

Communicating With Customers

What's a Verbal Softener?

Verbal softeners are phrases and words like "sometimes", "it could be", "perhaps" and so on that state things in a more ambiguous and less harsh way. They fall into the family of techniques that we call cooperative communication techniques, and are used both to prevent escalation and to defuse emotional situations.

From "[Perfect Phrases For Customer Service](#)":

People don't respond well to language that sounds absolute, authoritarian, or harsh. For example, "We never make those kind of mistakes" is very categorical and likely to antagonize even mild-mannered customers. Here's another way to put it: "It's unlikely we've made a mistake." The word "unlikely" is a verbal softener. Other softeners include "perhaps," "sometimes," "it's possible," and "occasionally."

Here's another example for a situation where the employee believes the customer has made a mistake. You could say, "Clearly, you've made a mistake." That would be bad. You could soften the sentence by saying, "Perhaps you've misinterpreted something here." "Perhaps" is the softener, but notice we've also replaced the word "mistake" with "misinterpreted," a less harsh word.

Verbal softeners are valuable tools in helping you appear more cooperative and likable to customers and to prevent conflict.

For more on cooperative language techniques see: [What Is Cooperative Communication?](#)

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