

# It's Ok to Say "No," But It's How You Say It That Matters

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Saying "No" to a customer is difficult. If it is done in the wrong manner, it can mean escalating a problem or even losing a customer. There are two things to consider before you do say "no" – why and how.

## Why

Before "no" escapes from your lips, examine why saying "no" is actually merited. If the incident falls under the heading of "gray area," should an exception be made? Was the customer confused, and if so, can you make an exception? Or, if this is a customer with an established history of your organization, do you have any latitude to give the customer a "buy" just this one time? Recently, I booked non-refundable airline tickets. After doing so, I was asked by a client to make a change in my return date. Because I am an Executive Club Member and because I had booked the tickets on the same day, an exception was made this one time. I was able to change my reservation without a penalty. The fact that the customer service representative accommodated me has gone a long way in cementing my loyalty to them, especially when I have so many choices of carriers. Had the rep not made an exception, I would have understood, but I would not have felt any special reason to continue to remain loyal.

## How

Obviously, there are times you do have to say "no." After all, you can't give away the shop to customers who want ridiculous concessions. That being said, the way you say "no" does make a difference. A three-part statement works best.

The part one of your "no" statement should begin with an apology. You may not have personally been responsible, but it is wise to apologize for any inconvenience your organization may have caused. The acceptance of the apology depends a lot on the tone of your voice. If it sounds sincere, the customer is likely to become calmer and more amenable to discussing the problem.

Follow the apology with your "no statement and an explanation of why an exception can't be made. "I

wish I could tell you that we could get that delivery to you today, but our carrier has made it's the last pick up for the day, and we have no control over their schedule." "I know you would like to return this drug, but the federal government does not allow us to take back any drugs because of safety reasons." The more you can blame it on a third party, the more receptive the customer will become. Every one of us knows that things cannot always turn out in our favor. If the explanation of why an exception cannot be made sounds legitimate, the customer will concede and probably continue to do business with you. However, again, the tone of your voice makes a difference. If you sound unsure or tentative, the customer will try to take advantage.

The final piece of your "no" reply is to tell your customer what you can do for them. "I can't get this out to you today, but what I can do for you is make sure this goes out to you at our 7 am pick-up. I will personally walk this request over to the shipping department to ensure that there are no slip-ups." Any extra efforts on your part will be greatly appreciated by the customer.

Every customer knows that a "yes" answer isn't always possible. However, if there is a legitimate reason for a "no" and if you say "no" in the nicest possible way, you minimize the possibility of a negative reaction.

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