

## **Dealing with Rude and Angry Customers**

*By Jill Evans Kryston, Etiquette Consultant*

**Q: Some time ago you wrote about rude retail service. I work with customer service so I see problems on the other end of the spectrum. What are your suggestions of how to deal with rude and angry customers?**

A: There's an old Proverb which says, "Speaking without thinking is like shooting without aiming." No matter where you are there are going to be thoughtless people who will try to ruin your day. My first suggestion is to always be prepared for rudeness. Once you have the right mindset, condition yourself to be ready for the unexpected and remember to not take it personally, nor should you return insult for insult.

When dealing with an angry customer, immediately guard against getting angry in response. You are representing the integrity of something bigger than yourself which happens to be your company's reputation. Here are some strategies which may help when you're in the line of fire:

- Allow the customer to vent and don't try to interrupt. Anger is a legitimate feeling and there are probably grounds for the anger.
- Listen carefully. Use eye contact and show concern with gentle expressions and relaxed body language. Demonstrating compassion helps to defuse a tense situation.
- Keep your composure. In your mind, separate the customer's angry voice tone from the reason for the anger and focus on the merit of the complaint.
- Your job is to solve problems and not to reform character. Once the customer is finished speaking respond with a warm smile and say: "I'm sorry to hear that," or "I understand," or "I can see how frustrating this can be," and "I'll do everything I can to help you."
- Always begin by stating the actions you can take and not those you can't take. Proceed to solve the problem either on the spot, or with further investigation, or with the help of a superior. Be ready to give your name.
- Never promise something you can't deliver on and do not belittle the customer's complaint, use sarcasm, profanities, or negative voice tones.
- If a customer's anger continues to escalate, you should take control by saying: "Sir or Ma'am, I need you to calm down so that we can work on this together."
- If the anger becomes abusive or threatening you can tell the customer that you both need to step back from this while you call for help and summon either a superior or a security guard.

Whenever you're faced with a difficult problem or unusual situation, always resort to using your best judgment based on common sense. Think of the other person's feelings and consider how you would want to be treated if the shoe was on the other foot.

*Email your etiquette questions to Jill at: [information@DefiningManners.com](mailto:information@DefiningManners.com) or mail to: P.O. Box 1703, Shavertown, PA 18708.*

*Defining Manners: A School of Contemporary Protocol offers certified etiquette instruction for children, teens, adults and business professionals. For more information visit: [www.DefiningManners.com](http://www.DefiningManners.com) or call 570-696-3209.*