

# Six Things You Should Never Say to a Customer

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## **1. *I hate my job... Corporate sucks... This company is lame... My boss is a jerk...***

Let's face it; nobody likes whining. Harsh words and complaints about your job, the company, your boss or co-workers should never be directed to or within hearing of a customer. It's the start of a downhill slide that will affect everyone around you.

Let me give you an example. The other day I was sitting in the waiting room of a doctor's office. The receptionist walked by and said – to no one in particular but teeming with emotion – “I *hate* this job.” Does she really hate her job, I wondered. Or was she just having a bad day? How many people will her mood impact? Will she be able to shake it off and smile at the next patient who comes in?

It doesn't matter that the receptionist didn't say those words directly to me. It doesn't even matter whether she meant what she said. I heard her and so did the other people in the room. Let's face it; we've all been there. We oversleep. We're late for work. An argument with someone we care about is still on our minds. A co-worker says something that sets us off. The key is to make sure your bad mood doesn't affect your customers.

## **2. *There's nothing I can do.***

Even if that's true – and usually it isn't – there's a better way to say it. Those five little words lit a fire of resolve in a friend of mine a few months ago. She had just returned from a business trip to Seattle and was relating to me the audacity (her word) of the hotel staff at the waterfront property where she had stayed.

Here's what happened. She arrived to discover that her room had been given away – in error. The hotel set her up in a different room, this one with a water view – and here's the kicker – a higher price tag. Given that it wasn't her fault that the reservation was cancelled, she questioned the higher rate, which was almost \$75 more per night. The hotel clerk relented and negotiated a lower rate.

“It was still higher than my original rate, but I was tired and just happy I had a room, so I agreed,” she told me. But, then came the surprise. When she checked out on the fifth day of her stay, her room bill showed the lower rate for the first night only. Her bill was almost \$250 more than she was expecting.

“I gave them the benefit of the doubt and went through the whole story. The clerk told me the lower rate was only for the first night, and that my original rate was moot because it was a special the hotel no longer offered,” she said. That's when he said it. “I'm sorry. There's nothing I can do.”

You've probably dealt with plenty of upset customers. It comes with the job. Instead of saying there is nothing you can do, try to understand, offer an apology, and show a genuine desire to help.

My friend's story did not end well for the hotel. She got the credit card company involved and paid the lower rate for all five nights. But, the hotel lost a lot of business that day. The travel agency that books trips for all the employees in her company won't use that hotel again.

## **3. *That's our policy.***

Just like saying “There's nothing I can do,” these words are a cop-out that will escalate a customer problem. Customers are forgiving if they feel that you're trying. And a well-handled complaint actually builds loyalty. But, throwing up your hands and saying “That's our policy” shuts down discussion. It essentially tells the customer that you're finished and that there is no amenable solution.

You may be finished but your customer isn't. An angry customer doesn't stop feeling angry when you say, "That's our policy... we're finished here." If you can't come up with a solution, call your manager to help you. The customer needs to know you're trying because the problem doesn't end just because you want it to end.

#### **4. No problem.**

Saying "No problem" has become part of pop culture vernacular. But, saying "No problem" after a customer says "Thank you" suggests that the customer was a potential problem and – thank goodness – things turned out okay. I don't think anyone wishes to be viewed as a potential problem or an interruption, disruption or a hassle.

So, the next time a customer thanks you for helping, say "My pleasure" instead. And, if that's a tad too cheery for your personality, stick with the tried and true "You're welcome."

#### **5. What's up... Wassup... Here's the deal... or any other slang.**

It's one thing to use slang when you talk co-worker to co-worker. It's quite another to direct it toward your customers. Using slang like "Hey, what's up?" instead of a more traditional "Hello, how are you?" may leave your customers feeling disrespected. Other slang expressions may leave your customers wondering what you said.

There's no question that the use of slang is part of life. It intimates cultural bonds, age bonds, and gender bonds. But, unless your customers can all connect with you based on age, gender, and culture, keep it out of work.

#### **6. You need...You should... You...You...You**

Not to be confused with the customer-friendly phrase "For you," the phrases "You need" or "You should," or even used alone, the word "You" often puts a customer on the defensive. Instead, use "We" or "I" especially when you're dealing with a potential problem. Consider the difference in the following:

"You need to drop off your shirts by 7 am to get same day service" versus "We need everything in by 7 am to offer same day service."

"You need your receipt to get cash back" versus "I can give you cash back with a receipt; otherwise I'd be more than happy to give you a store credit."

"You should have filled out this paperwork first" versus "We should have filled out your paperwork first."

### ***Putting on a friendly attitude***

One of the most meaningful quotes I've ever read about attitude is attributed to Martha Washington. She said, "The greatest part of our happiness depends on our dispositions, not our circumstances."

Every time you face a customer, put on a friendly disposition. Choose to have a positive service attitude and let it show in your behaviors.

*Michele Eby works for [Media Partners](#) as a writer and training advisor. She has worked in the training and development field for more than 20 years. Media Partner's customer service training program, "Give 'em the Pickle" was the source for this article.*