

Verbal Self Defense Techniques

What Is The "Topic Grab" And How Do I Use It With Angry Customers

Like the "when question", and "computer mode", the TOPIC GRAB is used to get someone to stop long enough in their tirade to pay attention to what you have to say. It is designed to exert some control over the interaction.

Based on the self-defense principle that suggests you use the momentum of the attacker for your own benefit, the TOPIC GRAB is unexpected and surprising to the hostile person.

The topic grab involves taking something that the individual has said during their tirade, commenting on it or asking a question about it. What makes this different from simply asking a question about the issue at hand, is that you choose a topic that is not directly related to the complaint, but has been brought up by the client.

In addition, the more the client is interested in the topic, the more likely it is that he/she will hesitate or stop the tirade. **The topic grab is a technique to temporarily distract the client, and return the conversation to a more calm condition.**

The best way to illustrate the technique is to give an example:

Client: *"What the hell do you expect me to do now. Look, I got fired for no reason, and you don't give a damn.. and now I ask for MY money back from my pension, and you tell me that I can't have MY money ... what kind of idiot are you, anyway. I got a family to support, I have a house with a mortgage, and because of you my family is going to end up on the street. How am I supposed to feed my kids ... what are they gonna think ..."* [and on and on]

Employee: [very calmly and in a tone that shows interest] *"It must be frustrating, Mr. Smith. How old are the kids?"*

Client: [stops and stutters a bit] *"Ummm ... five and seven. Why do you ask?"* [note that the client has relinquished control by responding to YOU]

Employee: *"Well, I have kids around that age too, and it sure is tough sometimes, isn't it. I know how difficult it is to worry about them. Let me explain what you can do, so at least you will know your options."*

Client: *"Well, this stinks ... it just isn't fair."* **Employee:** *"Some people think it IS unfair let me explain what you can do next, OK?"*

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Author: Robert Bacal

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