

Communication Guru™

Tips, best practices, and resources for effective communication



by Debra Hamilton

Conversation Tips for Handling Angry Customers

When a client is angry or dissatisfied, you have an opportunity to build the relationship through a crucial conversation. In fact, according to Susan Scott, author of *Fierce Conversations*, the conversation is the relationship.

Here are 10 conversation tips to turn an angry client or customer into a loyal, happy client.

- 1. Remain calm and listen without interrupting.** Use open, approachable body language while your client is talking. Make eye contact and nod to show understanding. Get in touch with your own anger and emotional responses. Never argue or get angry with the customer.
- 2. Empathize with the client.** Allow the client to vent emotions. Paraphrase back what you are hearing. Express your feelings about the situation; comfort the client. Agree with them if possible.
- 3. Ask questions** to understand their problem better and to find out what they need and want. Use the platinum rule: help them the way they want to be helped. Take notes and confirm that everything has been covered.
- 4. Apologize, and take immediate action.** Say “I apologize for XYZ occurrence” rather than “I’m sorry.” Don’t get stuck over apologizing; instead, move toward solutions. Identify and manage sidetracks and keep the conversation focused forward.
- 5. Take responsibility.** Jeffrey Gittomer, author of *Customer Satisfaction Is Worthless; Customer Loyalty Is Priceless*, says, “Be an ambassador for your company—tell the client you will personally handle it and be sure to make a follow-up call after the situation has been resolved.”

“ Good listening skills and timely responses are key to mending potentially damaged relationships. ”

- 6. Don’t blame others** or look for a scapegoat. Gittomer notes that responding with a finger-pointing statement such as, “Someone else handles that,” is an unacceptable, aggravating response.

- 7. Turn the problem into an opportunity.** Talk about what is possible; focus on strengths and paint “what if” scenarios. Open up a genuine dialogue that explores multiple solutions and leads to a win-win outcome.

- 8. Use humor if possible.** Laughter is good; it puts people at ease and helps diffuse tense situations.

- 9. Gain agreement to the solution.** Establish an action plan that includes follow-up. Reaffirm, with enthusiasm, the importance of the partnership.

- 10. Learn from the experience.** Ask yourself: “What have I learned? What can I do to prevent this from happening again? What changes should I make to build better relationships with clients?”

When clients feel that you are looking out for their best interests and feel respected, you earn their loyalty and increase your chances of getting referrals. The conversation is the relationship, so use open, honest, and frequent dialogue to understand their needs and build stronger partnerships.

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