

Communicating With Customers

Customer threatens to go over my head: What to do?

THE SITUATION - Customer Threatens To Go Over Your Head

An angry customer may threaten to go over your head, demand to speak with your supervisor or manager, or even try to intimidate you by demanding to speak with the “person in charge.” The angry customer may want to talk with someone higher up because he or she believes that person will be better able to solve the problem or because he or she may be trying to intimidate or scare you into giving in to his or her demands.

TECHNIQUES USED

- ? Empathy Statements (1)
- ? Offering Choices/Empowering (2)

DIALOGUE - How To Handle "Going Over Your Head" Customers

The customer is upset because the employee can't or won't do what the customer is asking.
Customer: If I don't get what I want, I'm going to go to your manager and your president, and then we'll see who's right.

Employee: I know you're unhappy about [topic of conversation] (1). If you believe it's best to talk to my manager, I can certainly help with that. Do you want me to help you arrange to talk to her (2)?

There are two common customer responses to this. The first is to back off from the threat, having realized the employee won't be intimidated. The second is to take the employee's offer. If the customer backs off, the employee turns the discussion back to the issue. If the customer continues to demand to talk to “the boss,” the employee makes the effort to help the customer discuss the issue with the manager. (See “Refer to Third Party” technique for details.)

EXPLANATIONS - Why It Works

Once again, we see the employee using an empathy statement (1) to show the customer that his feelings are understood and acknowledged. In the second part of the response, the employee does not resist or try to convince the customer not to contact someone higher up, but instead offers to help the customer do so, using “Offering Choices/Empowering” (2). There are two reasons the employee uses this technique. The obvious one is that the customer is within his rights in asking to speak with the manager, and the employee is acknowledging that and helping the customer do this. The second is that if the customer is bluffing for effect or to intimidate, providing that option will often convince the customer to give up that line of attack, since the employee doesn't seem to be intimidated.

HINTS

Organizations and managers have different rules about referring a customer to talk with a

Communicating With Customers

manager or senior

staff. Find out what these rules are before using these techniques.

Offering to help tells the customer you won't be intimidated by threats and/or manipulated.

When in doubt, offer help.

[From Perfect Phrases For Customer Service by Robert Bacal, and published by McGraw-Hill. A great deal for about ten dollars from amazon.](#)

Unique solution ID: #1055

Author: Robert Bacal

Last update: 2014-02-12 15:32