

DRYCLEANING & LAUNDRY INSTITUTE CUSTOMER SERVICE TRAINING GUIDE



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Note: This information has been sourced from the Drycleaning and Laundry Institute Encyclopedia which covers all aspects of drycleaning and management.

3. DEALING WITH DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS

CATEGORIES: CUSTOMER SERVICE

One of the trickiest jobs for a customer service representative is handling difficult customers. Difficult customers are a part of any business, from grocery stores and restaurants to retail establishments to drycleaning customers. Some customers may be calmed down or easily appeased, while others will require great control to handle. When dealing with difficult customers, you must use all of your customer service skills. Your tone of voice, clarity, rate of speech, and focus of attention to them and their problem will all play a factor in how the customer responds to you. In addition, the words you use, as well as how courteous you remain, will display your effectiveness or ability to deal with problem situations.



THREE STEPS TO HELP YOU ACE DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

There are many different steps you can follow when dealing with all customers. One of the most common procedures to follow is the "**ACE** Approach." This involves the following steps:






1. Acknowledge your customer's concern. If your customer says there is a problem, he or she may legitimately believe you have caused it. If you see a stain, hole or other damage, do not act like it is not there. It is important to remember that acknowledging the problem does not admit fault. Also, do not take a defensive attitude when talking to your customer. This will make him or her feel that you are not interested in the problem or willing to work it out.
2. Clarify the problem. Make sure you understand your customer's concern. Ask specific questions and repeat what he or she has said. Ask direct questions about the problem, and take notes. This shows the customer you are concerned and interested in what he or she has to say.
3. Explain what actions you will be taking. Try to be specific. Be realistic about the time that may be necessary to fix the problem. Do not make any promises you cannot keep, and do not allow the customer to "talk" you into making false promises. Follow through with what you have told the customer. Call him or her when promised, even if the problem has not been fixed. This lets the customer know that you are working on the problem, and you have not forgotten about him or her.

IDENTIFYING THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF PROBLEM CUSTOMERS

Our goal as a good customer service representative is to recognize the different types of customers, and adjust our ways of dealing with them based on the customer type. Most problem customers can be divided into five main categories, although there may be various other subcategories or combinations of the five main categories. If you can place a problem customer into the appropriate category, you are one step closer to being able to satisfy your customer's needs. The chart on the following page illustrates the five common personality types of addition, there are recommendations to follow using the "ACE Approach" to lead toward a resolution with a customer.

FIVE FACES OF CUSTOMER DISSATISFACTION AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM

Customers express their dissatisfaction in many ways over the service we have provided or failed to provide. We can put faces to some of the different ways customers might behave in a difficult situation. (Taken from *Counter-Acting Customer Conflict*, a self directed learning program designed to help "front counter" personnel in the drycleaning industry developed by The Learning Group of Orlando, all rights reserved.)

Personality Type	Description	Solution
 <p>VOLCANO</p>	angry, loud, unfocused, rants and raves	<p>Acknowledge the problem in a calm, professional tone of voice. It may be necessary to move to a private area. This is often calms him/her down when he/she knows he/she has your undivided attention and no audience to impress.</p> <p>Clarify by repeating what the customer has told you in a firm but polite manner. Ask questions. Take notes.</p> <p>Explain the action you are going to take. This will indicate you are in control of the situation and will make it your job to get quick action to solve the problem.</p>
 <p>TIME BOMB</p>	upset, nervous, defensive, ready to explode	<p>Acknowledge in a friendly tone of voice that you want to clear up any misunderstanding quickly. Do not argue.</p> <p>Clarify the problem by asking specific questions. Take notes. Show you care about the inconvenience. Maintain eye contact when speaking and listening. Be careful not to interrupt when he/she is speaking.</p> <p>Explain step by step what actions you are going to take to solve the problem. Respond confidently to any questions that may be asked during your explanation.</p>
 <p>SNOB</p>	arrogant, haughty, talks down to you	<p>Acknowledge the problem in a confident manner. Keep your cool. Be polite but in control.</p> <p>Clarify the problem by asking the customer to describe the problem from his/her point of view. Only ask questions for clarification. After he/she has described the problem repeat it in your own words. Get his/her agreement that you have identified the problem.</p> <p>Explain what action you are going to take in a professional manner.</p>
 <p>HAMMERHEAD</p>	repeats the problem over and over	<p>Acknowledge the problem in a direct and professional manner. Be assertive but not aggressive. Let the customer know you appreciate his/her persistence but until you start working on the problem nothing can be done.</p> <p>Clarify the problem by asking short, direct, and very specific questions. Take notes when questioning.</p> <p>Explain exactly what you are going to do to solve the problem in a direct and professional manner.</p>
 <p>THE BULLY</p>	tries to over power you with words and a forceful attitude. Often yells and tries to get you to back down	<p>Acknowledge the problem in a pleasant and assertive manner. Stand your ground politely but firmly. Do not argue or say anything which he/she could use as ammunition. State clearly what steps you must take to help solve the problem. Move to a private area where he/she may calm down and there is no audience to impress.</p> <p>Clarify the problem by asking short, specific questions which require short, factual answers.</p> <p>Explain what you are going to do in a professional manner. Be polite. Do not let him/her bully you into promising something that is wrong or outside your authority.</p>