

Keep Your Cool when Others Lose Theirs

Are you ready for some spring training?

In a previous issue of Security Spotlight you learned the difference between an upset customer and a difficult one, namely: Upset customers are fundamentally reasonable and rational. They are upset for a specific reason, and will become reasonable and rational again once the specific problem is addressed.

In contrast, difficult customers are “chronically crabby.” They seem to enjoy being disruptive and getting attention through negative behavior. These customers can be hard to communicate with and will likely find new reasons to be upset when old ones are resolved.

It might be tempting to turn and run the other way when a difficult customer approaches you, or to ignore the ringing phone when his or her number appears on the caller ID. But don't. Encounters with difficult people are indeed a challenge. But, with a positive attitude and practice, you can learn the skills needed to calm them and continue to deliver excellent service.

Project a Positive Attitude

The first step in successfully dealing with a difficult person is to manage your own behavior. There are a number of reasons why difficult people behave negatively. Maybe they are tired, frustrated or stressed.



You can't control another person's behavior or attitude, but you can adjust your own to avoid making an upset person even more annoyed.

Positive body language projects a positive attitude. Your facial expression should communicate that you are interested, focused and willing to help. Don't roll your eyes or smirk. These can be interpreted as insulting. Use positive body posture, too. Show you are attentive by standing or sitting up straight. Make direct eye contact and maintain a non-threatening, open body posture.

Your attitude is not only reflected in your body language but also in your tone of voice. Be sure your voice conveys the attitude: “I’m here to help as best I can.” Avoid sighing—it often suggests annoyance or impatience. Speak with an even tone. You will sound confident and competent. People often respond more to *how* you say something than to *what* you say.

Listen, Think, then Speak

Your first objective for effectively interacting with difficult people is to calm them. Maintain your attitude of respect and willingness to help, and then actively listen. That means stop talking, avoid distractions and concentrate on what the other person is saying.

Some individuals may not respond to your initial attempts to calm them down and they may become verbally aggressive—approaching you with a flurry of demands and harsh words. Remain courteous and in control:

- Do not try to “out shout” the difficult person
- Do not interrupt—sometimes the best response is to let the person “vent”—and when he or she takes a breath, you can use your active listening skills to establish control of the conversation
- Don’t take insults or inconsiderate remarks personally
- Do, however, set reasonable and enforceable limits—you deserve to be treated with respect
- Focus on the issue, not the emotion

- Think before you speak
- Offer a solution, if possible, that fits within the bounds of policy and your post orders

Your ability to remain calm and non-confrontational can greatly influence the outcome of a challenging encounter. Your attitude and behavior can either intensify the situation or help to peacefully resolve it.

Securitas personnel have access to specialized training resources that specifically address the skills and techniques needed to deal effectively with upset individuals. These include the SCPD e-learning programs Customer Service Essentials and Dealing with Difficult Customers available in the Securitas Online Academy on the LMS.

What if...?

What if someone is determined not to cooperate or continues to be verbally aggressive?

- Politely tell the person your supervisor will need to help him or her
- Ask the person to wait and immediately call your supervisor
- If your supervisor is not available, get help from your associates
- Document the incident

If at any point you feel threatened, keep yourself and others safe from harm and immediately call for assistance.

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