

Acknowledging—the Inside Scoop

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When a customer, whether internal or external, has an issue, the good listener acknowledges it. By empathizing, the person feels you understand him and becomes more receptive to hearing what you have to say. He or she becomes less hostile. You build rapport. Do not worry that this will lengthen the call. It will actually facilitate moving the customer into problem solving mode sooner. Most acknowledgements take only a few seconds anyway.

When you acknowledge or apologize, you are not accepting blame on a personal level but rather apologizing for any inconvenience your company caused. Anytime you detect that the customer is upset, anytime you sense an underlying emotion, you should apologize. You can't overdo it.

Tip #1: Acknowledgements work best at the beginning of the call when the customer states he is upset or having a problem. This means avoiding the temptation to immediately launch into fact-finding or request information.

Tip # 2: Acknowledgements that are meaningful are specific. The following are some examples of specific acknowledgements.

“I am sorry to hear you are having a problem running our software. That must be so frustrating.”

“Yes, I know, the instructions can be a bit confusing. I would be happy to walk you through them.”

“Mr. Smith, we really apologize for any inconvenience we may have caused you by not having that shipment at the building site on time. I am sure you had workers standing around.”

The more specific the acknowledgement, the more the customer feels you understand.

Tip # 3: “Okay” or “Yes” is not sufficient. It really doesn't satisfy the customer or demonstrate you get their problem.

Tips # 4: Avoid saying “but” or “however” after an acknowledgement. It erases the empathy you have just shown. For example, avoid saying “I can see that this is upsetting, but the policy clearly states no returns on custom orders.”

Customers know problems can occur. When they complain, they want to be heard. If you do a good job of empathizing and showing respect, they often become more loyal than the customer who has never had a problem. They also buy more because they are impressed with the service they have received.

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