

WORST-CASE SCENARIO®

HOW TO DEAL WITH A NIGHTMARE CUSTOMER

IRATE RETAIL CUSTOMER

1

Watch for warning signs.

A customer will usually display several “build up” physical cues before becoming irate. Look for clenching of the hands, locking of the knees, crossing of the arms, rolling of the eyes, and leaning in toward you to reduce the amount of personal space between you.

2

Listen, listen, listen.

The customer will raise his voice and become demanding, and may begin assessing blame, claiming victimhood, threatening to report you, and insisting on satisfaction. Let him rant—interrupting or defending your actions during the rant will only exacerbate the problem.

3

Do not mimic the posture or volume of the irate patron.

Avoid leaning in, but do not lean away, either: Moving away indicates that you are becoming defensive. Maintain a placid, neutral position.



Remain calm.

4 Stay loose.

Keep your weight evenly distributed on both feet. Breathe deeply and exhale slowly.

5 Speak softly.

Wait until the customer is finished speaking, then speak calmly. Never state that the customer is angry or upset. Instead, say, "I recognize that you are raising your voice. What is it you need me to do? What is it you need the store to do?" Anger results from unmet needs, so try your best to solve the problem.

6 Send a clear message and offer a clear resolution.

Say, "My commitment is to a quick, successful resolution of this problem." Offer an exchange, a return, or a new item according to your company's policies. If you are unable to provide a satisfactory solution, ask a manager for help.

7 Apologize.

Before you find a manager, say, "I am sorry we were unable to help you today. I do hope that you will come back to shop at our store again."

ABUSIVE RESTAURANT PATRON

1 Listen.

Allow the customer to explain what is wrong. If he begins yelling or using foul language, do not respond in kind.

2 Do not argue.

If the customer complains that the food is a funny color, that the bread is stale, or that the coffee tastes of detergent, do not respond by saying, "It looks/ tastes okay to me!" Never taste a customer's food.

3 Observe the customer.

If the customer stands up angrily, moves in close, or begins gesticulating wildly, move away and quietly ask him to lower his voice. If he refuses, or if he starts poking or grabbing the food, ask him to leave.

4 Observe the room.

Quickly check the room to see if other diners are being disturbed. If you notice turned heads or whispering, contact the manager immediately to deal with the other customers, or to back you up with yours.

5 Placate.

Keep your tone even and your volume low. If a dish is unsatisfactory, offer to take it back and provide him with another selection. If the customer's dinner arrived late or cold, offer to remove it from the bill.

6 Check back.

Once the problem is resolved, check back with the customer to make certain everything is acceptable. Do not check more than once. Consider offering a dessert or after-dinner drink "on the house."

Be Aware

- Watch for a setup. A customer may eat and complain in hopes of getting a complimentary meal. If a customer returns to the restaurant to dine and complains again, alert the manager and consider asking the patron to leave and not return.
- Avoid physical confrontation with patrons, particularly if the tables in the restaurant are close together.

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