

Psychology of The Angry Customer

What's the problem with defending oneself against customer verbal abuse?

First, let's talk about what "defending oneself" means.

Defending statements include things like:

- I only work here
- I try the best I can
- We're short-staffed
- I am treating you fairly
- I know what I'm doing
- We don't lose files

They usually begin with "I", or "We", and when under a verbal attack from a customer, it's one of our natural gut responses to the attack. We want to defend ourselves, and the more unfair the attack, the more we want to defend.

The Problem With Defending When Under A Customer's Verbal Attack

There's actually a few issues. Within the CARP System For Defusing Customers, we talk about how emotional people tend to disengage their thinking, and run off a tape or script aimed at the employee. They don't think clearly, but they expect you either to DEFEND, or COUNTER-ATTACK. If you do either of those, you don't push the person to THINK. Getting the person to engage the thinking brain is a central part of the process of defusing irate customers.

When you do what's expected within the "rules" of the attack game, the customer doesn't need to think, and will simply playing and re-playing their script.

So, the main problem is that when you do the expected within the game of abuse, you'll end up actually encouraging the person to play the tape.

Expressing Weakness Through Defensiveness

The other issue is that being defensive portrays weakness, and that tends to encourage customer abuse. It also communicates that the attack is "getting to you", so by being defensive, you end up rewarding the behaviors you want the customer to stop.

Finally, Defending Never Convinces Anyone

When someone makes personal and negative remarks about you or the company, and you reply defensively, there's almost zero chance that you will actually "convince" the person that the accusation he or she made is wrong. They probably require little evidence to confirm their accusation, and no amount of defending is likely to change their minds.

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So, the question is: Why are you defending yourself when it doesn't work?

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