

What Do You Say?

When Your Guest Wants Special Treatment

■ Your guest has to wait ...

Let's face it—none of us like to wait. And the worst thing about it is not having any idea how long the wait is going to be. Acknowledge guests who are waiting and tell them honestly how long it will be before you can devote your attention to them.

“I'm sorry you've had to wait. I'm with another customer right now, but I should be free in about five minutes. If you would like to look around for just a few more minutes, I'll come find you as soon as I can.”

“My appointment is at 3:00. Can you squeeze me in earlier?”

If there is a way to fit someone in without putting your team or other guests at a disadvantage, you of course just say yes and do so. But if you **can't** say yes, **make sure you don't say no**. Instead, try offering some options like,

“Let me see what I can do ... (pause) I'm sorry, we're completely booked. Would you like me to reschedule for a more convenient time? Or I can call you if there is a cancellation.”

By giving her options, your guest knows that even though you can't give her exactly what she wants—an earlier appointment—you have listened to her request and are doing what you can to help out.

“Can you please put my order in the front of the line? I’ll pay a rush fee.”

Yeah, it sounds a little pushy, but you can’t really blame a person for trying. This guest has just asked for your help in getting something done as quickly as possible. Your goal is to try to do whatever you can to help without jeopardizing any of your other guests’ work. Without promising something you’re not sure you can deliver, you might say something like,

“I’d like to be able to help you. Let me check on the other work orders and see if any have more flexible deadlines than yours. Can you wait a few minutes or would you like me to call you with that information?”

When you get back to your guest, state your answer **positively**, such as,

“Tracy, I can get your order to you by 4:30 this afternoon”

Instead of, “Sorry, the soonest I could get it to you would be 4:30 this afternoon.”

“Can’t you just give me an answer? You have all my information.”

With technology as advanced as it is, customers sometimes expect you to have access to any and all information they need with just a click of your mouse. In situations where you don’t have all the information immediately within your grasp, you can say something like,

“Well, let me see. (Pause) I’m sorry. Unfortunately, it’s going to take me several minutes to get that information for you. Would you like to wait, or would you like me to call you?”

“Yeah, I’m going to need that by the end of the day.”

Some guests would like to make their crisis your crisis. And depending on the way they approach you, you may really want to help. So if you can take on the challenge without jeopardizing your service to your other guests, go for it. You’ll probably have a customer for life. But when your guest is asking for something that you know is absolutely impossible to deliver, just be honest with her by saying something like,

”I understand; let me see what I can do for you. (Pause) I can promise it before noon tomorrow. Will that work for you?”

If the answer is no, help her out another way. Refer her to someone who may be able to meet her deadline. A referral tells your guest that you care more about serving her needs than about getting her money no matter what. People don’t forget. The next time a big project comes along, this guest is much more likely to remember you and give your company a shot at her business.

“I’m really in a hurry. Can you help me first?”

“I’m sorry that you have to wait, but I want to be fair to everybody. I can help you as soon as I finish with this gentleman

“I’m sorry I’m late. I got held up at work a few minutes longer than I wanted and then the traffic was unbelievable.”

“Yeah, traffic is unpredictable. Let me see what I can do. (Pause) I’d be happy to reschedule you, or you can wait and see if we can fit you in later today.”

■ Your guest is asking for something out of the ordinary ...

“Come on, you can bend the rules just this one time.”

In a situation like this, you need to let your guest know that you want to help, but you aren't going to throw away your loyalty to your company to do it. You can do this by saying something like,

“Well, let me see what I can do. Tell me what you'd like to see happen and I'll take it to my supervisor.”

“What do you mean, you're closing? I'm here and you're not closed.”

We feel for you, we do. It's closing time. You're tired. You want to go home. But here is a guest standing in front of you. Does she want special treatment? Maybe a little. She wants to know you appreciate her business enough to stay open for a couple minutes more. Yes, you need patience. And you need to focus on her.

“I'm sorry. Do you already know what you want?”

Or

“I'm sorry. How may I help you?”

“Can you cut me a deal here?”

The key to this question is to know ahead of time what discounts you can give and to whom. Do you offer discounts if a person orders in bulk? Do you offer discounts for longtime customers? Do you offer discounts for cash? Do you ever offer free shipping or free delivery? Do you ever waive the handling fee? Are there discounts for higher-priced items? Are there any low-cost add-ons you can throw in for free if you can't offer a discount? Do you honor or beat your competitor's prices with an ad?

Every company is different, so talk to your manager to find out the guidelines. You will feel much more prepared and have more to offer your guests if you do your homework before they pop that kind of question. If you are caught off guard and don't know what discount, if any, you can offer your customer, you can say something like,

“That’s a good question. Let me find out for you.”

Or,

“To be honest, I’m not absolutely sure, but if you can stick with me for just a minute, I will find out for you.”

If you check with a manager and the answer is no, or if you have something different to offer to your guest, **state it positively**, such as,

“Thanks for your patience. I found out that we’re at our lowest price for this item, but we can take off the price of shipping for you. Would that help?”

Or simply,

“Thanks for asking, but we’re not able to offer a discount on this item.”

This excerpt is used with permission. © 2003 Media Partners Corporation. It is part of the video program, **What Do You Say**, which can be found, along with 1000s of others, at **OnlineBusinessLearning.com**