

Customer Service: Dealing with Difficult Personalities

you need to understand the personalities of your customers in order to deal with them appropriately and to resolve problems efficiently. In this lesson, we'll talk about the four primary personality types of customers and attitudes of difficult customers you may come face to face with.

Customer Personalities

One thing that is true about customers is that they aren't any different than the people providing them with service or selling them a product. We all fall into one of four personality categories which have been identified by psychologists. Understanding a customer's personality type can give you some clues as to how to help them have a pleasant experience.

Let's discuss those four personality types:

1. Amiable – As the name suggests, these people are friendly and outgoing. They are usually talkative and are eager to share their thoughts and feelings others, even strangers. They are highly social and value the opinions of others.
2. Expressive – These individuals are hard to miss because they enjoy being the center of attention. Generally, they are very self-focused and social. Expressive individuals are typically full of creativity and excitement.
3. Analytical – These individuals want to know the facts. They aren't interested in what other people think; their opinion is the one that matters when it comes to making their own choices. They're also somewhat reserved and aren't eager to speak up about their own concerns or feelings.
4. Driver – Driver personalities want fast results. They are very time conscious and don't want to waste time with unnecessary information. Like analytical people, driver personalities are introverted.

As you can probably guess, each of these personality types approach purchases and customer service differently. An amiable service representative may want to spend some time chatting with a customer before getting down to business which might annoy a driver customer who just wants to know whether a product will solve his or her problem.

Regardless of your personality type, you need to provide service in a manner that will work well with your customer's personality type. This can sometimes be difficult, but it's necessary. Here are some strategies for each personality type:

- Amiable – Talk socially for a few minutes, discuss positive opinions of other customers about the product/service
- Expressive – Use a creative presentation that will keep their interest, avoid spending time on details
- Analytical – Stay focused on business, present all of the facts available for the customer, give him or her time to put everything together on their own
- Driver – Talk about results and benefits, don't try to be social and don't keep them waiting

Who Are the Difficult Customers?

No matter how good you are at your job, you're going to encounter difficult customers from time to time. Some of these people aren't always difficult; they may just be having a bad day or negative experience. Other people, for some reason, never seem to be easy to work with.

The key to dealing with all of these difficult customers is to first understand what type of difficult customer they are and then to use the appropriate approach. With the right approach, even the most frustrating individual can be served with a minimal amount of stress.

There are six main types of difficult customers and there's an excellent chance you'll encounter every one of them during your lifetime. Let's look at who they are:

- Mr./Ms. Nice Guy/Girl – Some people just don't know how to disagree or say no even when they want to. They may make purchases or commitments they later regret and/or back out off. They can also lead you to believe you've almost made a sale when they were just being nice.
- Quiet Types – There are customers who simply don't feel comfortable asking questions or sharing their opinions. It can be difficult helping someone who never says more than yes or no to any question.
- School Yard Bullies – Bullies aren't just found in elementary schools. These customers are quick to anger, highly critical, impatient, and often verbally abusive.
- Wait and See Types – These people are the ones who don't want to make a decision. You may spend hours working with them only to have them put off a choice.
- Mr./Mrs. Know-it-all – We've all met these people. They know everything about everything, including how to do your job. Their attitude is often accompanied by rudeness.
- Nothing's Ever Good Enough Types – You can't please everyone, but these people can simply never be pleased. They find something negative to say about everything, and they want to complain constantly.

Now that you know the types, there are a few ways to handle these individuals. With the first two types, you should work on forming a relationship with them. You may want to ask conversational questions to put them at ease, then move on to open-ended questions that will get them talking more. Similar strategies work with Wait and See Types also, except that you'll need to question them about why they are hesitating and figure out ways to help them overcome those reservations.

With the last two types, you'll have to take proactive measures. For Know-it-alls, you should focus on delivering the facts. Don't give them a chance to one-up you up their knowledge. For the complainers, you should bring up potential negatives before they have a chance to. If they complain, ask them specifically how they want the situation corrected so you don't give them an opportunity to complain more.

Bullies can often be the most difficult because their behavior can be outrageous. You should never argue or fight with a bully, since that's really all they want. Instead, force yourself to remain calm and rational. If the situation starts to get out of control, you should call for support from a supervisor and ask the customer to leave.

Dealing with Difficult Personalities – Worksheet

Directions: Below are some questions related to what you just read. The group that is assigned this topic should complete the answers and be prepared to present them to the class. Relate your answers back to the article whenever possible to make this a lesson. 😊

1. Think about your own personality, particularly when you have to make a purchase. Which of the four personality types – amiable, expressive, analytical, or driver – best describes you? Why?
2. Some difficult customers will always be difficult because their negative behavior generates some sort of reward for them. For example, Mr./Ms. Nice Guy/Girl Types feel as if they are liked more because they are agreeable. Think about the behaviors of two other types of difficult customers. What do you think they get out of their inappropriate behavior?
3. Read the following scenario, then decide which type of difficult customer is being depicted and discuss what the employee can do to deal with them effectively:

Employee (showing travel brochures): We've talked about several of these great vacation packages which would be perfect for your family's budget. Is there any one that you are more interested in?

Customer (staring at the brochures): I'm not sure, really. They all seem so wonderful, but maybe I should wait before making a decision.

Employee: Well, the Early Bird rates I gave you are only good until the end of the week so I can't guarantee those prices much longer. Last time, you said you were going to speak with your husband about the choice. Did he have a favorite?

Customer: He said the decision is up to me, but I just can't make up my mind. Maybe I should wait until my son comes home from college. He might be able to help me decide.