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RCC Loss Prevention

How to deal with angry customers

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Whether you are at work or at home, you might have to deal with angry, aggressive, or abusive behaviour from customers. How you respond to this kind of behaviour can be the key to avoiding a physical confrontation. These 10 de-escalation tips will help you respond to difficult behaviour in the safest, most effective way possible.

Show empathy

When someone says or does something you perceive as irrational or weird, try not to discount their feelings. You may not think it is justified, but it's real to the other person. Keep in mind that what the person is going through could be the most important thing in their life at that moment.

Respect personal space

Whenever possible, maintain a good distance from a person who is escalating unwanted behaviour. Six feet away is a good distance. When you allow for personal space, a person's anxiety tends to decrease, and this can prevent acting-out behaviour. If you must enter someone's personal space, explain your actions so the person feels less threatened and/or frightened.

Use non-threatening body language and tone of voice

When a person loses control, the chance of them hearing your words decreases and they will react more to your nonverbal communication. Be aware of your gestures, facial expressions, movements, and tone of voice. Keep your tone of voice and body language neutral to help defuse the situation. When someone says or does something you perceive as irrational or weird, try not to discount their feelings. Keep in mind that what the person is going through could be the most important thing in their life at that moment.

Remain calm

Do not allow yourself to escalate. Remain calm, rational, and professional. You cannot control the other person's behaviour, but how you respond to their behaviour will have a direct effect on the situation. When facing an escalating situation, breathe, think positive thoughts like, "I can handle this." This will help you stay calm.

Focus on feelings

How a person feels is at the heart of an escalating situation. Some people have trouble identifying how they feel about what is happening to them and resort to anger or aggressive behaviour. Watch and listen for the person's real message. Try saying things like, "I am here to help you, what can I do?" Supportive words will let the person know that you are offering support and you may get a positive response.

Focus on solutions, not who is right

A power struggle will often arise when answering challenging questions. If a person challenges your authority, redirect their attention to the situation at hand and bring their focus back to how you can work together to solve the problem. Make sure that while you are ignoring the challenge by the person, you are not ignoring the person.

Set clear limits

If a person's behavior is disruptive, belligerent, or aggressive, give them clear, simple and enforceable limits. Offer clear and respectful choices and consequences. Someone who is upset may not be able to hear or focus on everything you say, so speak clearly, use simple words, and offer a positive choice first.

Do not make promises you cannot keep

It is important to consider which rules may be up for negotiation, and which are not. If you can offer a person options and flexibility, you may be able to avoid altercations. For example, if a person is demanding a refund on merchandise and being aggressive, it may be appropriate to state, "I am sorry, but I do not have the authority to make that decision. Would you like me to get someone who can?"

Allow silence for reflection

During a situation that is escalating it may seem counterintuitive to let moments of silence occur, however, giving a person a chance to reflect on what's happening and how he or she needs to proceed is most often the best choice. People cannot think clearly during a barrage of information and talking, and silence can be the most powerful communication tool.

Allow time for decisions

When a person feels rushed, their stress level goes up and they cannot think clearly. After offering a solution, providing time for the person to think about what you have said will help to calm the situation. Offer a solution to the situation and allow the person time to think.