

What Should I Do When A Customer...

What To Do When A Customer Demands To Speak To Supervisor Who Is Unavailable?

THE SITUATION - Customer Demands To Talk To Supervisor Who Is Unavailable

Your supervisor may not be immediately available when a customer demands to speak with him or her. Or maybe your supervisor really dislikes talking with customers and has made it clear that he or she doesn't want to do so.

You have several options for dealing with these situations, but we're going to focus on an alternative—referring the customer to one of your peers.

TECHNIQUES USED

? Refer to Third Party (1)

? Acknowledge Customer's Needs (2)

? Offer Choices/Empowering (3)

Example Dialogue Using These Defusing Techniques

In this example, the customer is upset because the merchandise he purchased seems to be defective.

Customer: *This is the second time this week that I've gotten* stuck with defective merchandise from you, and I'm fed up. I want to speak to your supervisor, and I want to speak to him now.

Employee: *I can see that you want this resolved right away (2). My supervisor isn't available right now, and I don't want to delay you, so I have a suggestion. John Jackson is an expert in this product line; if anyone can help you with this, it's him (1). I know he's available, so if you like I can arrange for you to speak with him right now. If that doesn't work out, we can set up a time for you to speak with the manager. How does that sound (3)?*

Customer: *OK. I'll try that.*

The employee then finds and explains the situation to John. He returns to the customer with John, who introduces himself, making sure to demonstrate to the customer that he and the first employee have discussed the customer's complaint.

John: *I think I understand your problem. Let's see if we can get it solved for you.*

Why This Works

The core element of this interaction is how the employee offers the referral (1). The employee introduces the possibility of talking to John by highlighting his expertise about the customer's specific problem. In other words, he explains why talking to John will address the customer's problem—the faulty product. In reality, John may not have any more knowledge than the first employee, but by presenting John as an expert (which he is), the employee increases the chances the customer will respond positively to the offer and the interaction with John.

Notice also that the employee acknowledges the customer's need to get this resolved quickly

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(2) and leaves the decision to the customer by offering choices (3).

Hints To Make This Work

Never lie to a customer. If, for example, John knew nothing about the product in question, but was presented as an expert, no good would come from the referral.

As with referring to a supervisor, both the referring employee and the "expert" need to have arranged this referral process beforehand.

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