

Negotiating And Getting To Solutions

Where Does Compromise Fit In Resolving A Customer Issue

If you could do what the customer wants, then things would be much easier, but as we know, customers do make demands that are impossible to comply with, or even if they are reasonable, you may not have the authority to grant what they are asking. Compromise involves both parties "giving a little" on the issues, so that the final resolution is something that both parties can live with, so that everyone can move on.

Compromise means the customer isn't going to get everything that he wants. It means also, that you and your employer may budge off of policy or procedures to meet somewhere, again, so the issue can be resolved, and things can move forward.

- It's an important method in any conflict resolution process, because it's often the fastest and most efficient means of ending a difficult conversation so that both parties can exit.
- Offering a compromise solution helps you appear flexible, more reasonable, and just as importantly tells the customer you are trying, even if the end result isn't perfect. It's better than a flat "No" because it's less likely to cause a negative emotional reaction. In this sense a compromise involves "giving something away", another tactic we've mentioned elsewhere.
- It's best if YOU offer the compromise to the customer, rather than waiting until the customer offers it up. That shows you are "working" to help.

Compromise steps

Step 1: Understand

Offering a compromise that gives nothing to the customer that he or she wants is likely to make them angrier, because it shows you aren't listening, or making an effort to understand. For that reason you need to guide the conversation to give you the information about where the customer is at. The more you understand the angry or dissatisfied customer, the better you will be able to offer a possible compromise that will be acceptable. You don't want to end up trying compromise after compromise, because it's time consuming, and frustrating for both sides.

Step 2: Make The Offer

The offer, again, must demonstrate an understanding of the customer. Here are some phrasings:

- *I don't think I'm able to give you a cash refund, but I CAN meet you in the middle. I'd be happy to take back your purchase, and I can offer you a store credit, which is almost as good as cash. I know that's not perfect for you, but I CAN do that, and I can do it right now. Does that work for you?*
- *You've said that you need delivery of this items by March 1, and I understand that any delays are going to cost you extra. We don't have these supplies in enough quantity right now, but we can get everything to you by March 3, guaranteed. Since it's a problem on our end, we can offer you a discount of 10% on the total order to balance things. How do you feel about that?*
- *I understand you need delivery by March 1. We don't have the complete order in stock,*

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and I know this is going to cause you problems with your customers, and neither of us want that. How about this. We have enough in stock right now to get you 60% of the order by March 1st, and the rest by March 3. From what you've told me, that won't slow down things at your end, since you don't need all of them at the same time. Can you work with that solution?

Notice that we are trying to demonstrate we listened and understand the problem, AND the consequences to the customer. We offer the compromise, and always ask a question at the end. If the customer refuses the customer, follow up with asking whether the customer can come up with something SIMILAR that might work. That's really the process of negotiation in action.

Step 3: Restating The Agreement

If you find that compromise, make sure that you conclude the conversation with an explicit statement of the agreement, and what you (and the other person), have agreed to. You also should state something to the effect of how happy you are that the two of you have come to an agreement for example:

John, I'm happy that we could come to an agreement that works for you, even if it's not perfect. Here's what we will do. We'll make sure that you receive delivery on or before March 1, and we'll bill you at a 10% discount to cover the inconvenience and out of pocket costs. Now, if there's any problem, please contact me at [enter info]. I'll personally oversee your order.

You can also include a thank you like this one:

I want to thank you for being so flexible and working with me to find a solution. I know it's frustrating for you to have to deal with these kinds of issues, so thanks for working with me and being so reasonable.

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Author: Rob Bacal

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