

# Overview - Customer Service and Angry Customers

## The Customer Isn't Always Right, So What's The Rule?

Clearly, customers aren't always right. Here's an excerpt from [Perfect Phrases For Customer Service](#) that reflects that we can't always have customers who are right, but we can think about situations in a different way.

We need to address the single most popular false idea about customer service. It's a great slogan, credited to H. Gordon Selfridge, who passed away in 1947. No doubt you've heard the phrase, "The customer is always right." Unfortunately, it's wrong and misleading.

Clearly the customer is not always right. Customers make unreasonable requests and have unreasonable expectations. Customers sometimes even play fast and loose with the truth. Customers may not understand your company and what you can and can't do for them. Practically speaking, you can't operate under the assumption that the customer is always right. You can't give every customer what he or she asks for.

Can we come up with a phrase or two that realistically describe how we should treat customers? Yes. Here are two short phrases that fit the bill.

- The customer always deserves to be treated as if he or she is important and his or her opinions, needs, and wants are worth your attention.
- The customer deserves to receive maximum effort of those serving him or her, even when the customer's expectations, wants, and needs may be impractical.

Since the customer isn't "always right" and it's often not possible to give the customer what he or she wants, what are the implications for customer service? It's simple. The customer has other important wants and needs besides getting what he or she is asking for. Even in situations where you can't do what the customer asks, you can contribute to development of the customer's positive impression about how he or she is treated. That's what we've captured in the two phrases above. We need to focus not only on what we provide to the customer, but on how we provide it. That's the key to realistic, excellent customer service. To do that, you need to understand these other wants and needs—and that's where we're going to go next.

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