

Quick fire information

How to Deal with Difficult or Disgruntled Customers

Dealing with difficult or disgruntled customers in your venue can be a tough situation for business owners and staff. “The customer is always right”. This is usually the phrase we tend to think about when dealing with an angry customer. And while the saying may be true most of the time, occasionally a customer can get their nose out of joint for all the wrong reasons.

Nevertheless, these situations need to be handled calmly and effectively. Below are simple strategies to better handle and resolve these difficult situations with difficult or disgruntled customers.



Let the Customer Vent

Sometimes, a disgruntled customer at your venue may not be looking for any kind of solution. Instead, they may just want to express their frustrations. And, unfortunately, some don't know any other way to communicate this other than to yell and scream.

So instead of trying to instantly calm the situation, which could backfire and lead to more yelling, take them somewhere private and let them vent it out. When they have gotten it all out, and hopefully managed to calm down a little you can begin to set matters right.

Don't Get Defensive

This is a hard one to follow in situations where the complaints can feel like a personal attack, but it's best to stay neutral in tone when a customer is actively complaining. This is critical to making them feel like you're taking their concerns seriously.

It's best not to argue back, even if you know the customer is wrong. Reacting with the same emotions that an angry customer is displaying is a sure-fire way to start an argument. The goal is to resolve the problem, not create further conflict.

Listen

A large majority of customer complaints can be resolved simply by making the customer feel like they have been heard and understood. Even when they're demanding something that's completely unreasonable, proactively listen.

Speak with a Soft Tone

When you're given the opportunity to speak, do so with a soft tone of voice. This will further reduce the anger the customer feels. It's often the case that parties in a dispute will often elevate or lower their own voice in order to match the others speaking. So if you raise your voice, the customer is going to get defensive and raise their voice also.

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Sympathize but don't Patronize

While it's incredibly important to let an angry customer know that you're taking their issues seriously, it's also important to express sympathy for the dilemma. But your empathy has to be limited to a point that it doesn't come off as fake or patronizing. This is a fine line, since it's easy to be misinterpreted, especially when one party is seeing red. Just remember to keep calm.

Repeat what you have Heard

After you have proactively listened to the customer's full description of the problem, repeat the concern back to them in plain language. If your understanding has inconsistencies, this will be the customers' chance to correct you.

Ultimately, the goal is to get both parties to the same level of understanding around the events that led to the complaint. Repeating also gives you more time to fully process the situation and come up with the best response.

Take Responsibility

While it may be tempting to distance yourself from the problem and deny responsibility, it's best to avoid that approach. With an irate customer, there comes a point where you overcome who or what caused the problem. Emphasise that you are the one dealing with it. Reassuring the customer that you will take responsibility for the situation and work to reach a resolution.

Present a Solution to Their Problem

An important distinction to remember, you will need to present a solution to their problem, which may not necessarily be a solution to the problem. It doesn't matter to your customer that your supplier shorted you on supplies, or you're short-staffed due to a late sick call in.

This is why you need to distance yourself and come up with a solution that satisfies their immediate needs. The wider problem can be worked out behind closed doors.

Furthermore, if the customer is irate it may infringe on other customers' experience at your venue. Make sure you get your staff to check on people and offer an apology for the disrupted service if necessary.

Being able to deal with difficult customers and handling their concerns is a strong test of empathy and professional service. Even when the customer is rather heated, you can exercise restraint and temper things for a peaceful resolution. Resolving customer conflict effectively can help build a stronger relationship. If you need help resolving or replying to a customer complaint then, please get in touch with the Helpline team and we can help you with the issue.