

What Do You Say?

When A Guest is Disruptive or Dangerous

A disruptive guest is one who is no longer merely dissatisfied. In fact, he's gone right over the edge of what would normally be considered civil behavior. Now he is stinking mad! He is irate, he is loud and he is going to tell you and anyone within 300 feet of you exactly how he is feeling. If you have ever been caught in a situation like this one, you know how stressful it is. In addition to having him in your face, you may feel like everyone is looking at you. And that may be. But your concern should be not what people think but, rather, how to calm the situation. So let's look at some basic steps to take and some helpful words to say when trying to tame the guest turned monster in front of you.

First, take him someplace else.

Walk your guest to a more private place to discuss his problem, so the disruption will affect as few people as possible.

“I’m sorry, sir. Why don’t we walk over to a more private area, so we can work this out for you?”

Second, get help if necessary.

Especially if the guest is blaming you for his problem, it's useful to have a third party to mediate between you.

“If you don’t mind, I’d like to ask my manager to join us, so we can make sure we’re doing everything possible to take care of this problem for you.”

Third, use L.A.S.T.

Listen
Apologize
Solve
Thank

■ Listen

The best thing you can do to diffuse an explosive customer is to listen, listen, listen and don't interrupt! Even if you think you know where your guest is headed, keep those lips sealed. Let your guest vent her feelings. Let her tell you exactly what is going on from her perspective. The more you listen, the more you'll learn and the cooler your upset guest will become. This also gives you time to cool down and consider how you're going to start solving the problem.

■ Apologize

Sometimes apologizing is tough, especially if you feel like you are taking the brunt of someone else's problem, whether that be your guest, a co-worker or your company. But as the representative of your company to this guest, do it. You do it because you're the pro. You do it to win back the allegiance of your customer.

Here are a couple of thoughts to make it a little easier. An apology doesn't mean bowing, scraping and humbling yourself. Be direct, address the problem and move on to problem solving.

“I'm so sorry for the inconvenience... let's see what we can do...”

An apology doesn't necessarily mean an admission of guilt. It is simply an expression that you're personally sorry that your guest is disappointed.

“I can understand you're upset. We're sorry. Here's what I can do....”

■ Solve

You know as well as we do that in real life, you can't always solve the problem exactly the way your guest wants you to. It may be out of your control or a figment of your guest's imagination. Your goal in every situation is to do everything within your power to help your guests as much as you can. If possible, try to come up with some options they can choose from. This helps them regain some of the control they feel they have lost.

“I have a couple ideas of how we can get this fixed.”

If you show your guests that you’re willing to work together with them to solve their problems, you’ll probably end up on a positive note, whether you achieve the perfect solution or not. And remember, often your manager needs to be a part of the solution process and your guest will respect that.

■ Thank

Mom was right. *“Always say thank you”* really is a golden rule. Not only is it common courtesy, it’s healing when you’ve been through a scrape with an unhappy guest. A thank-you is a powerful gesture that shows your guest that you still value the partnership you have. So after a problem is solved, thank your customer for bringing the concern to you by saying something like,

“Thanks for giving us the chance to make this right for you.”

Or,

“Thank you for bringing this situation to our attention. It helps us do a better job in the future.”

What if an irate customer is physically out of control and is touching you?

If an irate customer’s behavior is becoming a safety risk for you or others, that person has crossed a line and you do not have to put up with it. If a customer is touching you in any way that makes you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, you can respond by calmly and firmly saying something like,

“I’m not comfortable with the way you are touching me. Please move back.”

If the touch is physically threatening, say something like,

“If you do not let go of my arm right now, I will have to call for security.”

What if an irate customer is out of control and using profanity?

If a customer is using abusive or foul language that is personally offensive to you, you can politely say something like,

“I understand that you are very angry, but please stop using that type of language.”

Or,

“I’m sorry, but I can’t help you solve this problem if you keep using that type of language.”

On the telephone, you could say something like,

“Excuse me. I want to help you solve this problem, but I cannot help you if you insist on using that type of language. If you continue, I will have to hang up.”

If you end up having to hang up, go tell your manager about the situation right away.

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