“I'm sorry you've had to wait, I'll check on your order right now.”

“There are a lot of employees hanging around back there. Why is it you're the only one helping customers?”

Again, your guest's sense of fairness is at play here, but she doesn't really want an answer to her question. She's disappointed. What she really wants is for you to help her.

“I'm sorry you've had to wait. What can I help you with?”

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