How to Serve Angry or Difficult Customers - Part 1

As SC State University service providers, we may occasionally encounter an angry, rude, or otherwise difficult student, parent, or colleague. Whether the interaction is over the telephone or in person, an unhappy customer does not alter our mission of helping. We can employ strategies to turn potentially bad service encounters into good ones.

Angry Customers

If a customer perceives that he or she was somehow wronged, disrespected, or given the “run-around,” they are more likely to be angry. It is important that we do all we can to fix things and regain their goodwill.

Tips for Serving Angry Customers

- **Don’t take it personally.** It is likely that you are not the source of their anger. Remain calm, and act as an agent of the university whose job is to satisfy and retain that customer.
- **Listen.** Let the customer vent. Allow them to say everything they want to say without interrupting. Once the customer has gotten it all out, they are more open to a resolution.
- **Summarize and reconfirm.** Paraphrase back to the customer what they have told you to confirm that you understand their situation.
- **Empathize.** Let the customer know that you understand why they are upset, and you want to help them. You can say, “I understand why you feel the way you do. I’d like to try and help.”
- **Apologize.** Tell the customer that you are sorry for their inconvenience. An apology diffuses anger, and creates calm and goodwill.
- **Assure the customer that their problem will be addressed.** Come up with suggestions that will solve the customer’s problem and let them choose which one they want to pursue. Act as their advocate and follow up.
- **Use positive language.** Tell the customer what you can do, not what you can’t do.
- **Thank the customer for their input.** You can say, “Thanks for being so frank and honest about the service you have received.”

Today’s Customer Service Quote

*It starts with respect. If you respect the customer as a human being, and truly honor their right to be treated fairly and honestly, everything else is much easier.*

Doug Smith

COMING NEXT WEEK: How to serve angry or difficult customers, Part 2

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Please encourage all students to take the FALL 2010 STUDENT CUSTOMER SERVICE SURVEY

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