

**Script for handling an upset Customer**  
**Excerpt taken from the**  
**“Front-Row Manual on Self-Management”**

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**You blew it and you knew it.** Your customer is understandably upset. Thankfully, they are communicating the problem to you (although you don't seem very thankful at the time), knowing that it's better they bring an issue to your attention than to go away, never use your product or service again. Plus, the worse case scenario could be they tell all of their friends about it and you now have 'negative word of mouth' advertising.

How do you handle an angry customer? What do you say to them, on the spot, to defuse their anger and perhaps be a hero in the end? After you have listened to them and you fully understand why they are so upset, you might want to follow this script:

### **1. Apologize**

I know this sounds obvious, but you would be surprised by how many front-line employees who are willing to sell out management or a co-worker thinking 'hey, I didn't do it!'. But, if you work for the company that in some way let down a customer, you need to own up to it. "On behalf of (*name of your company*) I sincerely apologize for this inconvenience".

### **2. Empathize with the customer**

Make the customer know that what they are feeling is understandable. "I know that if (*whatever the mistake is*) happened to me, I would be (*whatever the customers' emotion*)". Here, you are saying, 'man if that happened to me, I sure would be upset too'. In fact, you could really score some points by going a little bit further. "If that happened to me, I would be really upset. I'd be even more upset than you are right

now! So I appreciate how calm you actually are under these circumstances.” This will only work if you are sincere. You don’t want to sound patronizing to a customer.

### **3. Thank them for bringing the issue to your attention**

We all know that it’s harder to bring in a new customer than it is to keep an existing one. Therefore, you should do whatever it takes to keep an existing customer happy so that they come back again and again. What you don’t want is for people to be unhappy with your company and silently go off never to be heard from again.

Thank them for bringing it to your attention and let them know how you appreciate the opportunity to make it up to them.

### **4. Ask them *how* you can make it up to them**

Many people are scared to ask a customer, especially an angry customer, what can they do to make it up to them. However, if you ask a customer what they want, many times they will ask for less than what you were willing to give them. For example, I was at a nice hotel before a speaking engagement and the windows had a popping sound that was quite disturbing. I called downstairs to ask what the problem was, and had anyone ever complained about this weird noise before. The operator said they never had any complaints, but she would send an engineer up right away.

The engineer came up and told me that the noise was due to the sun beating down on windows that don’t fit the frames of the windows. The management at the hotel would have to spend too much money to replace the windows, so he comes up an average of 2 times a day telling customers that the sounds would stop as soon as the sun went down. What a difference from the operators’ account of the situation. I appreciated the explanation, but the sound never stopped. I called 2 more times to talk to the manager on duty, and no one returned my call. The next morning, I met the meeting

planner and I told her of my situation. She told me to go and tell the front desk and ask for half of my room charge back.

I approached the front desk, fully prepared to tell the manager what my complaint was. Then, when he or she would ask me what I would like to make up for a poor night's sleep, I was prepared to say 'half my room charge would be fine'.

Much to my surprise, when I told the manager about the situation, she went right for the quick fix. She said "You shouldn't have to pay for your room. Let me waive the whole charge for last night." I was happy, but I realized, she could have simply asked me what I wanted and saved half the money she gave back to me.

When you or your company messes up with a customer, and then you fix it, you could actually be a hero to your customer. Customers who have a problem that is immediately fixed actually have a better impression than if nothing went wrong at all. People are more likely to talk about the service recovery and how great you were. If everything went status quo, then why would they talk about it? This doesn't mean that you should purposefully plan something to go wrong so you can fix it. There will be plenty of opportunity for things to go wrong! And when they do, try this four step approach to service recovery and watch your customers come back again and again!

## **Final notes to think about before you have the next confrontation with an upset customer.**

**1. Know what you are empowered to do.** Some companies have a standing policy that for every customer, each employee is authorized to compensate them up to a certain amount. The Ritz Carlton has a policy that any employee from the housekeeper to the front desk clerk to the concierge has a dollar amount that they have

to work with for service recovery. They don't have to call their supervisor, they just fix the situation on the spot.

I used to work for a car rental company, and we taught all the employees that they were empowered up to a certain amount refund on the customers car rental fee for situations that caused the customer to be upset. Have a conversation with your boss or supervisor to know up to what level are you authorized to refund a customer. If you are the boss or supervisor, make sure you have a service recovery plan so that there are no surprises. The worse thing that could happen is if an employee diffuses the anger of an upset customer by some sort of compensation, and then they get in trouble for it later on. Make sure everyone is clear about what is allowed and what is not allowed.

**2. After listening, don't forget to apologize.** You would be surprised at how many customers just want an apology. They don't want money back, they don't want anything for free, they just want to be acknowledged that they were inconvenienced in some way. Following the script and hearing their pain may be compensation enough. Therefore, make sure you are trained in how to listen to upset customers without taking their anger personally. Here are some helpful listening techniques:

**a. Let them vent.** If you are on the phone, this is a bit easier than if they are physically in front of other customers. Let them vent as long as it takes for them to get the situation off their chest. Use non-audible words to let them know you are listening to them and that you care about their problem. 'uh huh' 'hmm' 'okay'.

**b. Don't interrupt.** If they raise their voice or start to use inappropriate language, then it's okay to interrupt just to let them know you would like to help them as long as they remain calm and stop using such language. If they continue, you can suggest that you can help them once they calm down but until then, there is nothing

that you can do. If they are not raising their voice or using inappropriate language then let them vent. Don't interrupt them or you will upset them even more.

**c. Know when to say when.** Some customers like to go on and on and on and on and pretty soon, they have repeated themselves and they don't even realize it. They will start telling the story all over again! In this case, gently stop them by saying 'Let me make sure I understand what happened. You expected this, and you got that, is that right?' Make sure you are calm when you are recalling the event right back at you.

**d. Stay calm, cool and collected.** The calmer you are the better. The more upset the customer is, the harder this will be. The best way to stay calm is to not take their anger personally and as soon as you can try to put yourself in their shoes. Just be thinking that you are going to do whatever you can to make this situation right. The calmer you are, the more clearly you can think under pressure.

Now that you have some tools for listening, let's get back to the steps on dealing with upset customers.

**3. Be prepared to negotiate.** Some customers will catch on to your policy and may complain about something just to get something for free. When you ask them 'so what can I do to make it up to you?' and they come up with something outrageous, then be prepared to counter-their offer. This will totally depend on several things:

- a. What your company's policy is on empowerment
- b. How big the problem is and how big the loss was to your customer
- c. How big the customer is and how badly you want to retain them as your customer

If they are a great customer and there is a lot riding on you maintaining this customer, then you are probably empowered to do whatever it takes to keep them. However, if

they do not fit the demographic of your ideal customer, and the loss they experienced wasn't huge, you may draw the line on what you would want to do for them. If they ask for something that is unreasonable to you, you can say 'I'd love to give you everything! However, since the situation is such, I think it's only fair that we do this for you. How does that sound? I'm sorry if you are not happy with this, but this is what I am willing to do.'

For every situation that arises, learn from it. Share your success stories with others so that they can learn from each situation. Service recovery is not easy, but it will be easier with these tools to help you get from conflict to cooperation.

I hope you enjoyed this excerpt from Marilyn's Manual. She has additional articles available for free, or you can purchase her motivational books, cd's and manual at

[www.MarilynSherman.com](http://www.MarilynSherman.com).

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call 1-800-323-6287. Thanks!