

FOR PREVIEW ONLY



What do you? say.*

*The right words
at the right time.

Employee Handbook

practical
Answers to difficult
Questions

Media Partners™
1-800-408-5657

It is a violation of the law to copy any part of the videotape or related textual materials in this package. Use of these materials is permitted only in accordance with the limitations contained in the licensing agreement available from the publisher.

© 2003 Media Partners Corporation

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, unless specifically permitted in the text or by permission in writing from the publisher. All inquiries should be addressed to Media Partners Corporation, 911 Western Avenue, Suite 306, Seattle, Washington 98104. 1-800-408-5657, MPCfilms.com.

Printed in the United States of America.

What do you say?TM

The **right words** at the **right time**.

EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK

So, you know the company's customer service standards, you know you're supposed to treat your customers like guests, and, you even know what you're supposed to do to make that happen. Actually, it's pretty simple—when things are going well.

But, what happens when things aren't going so well? When things get a bit bumpy? When you're stuck for the right words to say in an uncomfortable service situation?

What do you say—

- *to those difficult questions?*
- *to those opinionated comments and questionable requests?*
- *to the guest giving you that “Don't you mess with me!” look across the counter?*

This handbook won't solve every problem for you, but it might help you find the right words to say, help you avoid some common pitfalls and give you some new ideas for treating each of your customers like a welcomed guest.

CONTENTS

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

To make your customer feel like a welcome guest? **page 1**

In those awkward situations?

When a guest interrupts while you are helping another guest—
"I just have one quick question." **page 2**

When you have a line of guests waiting and the phone keeps
ringing and ringing and ringing and ringing ... **page 2**

When your guest can't make up her mind—"I don't know. What do
you think?" **page 3**

When your guest is disappointed?

"This is not what I ordered." **card 1** **page 4**

"I don't like this. I want to return it." **card 2** **page 4**

"This was broken when we got it out of the box." **card 3** **page 4**

"The sign said that those were on sale." **card 4** **page 5**

"How do you expect anyone to fill this out?" **card 5** **page 5**

"I'm highly allergic to smoke and that room has been
smoked in!" **card 6** **page 5**

"That room stinks. I can't stay there." **page 5**

"You never have what I want!" **card 7** **page 5**

"This place has the worst layout I've ever seen." **card 8** **page 6**

"I pity you, man. The management here is messed up." **card 9** **page 6**

"I was beginning to think no one worked here." **card 10** **page 6**

"Every time I get a bill it's screwed up." **card 11** **page 6**

"I ordered a large and you sent a medium." **page 6**

"I ordered blue and they came in neon pink." **page 7**

"This stinks. I want to return it." **page 7**

"I don't understand why I am still waiting for my order. The people
behind me have already been helped." **card 12** **page 7**

"There are a lot of employees hanging around back there. Why is
it you're the only one helping customers?" **card 13** **page 7**

When your guest is dissatisfied?

“It didn’t mention onions on the menu and I’m allergic to onions.”	page 8
“This color is awful. I want to return it.”	page 8
“I have been on hold for half an hour!”	page 9
“What do you mean, that’s all you have? I called last week! You even gave me a confirmation number.”	page 9

When your guest won’t let you help?

Your guest doesn’t trust you ...

“ ‘Can you help me?’ I don’t know; can you? What are you, ... 12?”	card 14	page 10
“Any guys work here?”	card 15	page 10
“You think I can talk with someone older?”	card 16	page 10
“Can I talk with someone who has been working here for awhile?”		page 11
“Can I speak to a manager?”	card 17	page 11
“Is there anyone else I can talk to?”		page 11

Your guest is just grumpy ...

“You are the fourth person who’s asked me, and I don’t want any help.”	card 18	page 11
“You are the third person who’s called me, and I said no the first time.”		page 12
“I don’t need a reminder call. Do you think I have Alzheimer’s?”		page 12
“Let me get this straight. You are calling me, at my home, to tell me about an upcoming sale?”		page 12

When it’s not about business?

Your guest tries to put you in the middle of an argument ...

“Will you please tell him how stupid that is?”	card 19	page 13
“Tell him he’s wrong!”		page 13
“Can you believe what she’s wearing?”	card 20	page 13
“Would you please tell her how ridiculous that looks?”		page 13

Your guest asks personal questions ...

“Are you married?”	card 21	page 14
“You’re a Virgo, aren’t you?”	card 24	page 14
“Tell me, do you always look this good?”	card 25	page 14

When it's not about business?

Your guest feels compelled to enlighten you ...

“Can you believe that idiot we voted into the governor’s mansion?” **card 22** **page 15**

“Do you know where you’re going to spend eternity?” **card 23** **page 15**

Your guest makes negative comments ...

“How can you stand working in here? This music would drive me crazy!” **card 16** **page 16**

“Does anyone actually wear these styles?” **page 16**

“The decor in here is awful.” **page 16**

“You must hate wearing that color.” **page 16**

“Can you turn that hideous music off?” **page 16**

Your guest disrespects others ...

“I would not let my kid out of the house looking like that.” **page 16**

“I have to work with jerks like that at my job too. Isn’t it awful?” **page 16**

Your guest is chatty and customers are waiting ...

“The weather was unbelievable. Paradise, actually. The first day we went to ...” **page 17**

“You know, I have eight grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren. My first grandson, Charlie, has three children ... I think I have a picture of them ...” **card 27** **page 17**

When your guest wants special treatment?

Your guest has to wait ...

“My appointment is at 3:00. Can you squeeze me in earlier?” **card 28** **page 18**

“Can you please put my order in the front of the line? I’ll pay a rush fee.” **page 18**

“Can’t you just give me an answer? You have all my information.” **card 29** **page 19**

“Yeah, I’m going to need that by the end of the day.” **card 30** **page 19**

“I’m really in a hurry. Can you help me first?” **card 32** **page 19**

“I’m sorry I’m late. I got held up at work a few minutes longer than I wanted and then the traffic was unbelievable.” **card 33** **page 20**

Your guest is asking for something out of the ordinary ...

“Come on, you can bend the rules just this one time.” **card 31** **page 20**

“What do you mean, you’re closing? I’m here and you’re not closed.” **card 34** page 20

“Can you cut me a deal here?” page 20

When you can’t say yes?

When you can’t make the return without a sales slip. page 22

When you can’t give cash back. page 23

When you can’t give cash back until a check clears. page 23

“I’d like to make a reservation at noon for 11 people.” page 23

“I’m his parent. I have a right to know.” page 23

When your guest asks tough questions?

“I was just in here two months ago. Why should I have to fill this out again?” page 24

“Someone here did it for me last time; why won’t you?” page 24

“I bought these a few days ago and now they’re on sale. What can you do about it?” page 24

“You’re kidding me. Are you telling me that your prices went up again?” page 25

When your guest feels wronged?

“I was here first. Why are you helping him?” **card 35** page 26

“I’ve talked to three different people and gotten three different answers. What’s wrong with you people?” **card 36** page 26

“Listen. I could take my business anywhere!” **card 37** page 27

“I hope you can be more helpful than that idiot in the other department!” **card 38** page 27

“You’re the only person here who seems to know what he’s doing.” page 27

“Someone told me something totally different yesterday.” **card 39** page 27

“I called specifically to make sure you had it. They said you did. I wouldn’t have made the trip otherwise.” **card 40** page 27

“You people never do what you say you’ll do.” **card 41** page 28

“I made a reservation three weeks ago, and this is the table you stick me with?” **card 42** page 28

“Every time I see something in your ad in the newspaper that I want, I come in here and you’re out of it!” **card 43** page 28

“You told me it would arrive in two weeks. It’s been almost three!” **card 44** page 28

“I said I received it as a gift! Why are you only crediting me the sale amount—a sale that started today?” **card 45** page 28

“That other guy said that he would call me back, and he never did.”	page 29
“Forget it now. Everyone is ready to go.” card 46	page 29
“What good is a confirmation number if it doesn’t confirm anything?” card 47	page 29
“You’ve got to be kidding me. How can a gift certificate no longer be valid?” card 48	page 29

If a dissatisfied guest becomes disruptive? page 30

If a disruptive guest becomes a dangerous guest?

What if an irate customer is physically out of control and is touching you?	page 32
What if an irate customer is out of control and using profanity?	page 32

When diversity creates a challenge?

What if your guest smells funny?	page 33
What if you can’t understand your guest’s English?	page 34
What if your guest doesn’t speak English?	page 34
What if your guest’s manner of speaking seems abrupt or even rude?	page 34
What if you strongly disagree with the cultural style you see?	page 35
How do you help a guest with physical disabilities?	page 35

Some general rules of disability etiquette

Preferred terminology	page 36
Conversation	page 39

What should you never say? page 40

What will always be music to your guest’s ear?

A few winner phrases	page 41
The final words	page 42



What^{do} you say?

To make your customer feel like a welcome guest ...

There are five simple things that you can say every day to the people you are serving that will let them know that you don't view them as just another customer, but as a welcome guest.

“Hello” when they walk in.

Their name when you can.

“What can I help you with today?”

“Thank you.”

“Come back again.”

Pretty basic, right? They don't take a lot of time and they're not that big a deal to say, but they bring about big results. Not only will your guests leave feeling great, you'll find the time you spend with your guests more enjoyable and rewarding because you've connected. You'll have more fun at work, and your customers will feel welcomed and appreciated.

OK. So saying those things seems pretty easy, but what about the situations that come up (and they do) that aren't so easy?



What^{do} you say?

In those awkward situations ...

When a guest interrupts while you're helping another guest— "I just have one quick question."

If it truly is a quick question that will require only a quick answer, go ahead and answer. If it's going to take too much time away from the guest you are helping at the time, you can say something like, *"That will take me a little time to answer. If you can wait a couple of minutes while I finish up with this transaction, I'll be happy to help you."*

But what if your interrupting guest is visibly antsy, in a hurry, or growing impatient?

Some guests are already running late before they step inside your doors. While their crisis certainly isn't your fault, it's best to acknowledge it. It's a bit of a balancing act because you have a guest in front of you too.

The most important thing to remember is to be realistic and honest. If you've just said you'll be finished in a couple of minutes, and that's true, a quick "We're almost through here, sir" will likely go a long way. But if you're another 10 minutes away from being done, ask someone else to step in and help. If you're alone, acknowledge your mistake by saying something like, *"I'm sorry, sir, this is taking longer than I anticipated; why don't you look around and I'll find you as soon as I'm finished in about five, 10 minutes."*

And always, *always* thank the guest in front of you for his patience.

When you have a line of guests waiting and the phone keeps ringing and ringing and ringing and ringing ...

Answer it. Technically, a phone customer is not a guest—yet. But it's likely that the customer on the phone has been a guest or is planning to

become a guest. Think of a phone caller as a guest who is trying to RSVP. Give her a reason to come in.

Right. Easier said than done. There's that line of guests facing you. Well, the same thinking applies here as when a guest interrupts you in person. If you have a quick answer for the customer on the phone, go ahead and address it. If it will take too much time, say something like, *"I'm helping another customer right now; can I take your name and number so I can call you back?"* Then make sure you do.

When your guest can't make up her mind—"I don't know. What do you think?"

When your guests ask for your opinion on certain items or services, they are not asking you to make the decision for them, they are asking for a recommendation. So don't shy away. You're the expert. You know your services and products better than they do. This is your opportunity to step up to the plate and serve them: Ask the questions that will let you know what they want to accomplish with your products.

Offer one or two solid recommendations ... and explain why. If one of the ties she's chosen for her husband doesn't coordinate well with the shirt she's holding, suggest a couple more suitable ties. Be honest but tactful. *"Oh my, that combination looks like something out of a clown's wardrobe"* won't win her over. But *"Let me show you a couple of ties I really like with that shirt"* will. If she were sure about her selection, she wouldn't have asked for your opinion.

More than likely, she will buy something and walk away happy with her purchase and with your service.



What^{do} you say?

When your guest is disappointed ...

Just a word about this before we dive into specifics. In the big scheme of things, you will save yourself and your guests a lot of stress and energy by presuming that your guest is telling you the truth. Yeah, there are some people who will lie to get something they want, but you didn't check the box "All-Knowing Judge of Character" when you filled out your job application, right? And do you really want that job? Save yourself a lot of grief by approaching each guest with the presumption of innocence. That way, you can spend all your energy getting right to the solution of the problem.

Start by saying you're sorry. Apologizing doesn't mean taking blame; it means you're sorry for the problem, for the situation and for how the guest feels. With that in mind, what do you say when your guest comes to you and says ...

"This is not what I ordered."

Even if you feel 110 percent sure that you've given your guest exactly what he ordered, the only response to this comment is a polite *"Oh, I'm sorry for the mix-up. What were you expecting? I'll get that for you right away. Thanks for your patience."*

"I don't like this. I want to return it."

It's simple. You want this guest's loyalty. *"I'm sorry that you weren't happy with it. Can I help you find a similar item?"*

"This was broken when we got it out of the box."

This is one of those situations in which you need to know your company's policies on returns of damaged merchandise. Generally, the best response is an apology for the inconvenience caused to your guest and an offer to replace or exchange the item. *"I'm sorry. That's disappointing. Can I get you a new one or would you like to try another brand?"*

Another helpful offer would be to say, *“Let’s open the box to make sure that it is in good condition before you take it home.”* Going that extra mile can turn a disappointed guest into a guest who walks out of your store feeling that she was well respected and taken care of.

“The sign said that those were on sale.”

Again, every company is different, so check out your company’s policy. Generally, the best response is something like *“I’m sorry. That was our oversight. If the sign is still up, I will be happy to honor that price for you.”*

“How do you expect anyone to fill this out?”

Try saying *“I’m sorry this is frustrating for you. Let’s look it over together and see if we can figure it out.”* Or *“It is kind of long. I was a little confused when I first looked at it too. Let’s take a look at it together.”*

“I’m highly allergic to smoke and this room has been smoked in!”

“I’m sorry. Let me find you another non-smoking room right away.”

But what if there aren’t any other non-smoking rooms available?

This is a tough situation. But if your guest is highly allergic to smoke, she can’t stay in her current room even if she’d like to. So, if you don’t have any other non-smoking rooms available, why not be the one to try to find her a room in another hotel? She’ll remember you and your outstanding guest service. And it’s likely she’ll return to stay with you again. But, as with all company policies, talk to your manager about the problem. Your hotel may have another solution.

Consider saying something like, *“I’m sorry. We’re having trouble finding another non-smoking room for you. Let me talk to my manager to see what other accommodations we can make for you.”*

“That room stinks. I can’t stay there.”

“I’m really sorry about that. Let me find you another room right away. I’m going to give you room 101, which has the same great view. How soon would you like Kris to come up and move your bags for you?”

“You never have what I want!”

Your best response is to let him know that you have heard him, by acknowledging his feelings, and then offer him some options to help solve the problem. *“I’m sorry you feel that way. Can you tell me what it is you are looking for? I’d like to try to find it for you or order it for you.”* If it turns out to be an item on sale, you might add, *“I would be happy to get you a rain check on that item, so when it comes in, you can buy it at the discounted price. Would you like to give me your name and number so I can call you when it comes in?”* Don’t say this unless you’re really going to do it. Otherwise it does more harm than good.

“This place has the worst layout I’ve ever seen.”

Your first response should be to apologize for the guest’s obvious frustration. *“I’m sorry you feel that way. What can I find for you?”* If appropriate, walk him to what he is looking for. As you’re walking, treat him like a guest by showing interest in his opinions. Consider saying something like, *“We really value your input. So if you have some ideas that you would be willing to write down and leave with our customer service staff, we’d really appreciate it.”*

“I pity you, man. The management here is messed up.”

Again, your first response should be to apologize. Your guest is frustrated and disappointed about something that has happened. Focus on what you can do to help. *“I’m sorry you feel that way. Maybe I can help. What can I do for you?”*

“I was beginning to think no one worked here.”

Keep it simple with something like, *“I’m sorry you haven’t gotten the help you needed. What can I do for you?”* Saying you’re sorry is a good place to start because it helps diffuse most situations.

“Every time I get a bill it’s screwed up.”

“I’m sorry you’re so upset. I’m sure this is frustrating. May I try to straighten things out for you? Let me pull up your record, so we can figure this out together.”

“I ordered a large and you sent a medium.”

Whether your records show that Mr. Tate ordered a large or not, respond by saying something like, *“I apologize for our mistake, Mr. Tate. I’ll take care of this for you right now. I’ll get a medium to you and I’ll also send you a coupon for a future order. Will that be satisfactory?”*

“I ordered blue and they came in neon pink.”

People are human and mistakes happen. There are times when it’s obviously a mistake on the part of the company. If so, take complete responsibility for the problem, apologize, and offer a solution.

It’s also a good practice whenever possible to compensate your guest in some way for the inconvenience. *“I’m terribly sorry for our mistake, Ms. Lopez. That shouldn’t have happened. I can fix this by 2:00 this afternoon. Will that time frame be satisfactory? We would also like to discount this order for you by 10 percent as an apology for the inconvenience we have caused. Thanks for letting us make this right.”*

“This stinks. I want to return it.”

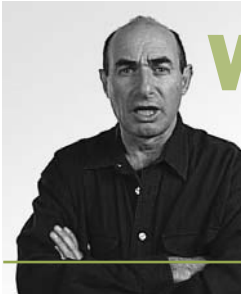
OK. We know we don’t even have to say this, but please don’t pick it up and smell it. Bottom line ... it doesn’t matter whether you think it stinks or not. Your guest thinks it stinks, so it stinks. Your response should be something like, *“I’m so sorry about that. Can I help you find something else instead?”*

“I don’t understand why I am still waiting for my order. The people behind me have already been helped.”

It’s human nature to expect fairness. Your guest is disappointed because he feels overlooked. He has had to wait, while others, in his opinion, have not. It’s not appropriate, however, to comment on the validity of his opinion; that’s how he feels. The best thing to do is to address his concern. *“I’m sorry you’ve had to wait, I’ll check on your order right now.”*

“There are a lot of employees hanging around back there. Why is it you’re the only one helping customers?”

Again, your guest’s sense of fairness is at play here, but she doesn’t really want an answer to her question. She’s disappointed. What she really wants is for you to help her. *“I’m sorry you’ve had to wait. What can I help you with?”*



What^{do} you say?

When your guest is dissatisfied ...

Whose fault is it, anyway? When a customer comes to us with a complaint or a problem, we naturally want to figure out the whole mystery. Whose fault is it? (OK, to be honest, what we really want to know is that we weren't the one to mess up.) Once and for all, here is the only answer you need to know for any such mystery. **IT DOESN'T MATTER!** It doesn't matter who did what or whether your customer is really right or wrong. Your customer is disappointed. Your guest has a problem and is waiting for you to help. And you have one shot to make things right. So don't waste your time and energy trying to pin blame. Put your energy into finding a solution that is going to make this guest want to come back.

"Easy for you to write," you might be thinking. So what words do you say to an irritated guest standing in front of you giving you that "Don't you mess with me" look across the counter? Here are some ideas that just may help you calm your crabbiest guests and assure them that you want to make things right with them before they walk out the door.

"It didn't mention onions on the menu and I'm allergic to onions."

"I'm really sorry about the inconvenience. Would you like me to ask the chef to prepare this same entree without onions, or would you like to take a look at the menu to choose something else?"

"This color is awful. I want to return it."

"I'm sorry that you were unhappy with it. Let me help you find the right shade and we can do an even exchange."

“I have been on hold for half an hour.”

“I’m so sorry. What can I do to help you?”

“What do you mean, that’s all you have? I called last week! You even gave me a confirmation number.”

Confirmation numbers, reservations, appointment reminder cards, delivery notifications. They all add up to an added sense of security for your guest that things will go smoothly. A promise, if you will. So when things go wrong and a problem surfaces, try to acknowledge how your guest may be feeling. Then work to make things better. Talk to your manager if you need to.

Say something like, *“I’m so sorry this has happened. I’m sure you expected everything to go smoothly and it hasn’t. Give me a minute to try to figure out what we can do for you.”*

PREVIEW



What^{do} you say?

When your guest won't let you help?

Your guest doesn't trust you ...

The most difficult part of interacting with a guest who doesn't trust you is trying not to get defensive. You know you're qualified. You know your stuff. You're confident you can handle almost any question or problem that comes your way. But why won't your guest give you a chance?

The simplest approach to this type of guest is to rise to the challenge. Be pleasant. Be professional and try asking for permission to help. Asking for permission to help gives your guests the control they crave. And that may be all you need to show them you're right for the job. So consider the following when a guest comes to you and says:

“Can you help me? I don't know; can you? What are you, ... 12?”

Agreed, this is one of those types of comments that might be said jokingly, but really isn't funny. It's inappropriate and it's rude, but you can rise above it. Hey, take it as a compliment. You may be young, but you know your job, you know your products and services ... and, best of all, you know how to turn a grumpy “old” guest into a satisfied guest. So even though you may want to say, *“Well, as you so beautifully illustrate, age doesn't equal intelligence,”* you might just smile and say, *“Well, regardless of my age, it's my job to know about our products and services and I'm good at my job. So how can I help you?”* Or *“Regardless of my age, my first priority is to see that you get all the help you need today. What can I do for you?”*

“Any guys work here?”

“You think I can talk with someone older?”

“Can I talk with someone who has been working here for awhile?”

Sometimes you just don't fit the predetermined image that your guests have in mind when they walk into your business. That's OK. You know that you're qualified for your job, so just keep your response friendly and nondefensive by saying something like, *“Sure, but maybe it's something that I could help you with as well. I'd sure like to try.”*

If your customer still balks, that really is his problem—not yours. Politely take him over to another team member and hand him off. *“Jake, this gentleman would like your help today. Thank you.”*

“Can I speak to a manager?”

“Is there anyone else I can talk to?”

“Certainly, but would you be willing to let me try to resolve your problem first? Then if the solution is not to your satisfaction, I'd be happy to get my supervisor for you.”

It's important to try this first, for a couple of reasons. For one thing, you truly may be able to help. But if not, your guest may feel a bit better simply after talking, and you will have some background information to share with your supervisor. Most customers will agree to your request, but if they don't, the best thing to do is politely and quickly transfer them to your manager by saying something like, *“Certainly, sir. May I have your name, please, and I will be happy to transfer you to my supervisor.”* Or, if your guest is in front of you, say something like, *“Certainly sir. I'll get my supervisor for you now.”*

Your guest is just grumpy ...

“You are the fourth person who's asked me, and I don't want any help.”

“I'm sorry. Let me know if you have any questions. My name is _____.”

“You are the third person who’s called me, and I said no the first time.”

“I apologize for the interruption. Would you like me to write your name down on our ‘do not call’ list?”

“I don’t need a reminder call. Do you think I have Alzheimer’s?”

“I’m sorry if I’ve interrupted you. We call all of our clients a day ahead of time, so no one will get charged if they forget their appointment. As long as you are aware of that fact, I could write a note not to give you a reminder call next time if you would prefer.” Then whether your customer says yes or no, you can end the conversation by saying, *“Thanks again for your patience and we will see you tomorrow.”*

“Let me get this straight. You are calling me, at my home, to tell me about an upcoming sale?”

“I’m sorry my call upset you. Some of our preferred customers appreciate learning about an upcoming promotion before the general public. But I can put you on our ‘do not call’ list, if you’d like.”



What^{do} you say?

When it's not about business ...

Your guest tries to put you in the middle of an argument ...

We've all seen it: a mother and daughter standing in the middle of a clothing department arguing over the style or price of a certain item. Or maybe it's a husband and wife fighting over the type of kitchen cabinets they want. Tempers can flare when people are trying to make decisions about products or services that they are paying good money for. So what do you say if one of your guests tries to make you take sides in a personal battle with another guest? Here are some ideas for staying out of the fight while staying in the guests' good graces.

"Will you please tell him how stupid that is?"

"Everyone's different. What can I help you with today?"

"Tell him he's wrong!"

"Oh, I don't want to get in the middle, but if I can give you any other information to help you make your decision, I'd be happy to."

"Can you believe what she's wearing?"

"That's fashion. What can I help you find today?"

"Would you please tell her how ridiculous that looks?"

"Fashion is a personal thing, so I don't want to get into the middle, but if I can bring you anything else or get you another size, I'd be happy to do that. Would you like me to check back with you in a few minutes?"

It's important to remember that both customers are guests. Saying to the mother, *"Oh, I have teenagers too"* may lighten the situation and amuse the mom, but it will alienate the daughter and potentially keep both from returning.

Your guest asks personal questions ...

"Are you married?"

"You're a Virgo, aren't you?"

"Tell me, do you always look this good?"

Sometimes the best response is no response at all. With comments like these, you may just want to smile and get right down to business. *"How may I help you?"* Most often a customer will follow your lead and switch gears with you.

But what do you say if your guest persists? What if he just doesn't get it? Yeah, it gets tougher. If your guest seems compelled to explore personal information, you need to be polite but direct.

Consider saying something like, *"I prefer not to talk about my personal life. But is there anything I can help you with today?"*

Or simply say, *"I consider that personal; is there anything I can help you with today?"*

However, what do you say if your guest continues to make comments that make you feel uncomfortable? If your guest is persistent with comments that are sexual in nature, say something like, *"Your comments make me feel uncomfortable. Please stop so we can focus on business."*

Your guest feels compelled to enlighten you ...

Some people like to share their dearly held personal views regardless of where they are and with people they don't really know. Some even talk about politics and religion as if it's their personal mission in life to enlighten the world. The issue isn't why they do this, because, well—it's just a mystery to most of us. The real issue is what to do when it happens to you on your job.

Your goal when confronted by comments or questions of this sort is to get around the topic without arguing with, insulting or disagreeing with your customer. Focus on the reason you are standing in front of this person in the first place—to serve her. And how do you accomplish that? Politely acknowledge the comment and direct the conversation back to the subject at hand. Smile. Be pleasant and professional. Here are some ideas.

“Can you believe that idiot we voted into the governor’s mansion?”

“Well, that’s politics. What can I help you with today?”

“Do you know where you’re going to spend eternity?”

“Thanks for your interest, but let’s talk about what you need today instead. What can I help you with?” Or simply say, *“Thank you for your interest. How may I help you today?”*

And if your guest just won’t let it go? Maybe you weren’t direct enough. As the saying goes, some people need to be hit over the head. If your guest seems compelled to enlighten you about politics or to make sure that things are right with your soul, be specific.

Consider saying something like, *“I prefer not to talk about politics (religion, my spirituality, my views on ...). But is there anything I can help you with today?”*

Your guest makes negative comments ...

Let’s face it. Many people just don’t hide their feelings. They have strong thoughts and opinions ... and what they think, they share. As you have probably experienced, often a guest’s negative comments have little to do with you or your service. For some reason, they just feel the need to share. So unless you can actually do something to solve your guests’ complaint, the best thing you can do is to remain pleasant, give a short neutral response to their comment and then ask how you can serve them. Here are some ideas.

“How can you stand working in here? This music would drive me crazy!”

“I’m sorry if it’s bothering you. I guess I’m used to it. How can I help you today?”

“Does anyone actually wear these styles?”

“I guess that’s fashion these days. You either hate it or you love it. How can I help you today?”

“The decor in here is awful.”

“Yeah, some people like it; some people don’t. It’s not everybody’s style. What can I help you with today?”

“You must hate wearing that color.”

“It’s okay. What can I help you with today?”

“Can you turn that hideous music off?”

“I’m sorry if it’s bothering you. Let me see if I can switch to something else. In the meantime, can I point you in the direction of anything specific?”

Your guest disrespects others ...

“I would not let my kid out of the house looking like that.”

If a guest makes a negative comment about another guest, you want to be careful not to agree (even if you may want to). Keep your response polite but neutral so you won’t be perceived as insulting any of your guests. You might try something like, *“Yep, we’re all different. What can I do for you?”*

“I have to work with jerks like that at my job too. Isn’t it awful?”

This can be a tricky situation. For one thing, at that given moment, you may be feeling exactly what your guest has just said. But this is not the time or place to express those particular feelings.

Agreeing with your guest only puts you and your company in a bad light. You look bad for backstabbing your teammate or manager and the company looks bad for hiring “jerks.” On the other hand, it would embarrass your guest if you responded with something like, *“What do you mean? She’s the best manager I ever had.”* So the best response is one that puts the focus back on your guest and his or her needs. Try smiling and saying something like, *“Right now you’re my top priority. How can I help you?”*

Your guest is chatty and customers are waiting ...

“The weather was unbelievable. Paradise, actually. The first day we went to ...”

What do you say when a guest starts telling you the details of her trip to Palm Springs while four customers wait in line behind her? Smile and say something like, *“Oh, it sounds wonderful. I’m sorry I have to cut you short, but I need to take care of everyone else here. Thanks for coming in today.”*

“You know, I have eight grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren. My first grandson, Charlie, has three children ... I think I have a picture of them ...”

“Oh, what a wonderful family you have. I’m sorry I can’t look at your pictures right now. I need to take care of the next customer. Thanks for coming in.”



What^{do} you say?

When your guest wants special treatment ...

Your guest has to wait ...

Let's face it—none of us like to wait. And the worst thing about it is not having any idea how long the wait is going to be. Acknowledge guests who are waiting and tell them honestly how long it will be before you can devote your attention to them. *"I'm sorry you've had to wait. I'm with another customer right now, but I should be free in about five minutes. If you would like to look around for just a few more minutes, I'll come find you as soon as I can."*

"My appointment is at 3:00. Can you squeeze me in earlier?"

If there is a way to fit someone in without putting your team or other guests at a disadvantage, you of course just say yes and do so. But if you can't say yes, make sure you don't say no.

Instead, try offering some options like, *"Let me see what I can do ... (pause) I'm sorry, we're completely booked. Would you like me to reschedule for a more convenient time? Or I can call you if there is a cancellation."* By giving her options, your guest knows that even though you can't give her exactly what she wants—an earlier appointment—you have listened to her request and are doing what you can to help out.

"Can you please put my order in the front of the line? I'll pay a rush fee."

Yeah, it sounds a little pushy, but you can't really blame a person for trying. This guest has just asked for your help in getting something done as quickly as possible. Your goal is to try to do whatever you can to help without jeopardizing any of your other guests' work. Without promising something you're not sure you can deliv-

er, you might say something like, *“I’d like to be able to help you. Let me check on the other work orders and see if any have more flexible deadlines than yours. Can you wait a few minutes or would you like me to call you with that information?”* When you get back to your guest, state your answer positively, such as, *“Tracy, I can get your order to you by 4:30 this afternoon”* instead of, *“Sorry, the soonest I could get it to you would be 4:30 this afternoon.”*

“Can’t you just give me an answer? You have all my information.”

With technology as advanced as it is, customers sometimes expect you to have access to any and all information they need with just a click of your mouse. In situations where you don’t have all the information immediately within your grasp, you can say something like, *“Well, let me see. (pause) I’m sorry. Unfortunately, it’s going to take me several minutes to get that information for you. Would you like to wait, or would you like me to call you?”*

“Yeah, I’m going to need that by the end of the day.”

Some guests would like to make their crisis your crisis. And depending on the way they approach you, you may really want to help. So if you can take on the challenge without jeopardizing your service to your other guests, go for it. You’ll probably have a customer for life. But when your guest is asking for something that you know is absolutely impossible to deliver, just be honest with her by saying something like, *“I understand; let me see what I can do for you. (pause) I can promise it before noon tomorrow. Will that work for you?”*

If the answer is no, help her out another way. Refer her to someone who may be able to meet her deadline. A referral tells your guest that you care more about serving her needs than about getting her money no matter what. People don’t forget. The next time a big project comes along, this guest is much more likely to remember you and give your company a shot at her business.

“I’m really in a hurry. Can you help me first?”

“I’m sorry that you have to wait, but I want to be fair to everybody. I can help you as soon as I finish with this gentleman.”

“I’m sorry I’m late. I got held up at work a few minutes longer than I wanted and then the traffic was unbelievable.”

“Yeah, traffic is unpredictable. Let me see what I can do. (pause) I’d be happy to reschedule you, or you can wait and see if we can fit you in later today.”

Your guest is asking for something out of the ordinary ...

“Come on, you can bend the rules just this one time.”

In a situation like this, you need to let your guest know that you want to help, but you aren’t going to throw away your loyalty to your company to do it. You can do this by saying something like, *“Well, let me see what I can do. Tell me what you’d like to see happen and I’ll take it to my supervisor.”*

“What do you mean, you’re closing? I’m here and you’re not closed.”

We feel for you, we do. It’s closing time. You’re tired. You want to go home. But here is a guest standing in front of you. Does she want special treatment? Maybe a little. She wants to know you appreciate her business enough to stay open for a couple minutes more. Yes, you need patience. And you need to focus on her. *“I’m sorry. Do you already know what you want?”* Or *“I’m sorry. How may I help you?”*

“Can you cut me a deal here?”

The key to this question is to know ahead of time what discounts you can give and to whom. Do you offer discounts if a person orders in bulk? Do you offer discounts for longtime customers? Do you offer discounts for cash? Do you ever offer free shipping or free delivery? Do you ever waive the handling fee? Are there discounts for higher-priced items? Are there any low-cost add-ons you can throw in for free if you can’t offer a discount? Do you honor or beat your competitor’s prices with an ad?

Every company is different, so talk to your manager to find out the guidelines. You will feel much more prepared and have more to offer your guests if you do your homework before they pop that

kind of question. If you are caught off guard and don't know what discount, if any, you can offer your customer, you can say something like, *"That's a good question. Let me find out for you."* Or, *"To be honest, I'm not absolutely sure, but if you can stick with me for just a minute, I will find out for you."*

If you check with a manager and the answer is no, or if you have something different to offer to your guest, state it positively, such as, *"Thanks for your patience. I found out that we're at our lowest price for this item, but we can take off the price of shipping for you. Would that help?"* Or simply, *"Thanks for asking, but we're not able to offer a discount on this item."*

PREVIEW



What^{do} you say?

When you can't say yes ...

There are times when you just can't say yes to a guest. It's not fun, but it's life. The thing that will determine whether this interaction ends up a positive or negative experience for your guest is all in how you say no. As an example, picture yourself as the customer explaining a problem to a service person. When you suggest a solution, he answers with one of the following phrases:

"I can't do that."

"You're wrong."

"We don't do that."

"That's against our policy."

"Ma'am, that's just not possible."

You get the idea. In fact, most of us have been there and we know exactly the feelings these responses evoke. (Of course, it wouldn't be polite to put them in writing, so we'll just move on.) Keep these in mind as the top five things you should never say to a guest.

So what can you say? There are ways of saying no without alienating your guests or putting them on the defensive. If you are pleasant and professional, calm and nondefensive, chances are good that your guest will follow your lead. Second, when you tell a guest that you can't give her the exact solution she wants, you can ease the sting by offering some other options. This way, you are focusing on what you can do for her.

Here are some examples of what to say ...

When you can't make the return without a sales slip.

"Normally we aren't able to accept returns without sales slips, but there are a couple things we could do. You could contact the manufacturer

directly, and I can get that number for you. Or if you think you can find the receipt at home, you can bring it back with you another time.” If your manager has been given authority to override certain policies, enlist her help for your customer. “If you would like, we can contact my sales manager and see what she might suggest.”

When you can't give cash back.

“With a charged item, we are happy to credit your account for the amount of the return. Or if you prefer, we can give you in-store credit, which can be used today or anytime within ____ months.”

When you can't give cash back until a check clears.

“We are happy to do a cash return with your receipt 10 days after the date of purchase, which allows for the check to clear. If you would rather receive a check in the mail, I can take your name and address right now and you should receive that within ____ days. Or if you would prefer in-store credit, it can be used today or anytime within ____ months.”

“I'd like to make a reservation at noon for 11 people.”

The first thing you want your guest to hear is that you want to serve them. Even though you can't say yes, don't say no. Instead of starting off your sentence with a “no” statement like “I'm sorry, we don't have room for a party of 11 at 12:00—can you make it 11:30?” simply say, “We can seat a party of 11 at 11:30. Would that work for you? Wonderful. May I take your name? Very good, Mr. Schaffer. We look forward to seeing you this morning at 11:30.”

“I'm his parent. I have a right to know.”

“Your son is fortunate to have a parent as involved and concerned as you are. However, records for children over the age of ____ are confidential and can't be given out to anyone else. We would be happy to confirm any information with him and then he is free to share that with you.”



What^{do} you say?

When your guest asks tough questions ...

“I was just in here two months ago. Why do I have to fill this out again?”

When your job requires that you verify your guests' information with every visit, explain why. They will feel much more willing to repeat information if they know that it is for their benefit. You might say something like, *“I know it can seem repetitious, but thanks for your patience. Your safety and security are really important to us, so we make sure that we have all your critical information up to date with every visit.”*

“Someone here did it for me last time; why won't you?”

You've already explained why you can't do what the customer would like and then she tells you someone did it last time. Now what? It's no fun to be contradicted or feel foolish. But the most important thing to remember is that it's not about you. It's about serving your guest. And if she's telling you it's been done before, give her the benefit of the doubt and check it out. Say something like, *“Oh, okay. I'm not aware of that. Give me a couple of minutes to find out how to proceed.”*

“I bought these a few days ago and now they're on sale. What can you do about it?”

To treat your customer like a guest, you should honor the sale price and offer him a partial refund or store credit. After all, the situation could get messy and your guest could choose to formally return your product and then buy a new one—from you or from your competitor. However, every company is different. So ... you guessed it. Know your company's policy on this one too.

“You’re kidding me. Are you telling me that your prices went up again?”

None of us like rising prices, but it’s much easier to accept when you know that there is a legitimate reason for the change. So if your prices at work go up, do a little research to find out why. Then you can pass that information along to customers who comment, by saying something like, *“I know it’s frustrating when prices increase. That’s why we’ve tried to avoid it. But as you know, the costs of electricity and water keep increasing, so we’ve had to pass some of that increase on.”*

PREVIEW



What^{do} you say?

When your guest feels wronged ...

“I was here first. Why are you helping him?”

Now this can be a sticky situation. You can't dump the first customer to take care of the customer who thinks he or she has been bumped in line. But you still want to let the offended customer know that you appreciate her and will help her as soon as you can. The key is ... don't get defensive! Your best bet is to let her accusation roll right off your back and respond pleasantly with something like, *“I'm sorry if there's been some confusion. I'll be right with you. Thank you for your patience.”*

But what if you're not sure who was there first?

This can be even stickier. Again, be honest. Say something like, *“I'm sorry for the confusion. I didn't see who was here first. Let me finish up with this gentleman and I'll be right with you.”*

If the guest you are helping really was there first, it's highly likely he won't argue the point because you are helping him. But if he believes he inadvertently stepped in front of the other customer, he'll probably apologize or even let her go ahead. Either way, the situation has been smoothed over a bit, thanks to you.

“I've talked to three different people and gotten three different answers. What's wrong with you people?”

It's likely this guest's frustration is turning to anger. Don't be surprised if he doesn't have much patience and lacks confidence in you and your company. Your best bet is to apologize and ask permission to try to turn things around. *“I'm sorry if you've been given confusing information. Would you be willing to talk me through the situation?”*

“Listen. I could take my business anywhere!”

Yes, we have talked a lot about treating your customer like a guest, but as tempting as it might be, this would **not** be the appropriate moment to respond with a smile and the words, *“Be my guest.”* This particular customer threat most often surfaces in a moment of extreme frustration and is usually delivered with a higher intensity and volume level than everyday conversation. No question about it—this guest feels wronged. To lower the emotional heat of the moment, reply calmly and quietly, *“I’m sorry you’re upset. We do appreciate your business. How would you prefer that we correct this for you?”*

Listen and let the customer vent. Then be prepared to discuss the matter with your manager.

“I hope you can be more helpful than that idiot in the other department!”

“You’re the only person here who seems to know what he’s doing.”

Whether this type of comment shows up as a personal jab at a teammate or an underhanded compliment to you, handle it the same. First, apologize for the inconvenience. Then refocus the conversation on your desire to serve your guest’s needs. *“I’m sorry to hear that you’ve had a difficult time. Please, tell me what I can do for you.”*

“Someone told me something totally different yesterday.”

“I’m sorry that you’ve been given confusing information. Would you be willing to talk me through the situation so we can resolve it?”

“I called specifically to make sure you had it. They said you did. I wouldn’t have made the trip otherwise.”

“I’m really sorry for the inconvenience. I would be upset too. Let me see what I can do to make this right for you.” The key here is to know ahead of time (or find out immediately) what you can do for your customer. Can you order something from another store and have it shipped to your customer at no cost? Can you have something shipped to your store and held for the customer? Find out exactly what you can do to best solve your customer’s problem. Then explain it clearly to your customer with a renewed apology for the trouble already caused.

“You people never do what you say you’ll do.”

“I’m sorry if that’s happened. Would you be willing to let me try to make it right for you?”

“I made a reservation three weeks ago, and this is the table you stick me with?”

“I’m sorry. I certainly don’t want you to be unhappy with any part of your evening here. If you would sit here for just one minute, I will check up front to see what we can do for you.” Hopefully you already know what you can offer your guest to appease her irritation. But if not, talk with a manager when you go to check on a different table, so you have a peace offering to give your guest when you return to the table. *“We’re really sorry for the inconvenience, ma’am. We will have a window table available in about 15 minutes. While you’re waiting, can we offer you a complimentary drink in the lounge?”*

“Every time I see something in your ad in the newspaper that I want, I come in here and you’re out of it!”

“I’m sorry that’s happened. Tell me specifically what you want and I can get you a rain check or find out when we’re getting our next delivery.”

“You told me it would arrive in two weeks. It’s been almost three!”

“I’m sorry for the delay. I’m sure that’s frustrating. Let me see if I can help.”

“I said I received it as a gift! Why are you only crediting me the sale amount—a sale that started today?”

Well, of course she doesn’t have a receipt. That would be too easy. But it doesn’t matter if the difference between the regular price and the sale price is \$8 or \$28. Are you willing to lose a customer because you don’t believe her when she says her parents gave it to her for her birthday, which was before your sale started? Why not just call her a liar and be done with it?

OK, we’re not the ones who are required to follow company policy. You are. So when you bring this customer issue to your manager’s attention, tell him that you believe her. And to your guest, say something like, *“I’m sorry. I know this can be frustrating. Let me talk to my manager.”*

“That other guy said that he would call me back, and he never did.”

“I’m really sorry that happened. I can imagine how frustrating that must be. Tell me what you needed and I will find out for you.” Remember that she has already been burned once. So if you find that you can’t respond immediately, let your guest know exactly when you will get back to her with the information. *“It will take me a little time to find out for you. If you give me your telephone number, I will call you within the hour to let you know. And if it’s going to take any longer than that, I will call and let you know that as well.”*

“Forget it now. Everyone is ready to go.”

“I’m sorry your visit didn’t go smoothly this time. How can I make it right for you?”

“What good is a confirmation number if it doesn’t confirm anything?”

“I’m sorry you’re upset. Let me see what we can do to make this right for you.”

“You’ve got to be kidding me. How can a gift certificate no longer be valid?”

“I’m sorry. I am sure this is frustrating for you. Let me talk to my manager about what we can do.”

PREVIEW



What_{do} you say?

If a dissatisfied guest becomes disruptive ...

A disruptive guest is one who is no longer merely dissatisfied. In fact, he's gone right over the edge of what would normally be considered civil behavior. Now he is stinking mad! He is irate, he is loud and he is going to tell you and anyone within 300 feet of you exactly how he is feeling. If you have ever been caught in a situation like this one, you know how stressful it is. In addition to having him in your face, you may feel like everyone is looking at you. And that may be. But your concern should be not what people think but, rather, how to calm the situation. So let's look at some basic steps to take and some helpful words to say when trying to tame the guest turned monster in front of you.

First, take him someplace else.

Walk your guest to a more private place to discuss his problem, so the disruption will affect as few people as possible. *"I'm sorry, sir. Why don't we walk over to a more private area, so we can work this out for you?"*

Second, get help if necessary.

Especially if the guest is blaming you for his problem, it's useful to have a third party to mediate between you. *"If you don't mind, I'd like to ask my manager to join us, so we can make sure we're doing everything possible to take care of this problem for you."*

Third, use L.A.S.T.

- L**isten
- A**pologize
- S**olve
- T**hank

Listen

The best thing you can do to diffuse an explosive customer is to listen, listen, listen and don't interrupt! Even if you think you know where your guest is headed, keep those lips sealed. Let your guest vent her feelings. Let her tell you exactly what is going on from her

perspective. The more you listen, the more you'll learn and the cooler your upset guest will become. This also gives you time to cool down and consider how you're going to start solving the problem.

Apologize

Sometimes apologizing is tough, especially if you feel like you are taking the brunt of someone else's problem, whether that be your guest, a co-worker or your company. But as the representative of your company to this guest, do it. You do it because you're the pro. You do it to win back the allegiance of your customer.

Here are a couple of thoughts to make it a little easier. An apology doesn't mean bowing, scraping and humbling yourself. Be direct, address the problem and move on to problem solving. *"I'm so sorry for the inconvenience... let's see what we can do."* An apology doesn't necessarily mean an admission of guilt. It is simply an expression that you're personally sorry that your guest is disappointed. *"I can understand you're upset. We're sorry. Here's what I can do...."*

Solve

You know as well as we do that in real life, you can't always solve the problem exactly the way your guest wants you to. It may be out of your control or a figment of your guest's imagination. Your goal in every situation is to do everything within your power to help your guests as much as you can. If possible, try to come up with some options they can choose from. This helps them regain some of the control they feel they have lost. *"I have a couple ideas of how we can get this fixed."* If you show your guests that you're willing to work together with them to solve their problems, you'll probably end up on a positive note, whether you achieve the perfect solution or not. And remember, often your manager needs to be a part of the solution process and your guest will respect that.

Thank

Mom was right. *"Always say thank you"* really is a golden rule. Not only is it common courtesy, it's healing when you've been through a scrape with an unhappy guest. A thank-you is a powerful gesture that shows your guest that you still value the partnership you have. So after a problem is solved, thank your customer for bringing the concern to you by saying something like, *"Thanks for giving us the chance to make this right for you."* Or, *"Thank you for bringing this situation to our attention. It helps us do a better job in the future."*



What^{do} you say?

If a disruptive guest becomes a dangerous guest ...

What if an irate customer is physically out of control and is touching you?

If an irate customer's behavior is becoming a safety risk for you or others, that person has crossed a line and you do not have to put up with it. If a customer is touching you in any way that makes you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, you can respond by calmly and firmly saying something like, *"I'm not comfortable with the way you are touching me. Please move back."* If the touch is physically threatening, say something like, *"If you do not let go of my arm right now, I will have to call for security."*

What if an irate customer is out of control and using profanity?

If a customer is using abusive or foul language that is personally offensive to you, you can politely say something like, *"I understand that you are very angry, but please stop using that type of language."* Or, *"I'm sorry, but I can't help you solve this problem if you keep using that type of language."*

On the telephone, you could say something like, *"Excuse me. I want to help you solve this problem, but I cannot help you if you insist on using that type of language. If you continue, I will have to hang up."* If you end up having to hang up, go tell your manager about the situation right away.



What_{do} you say?

When diversity creates a challenge ...

We are all different. We come from different backgrounds and practice different cultural customs. It makes life interesting. But sometimes our diversity can create challenges in our workplace. Without even being aware of it, we may tend to view other people's style and behavior as wrong or threatening, simply because we don't understand it and it's different.

So the first thing to think about when considering this issue is, "What's my attitude?" It's easy to let the fear of something different create distrust. And every one of your guests will pick up on your attitude before you say a word. So part of being a service pro (and an all-around more tolerant, approachable person) is deciding that you are going to let different be just that ... different. Not wrong. Not right. No judgment attached—just different. And since your goal for each and every one of your unique customers is the same—treating each of them like a guest and taking care of their needs the very best way you can—all of your guests are going to appreciate the same great service.

But even for pros with the greatest of attitudes, challenging situations do happen. What about those? Here are some words and thoughts to help handle common diversity issues that might show up in your workday.

What if your guest smells funny?

Hey, don't laugh. At one time or another, we've probably all knocked some poor, unsuspecting person over with our second-day garlic breath. So what do you do? Well, let's see: just reach under your desk, grab your handy gas mask, subtly place it over your face and continue with a pleasant, "*How can I help you today—care for a breath mint?*" OK ... really. How do you deal with it? You just do. You ignore it. You smile. You make sure your words are polite and pleasant. And you give your guest great service.

What if you can't understand your guest's English?

If you have a hard time understanding one of your guests, just be honest. This person wants to be understood and you want to understand, so smile and politely ask, *“I'm sorry, I didn't understand. Could you please repeat that more slowly?”* And one more hint: Just because you have trouble understanding someone doesn't mean that they have trouble understanding you. So unless someone asks you to, don't assume that you should speak more slowly and certainly not more loudly.

What if your guest doesn't speak English?

This may sound like a speech from Mom and Dad again, but it works. ... Do your best. Be considerate. Be patient. Have a sense of humor. Use body language. If your guest is with another guest, try talking with that person to see if he can help with the communication. And just because your guest doesn't speak English, don't assume he doesn't understand it. Often an understanding of language comes before speaking proficiency.

A language barrier can be a challenge but, like any other challenging guest situation, it shouldn't be viewed as a major interruption, a hassle or a disruption to your work. After all, serving this guest is your work. Show the same amount of respect and dignity that you would want to be shown if you were the customer in a foreign country where you couldn't speak the language. Be a great reflection of your own culture and the culture of your company.

What if your guest's manner of speaking seems abrupt or even rude?

Communication styles vary from culture to culture—even from city to city. Generally speaking, some cultures have a very direct and forward manner of speaking, some have a much more quiet and reticent manner. Some languages have sharper, more intense sounds; some languages sound softer and more diffused. If you are helping a guest whose manner of speaking seems abrupt or “in your face,” the best thing you can do is relax. Don't read anything personal into it. That's just the way this guest speaks. So don't let yourself fall into a defensive attitude. Just breathe, smile and deliver your very best guest service.

What if you strongly disagree with the cultural style you see?

Maybe someone is wearing something that is offensive to you. Maybe you don't agree with the roles that different genders have in certain cultures. That's OK. You have every right to your personal opinions and beliefs, but they are just that—personal. At work, keep them to yourself. Do your very best in every situation to keep your personal bias separate from your goal of serving the guest in front of you with 100 percent respect and 100 percent of your attention.

How do you help a guest with physical disabilities?

With the same common courtesies that you use to make any other customer feel like a guest. *“Can I help you find something today? How can I help you today?”* Granted, you might offer additional help, such as, *“Can I carry that to the counter for you?”* or *“Can I reach that for you?”* But you would also offer these courtesies to an elderly guest, so they're not really that out of the ordinary. It's pretty much common sense.

In terms of a guest's physical disability, the key is not to presume that a guest is asking for your help unless he or she really does. For example, don't push a guest's wheelchair unless you have been asked. If a guest who is blind or visually impaired uses a cane for walking, do not take hold of her arm to lead her somewhere. Instead you might say, *“The rest of your party is already seated. I would be happy to take you to join them. Would you like to take my arm or would you like to follow me?”* Either way, it is helpful to talk about where you are going. For example: *“It's quite a walk over to the billing department. We are going to go down these steps and then down another hallway.”*

SOME GENERAL RULES OF DISABILITY ETIQUETTE

As we mentioned earlier, people often feel uncomfortable with what they don't understand. That's not wrong, it's just human. For example, people may be afraid of offending guests with disabilities by using the wrong words or phrases when serving them. That's a pretty common concern. For that reason, we have included some general rules of disability etiquette to use as a guideline to better serve your guests.

Preferred Terminology

Blind (no visual capability)

Legally blind/low vision (some visual capability)

Hemiplegia (paralysis of one side of the body)

Paraplegia (loss of function in lower body only)

Quadraplegia (paralysis of both arms and legs)

Say

"Person with a disability ..."

Don't Say

"Handicapped," "handicap," "cripple" or "invalid" (which means "not valid")

Say

"Deaf" refers to a person who does not voice for themselves or is nonvocal.

"Deafness" refers to a person who has a total loss of hearing.

"Hearing impaired" refers to a person who has a partial loss of hearing.

Don't Say

"Deaf and dumb" or "deaf mute." Those phrases really are as bad as they sound. The inability to hear or speak does not indicate intelligence.

Say

“Person who has” or “person with ...” in reference to a person who has something such as a spinal cord injury or multiple sclerosis.

Don’t Say

“Victim,” “afflicted with” or “suffers from,” such as *“victim of a stroke”* or *“afflicted with cerebral palsy.”* People with disabilities do not like to be perceived as victims and don’t see themselves as afflicted or suffering continually.

Say

“Uses a wheelchair ...”

Don’t Say

“Wheelchair bound” or “confined/restricted to a wheelchair.” Most people who use a wheelchair or other mobility devices do not see them as confining—they are a tool that allows the user the freedom to move.

Say

“Disabled since birth” or “born with ...”

Don’t Say

“Birth defect.”

Say

“Person who has a mental or developmental disability ...”

Don’t Say

“Retarded,” “moron,” “slow” or “stupid.” These words are all degrading and offensive.

Say

“Mental illness,” “psychiatric disability/psychiatric history” or “emotional disorder ...”

Don’t Say

“Mental patient,” “insane,” “crazy” or “lunatic.”

Say

“Epilepsy” or “seizures ...”

Don’t Say

“Fits ...”

Say

“Able-bodied” or “able to walk, see, hear,” etc. in reference to people who do not have a disability.

Don’t Say

“Normal” or “healthy” (in contrast with disabled.) “Healthy” implies that a person with a disability is unhealthy, which is not accurate.

CONVERSATION

When talking with a person with a disability, look at and speak directly to that person rather than through a companion who may be along. For people who communicate through sign language, speak to them, not to the interpreter.

To get the attention of a person who has a hearing disability, wave your hand or tap the person on the shoulder. Look directly at the person and speak clearly to them.

Use a normal tone of voice when extending a verbal welcome and in general conversation. Don't raise your voice unless someone asks you to. Shouting won't help, but writing notes may.

If you are talking for more than a few minutes with a person who uses a wheelchair, place yourself at eye level with that person. Never patronize people using wheelchairs by patting them on the head.

Never lean on a person's wheelchair. It is considered part of that person's space and would be similar to hanging on a person.

When introduced to a person with a disability, it is appropriate to shake hands just as you do with everyone you meet. If a person is unable to shake, he or she will tell you.

When greeting someone with a severe loss of vision, it is helpful to identify yourself and others. "On my left is Mary Isler.

Relax. Don't be embarrassed if you use common expressions like "see you tomorrow" or "gotta run" that may seem connected to a person's disability. People with disabilities use these phrases too.

Most important, if you are in doubt as to how to communicate with or help a guest who has a disability of some sort, just ask the person how you can best assist him or her. Such guests will take the lead in asking for help or telling you that they don't need any.



What^{do} you say?

What should you never say ...

NEVER SAY NO. ALWAYS GIVE OPTIONS.

“I don’t know.” Instead say: *“I’ll find out.”*

“We don’t have it.” Instead say: *“Let me show you what we have.”*

“We can’t do that.” Instead say: *“Here are some options.”*

“You’ll have to ...” Instead say: *“Would you be willing to ...?”*

NEVER PASS THE BUCK. ALWAYS GIVE HELP OR GET HELP.

“I just work here.” Instead say: *“Let me take care of that for you.”*

“This isn’t my section.” Instead say: *“I’ll get you some help.”*

“Don’t blame me.” Instead say: *“How can I fix this for you?”*

NEVER SPEAK ILL OF CUSTOMERS.

“My last customer was an idiot.”

“You wouldn’t believe the freaks who come in here.”

“People ask the stupidest things.”

NEVER QUESTION A CUSTOMER’S NAME.

“That’s an unusual name.”

“That’s a funny name.”

“What kind of name is that?”

NEVER HANG OUT YOUR DIRTY LAUNDRY.

“I haven’t had my break yet.”

“My boss is on my case.”

“I hate my schedule.”

“I can’t wait to get out of here.”



What do you say?

What will always be music to your guest's ears ...

A FEW WINNER PHRASES

Here are a few key phrases that are proven winners to help smooth trouble spots and maintain good guest relationships.

“For you”

This simple phrase is music to your guest's ear, because it communicates that you are working for him. You are on his side. You want him to come out a winner. *“Let me pull up your file and let's figure this out for you.”*
“Thanks for asking. Let me find out for you.”

“As you might expect”

This tells your guest that you and she share the same life experience. You're on the same side. *“As you might expect, schedules get really tight around tax time. Let's see what we can do for you.”*

“Our records indicate / this account is showing ...”

Being reminded that we owe money can make the best of us edgy and defensive. No one likes to pick up the telephone to hear, *“Hello Mrs. Smith? You owe us ...”* The two phrases *“our records indicate”* and *“this account is showing ...”* help ease tension and build cooperation by taking the focus off the person and onto the forms and data. *“Mrs. Smith, our records indicate that there is a past due balance of \$651.21 on this account. Does that agree with your records?”*

“Thank you for letting us make this right for you.”

If there has been any type of misunderstanding or disappointment for your guest, these words go a long way in reestablishing a good relationship. *“Again, I'm sorry for the inconvenience. Thank you for letting us make this right for you.”*

THE FINAL WORDS

If you don't take anything else you've read away with you (but we know you will), keep these words on the tip of your tongue, and each of your customers will walk away feeling like they're more than just the customer ... they're the guest.

"Not a problem."

"I'll do that immediately."

"I would be happy to find out for you."

"Thank you."

"I'll take care of that for you."

"Certainly, sir/ma'am." (Better yet, use the customer's name if you can.)

"I would be happy to do that for you."

"I understand how you feel."

"Good afternoon/morning/evening."

"I'm sorry that happened."

"I can see how frustrating that could be."

"How could I make this better for you?"

"Come back and see us again."

What do you say?™

*The right words
at the right time.

About This Book

When it comes to customer service challenges, the first few seconds and your first few words determine your success or failure.

This book provides practical, realistic answers to more than a hundred difficult customer service situations.

Everything from "I was here first—why are you helping him?" to personal comments like "So... are you married?" Designed for frontline employees, answers are straightforward and easy to use on the job immediately.

Topics include:

- **Awkward Situations**
- **Disappointed & Dissatisfied Guests**
- **Personal & Inappropriate Questions**
- **Guests who Want Special Treatment**
- **When You Can't Say Yes**
- **Guests who Feel Wronged**
- **Guests that are Disruptive or Dangerous**
- **Diversity Challenges**
- **Disability Etiquette**
- **Wonder Words**

We're proud of this handbook. We hope that every employee who serves customers can have one. Please call your distributor for quantity discounts.

\$14.95
\$9.95 with video

© 2003 MPC

About the Publisher

Media Partners publishes performance improvement materials and media-based training for organizations around the world. Our company was founded in 1993 in Seattle, Washington.

We've collected a very select library of training tools from the industry's best training producers. We strive to represent only those products which we believe have the highest production values, are based on human truth, are decidedly positive and truly inspirational. You can view our entire library at

www.mpcfilms.com

All of us at Media Partners sincerely hope that you find our materials enjoyable to use and that our books and programs help you make a positive difference in your world.

This handbook is designed to be used with an accompanying video program of the same name, **What Do You Say?**

To order that program, more handbooks or for any other information, please call your distributor or contact us at:

1-800-408-5657

 **Media Partners™**
MPCfilms.com
800-408-5657