

# What Do You Say?

## When It's Not About Business

### **Your guest tries to put you in the middle of an argument...**

We've all seen it: a mother and daughter standing in the middle of a clothing department arguing over the style or price of a certain item. Or maybe it's a husband and wife fighting over the type of kitchen cabinets they want. Tempers can flare when people are trying to make decisions about products or services that they are paying good money for. So what do you say if one of your guests tries to make you take sides in a personal battle with another guest? Here are some ideas for staying out of the fight while staying in the guests' good graces.

***"Will you please tell him how stupid that is?"***

*"Everyone's different. What can I help you with today?"*

***"Tell him he's wrong!"***

*"Oh, I don't want to get in the middle, but if I can give you any other information to help you make your decision, I'd be happy to."*

***"Can you believe what she's wearing?"***

*"That's fashion. What can I help you find today?"*

***"Would you please tell her how ridiculous that looks?"***

*"Fashion is a personal thing, so I don't want to get into the middle, but if I can bring you anything else or get you another size, I'd be happy to do that. Would you like me to check back with you in a few minutes?"*

It's important to remember that both customers are guests. Saying to

the mother, “*Oh, I have teenagers too*” may lighten the situation and amuse the mom, but it will alienate the daughter and potentially keep both from returning.

## ■ Your guest asks personal questions...

***“Are you married?”***

***“You’re a Virgo, aren’t you?”***

***“Tell me, do you always look this good?”***

Sometimes the best response is no response at all. With comments like these, you may just want to smile and get right down to business.

***”How may I help you?”***

Most often a customer will follow your lead and switch gears with you.

But what do you say if your guest persists? What if he just doesn’t get it? Yeah, it gets tougher. If your guest seems compelled to explore personal information, you need to be polite but direct.

Consider saying something like,

***“I prefer not to talk about my personal life. But is there anything I can help you with today?”***

Or simply say,

***“I consider that personal; is there anything I can help you with today?”***

However, what do you say if your guest continues to make comments that make you feel uncomfortable? If your guest is persistent with comments that are sexual in nature, say something like,

***“Your comments make me feel uncomfortable. Please stop so we can focus on business.”***

## ■ Your guest feels compelled to enlighten you...

Some people like to share their dearly held personal views regardless of where they are and with people they don't really know. Some even talk about politics and religion as if it's their personal mission in life to enlighten the world. The issue isn't why they do this, because, well—it's just a mystery to most of us. The real issue is what to do when it happens to you on your job.

Your goal when confronted by comments or questions of this sort is to get around the topic without arguing with, insulting or disagreeing with your customer. Focus on the reason you are standing in front of this person in the first place—to serve her. And how do you accomplish that? Politely acknowledge the comment and direct the conversation back to the subject at hand. Smile. Be pleasant and professional. Here are some ideas.

***“Can you believe that idiot we voted into the governor’s mansion?”***

*“Well, that’s politics. What can I help you with today?”*

***“Do you know where you’re going to spend eternity?”***

*“Thanks for your interest, but let’s talk about what you need today instead. What can I help you with?”*

Or simply say,

*“Thank you for your interest. How may I help you today?”*

And if your guest just won't let it go? Maybe you weren't direct enough. As the saying goes, some people need to be hit over the head. If your guest seems compelled to enlighten you about politics or to make sure that things are right with your soul, be specific.

Consider saying something like,

*“I prefer not to talk about politics (religion, my spirituality, my views on...). But is there anything I can I help you with today?”*

## ■ Your guest makes negative comments . . .

Let’s face it. Many people just don’t hide their feelings. They have strong thoughts and opinions . . . and what they think, they share. As you have probably experienced, often a guest’s negative comments have little to do with you or your service. For some reason, they just feel the need to share. So unless you can actually do something to solve your guests’ complaint, the best thing you can do is to remain pleasant, give a short neutral response to their comment and then ask how you can serve them. Here are some ideas

***“How can you stand working in here? This music would drive me crazy!”***

*“I’m sorry if it’s bothering you. I guess I’m used to it. How can I help you today?”*

***“Does anyone actually wear these styles?”***

*“I guess that’s fashion these days. You either hate it or you love it. How can I help you today?”*

***“The decor in here is awful.”***

*“Yeah, some people like it; some people don’t. It’s not everybody’s style. What can I help you with today?”*

***“You must hate wearing that color.”***

*“It’s okay. What can I help you with today?”*

***“Can you turn that hideous music off?”***

*“I’m sorry if it’s bothering you. Let me see if I can switch to some- thing else. In the meantime, can I point you in the direction of any- thing specific?”*

■ **Your guest disrespects others...**

***“I would not let my kid out of the house looking like that.”***

If a guest makes a negative comment about another guest, you want to be careful not to agree (even if you may want to). Keep your response polite but neutral so you won’t be perceived as insulting any of your guests. You might try something like,

*“Yep, we’re all different. What can I do for you?”*

***“I have to work with jerks like that at my job too. Isn’t it awful?”***

This can be a tricky situation. For one thing, at that given moment, you may be feeling exactly what your guest has just said. But this is not the time or place to express those particular feelings

Agreeing with your guest only puts you and your company in a bad light. You look bad for backstabbing your teammate or manager and the company looks bad for hiring “jerks.” On the other hand, it would embarrass your guest if you responded with something like, *“What do you mean? She’s the best manager I ever had.”* So the best response is one that puts the focus back on your guest and his or her needs. Try smiling and saying something like,

*“Right now you’re my top priority. How can I help you?”*

■ **Your guest is chatty and customers are waiting...**

***“The weather was unbelievable. Paradise, actually. The first day we went to...”***

What do you say when a guest starts telling you the details of her trip to Palm Springs while four customers wait in line behind her? Smile and say something like,

*“Oh, it sounds wonderful. I’m sorry I have to cut you short, but I need to take care of everyone else here. Thanks for coming in today.”*

***“You know, I have eight grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren. My first grandson, Charlie, has three children ... I think I have a picture of them ...”***

*“Oh, what a wonderful family you have. I’m sorry I can’t look at your pictures right now. I need to take care of the next customer. Thanks for coming in.”*

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