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## The Good, the *Mad*, and the Ugly

*Dealing with Difficult Customers*



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### What do today's customers want?

- Speed
- Low price
- High quality
- Convenience
- Custom made



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### What does that mean to you?

- Huge challenges with expectations



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### You'll learn how to succeed with...

- Good (but too-talkative) customers
  - 3 steps
- Mad (usually for a reason) customers
  - 7 H.E.A.T.-reducing steps
- Ugly (demanding) customers
  - 3 steps

....whether they're internal or external customers, on or off the job.



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### The “Good” Customer



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### Who is s/he?

- Friendly
- Well-meaning
- Clueless



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## Succeeding with the “too-talkative”

- Be very eager to help!
  - ask closed questions
  - practice “space control”
    - Between their *and* your sentences
    - Acknowledge their remarks.
    - Take the conversation where it needs to go.
  - offer minimal responses



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## Questions



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## The “Mad” Customer



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### Who is s/he?

- Usually rational
- Now upset (angry/worried/frustrated/hostile)
- Has a specific problem



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### Form a problem-solving alliance

- Turn down the **H.E.A.T.!**
  - **H**ear the customer out
  - **E**mpathize
  - **A**pologize and **A**ddress the problem
  - **T**hank customer, **T**ake action, and **T**urn incident into learning experience



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### Hear the customer out

- Tune out distractions
- Be/act receptive
- Take notes
- Understand before being understood



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## Empathize with the customer

- Don't...
  - act shocked
  - insist “I know just how you feel!”
  - over-empathize
  - rush him/her



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## Empathize with the customer

- Do....
  - clarify and confirm
  - stay focused
  - let him/her vent without interruption



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## Apologize

- Do say you're sorry
  - personally
  - generally
- Don't say, “I'm sorry you feel that way!” as a way of beating people senseless with policy
- Don't blame ...
  - coworkers
  - your organization
  - the customer

... even when it's their fault!



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## Address the problem

- Sound and appear:
  - positive
  - energetic
  - competent



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## Address the problem

- Problem-solving options
  - suggest reasonable solution
  - partner up to brainstorm
  - add surprise, unexpected “lagniappe”



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## Address the problem

- Involve your boss?
  - if need advice or approval
  - after transaction, if problem will increase



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### Thank the customer

- For giving you and your organization a chance to make things right
- For taking the time to make a difference, to solve this and thus future problems
- Afterwards, be positive with the next customer



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### Take action to solve problem

- If you learn there will be extra costs or delays, inform customer
- If you've handed problem off, follow up to be sure it gets done
- Check back with customer afterward to see if problem was solved to satisfaction



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### Turn incident into learning experience

- Consider how you handled situation
  - what you did well and would do differently
  - how you worked with coworkers
- With coworkers and boss
  - share what works and doesn't
  - resolve what will be a recurring problem
  - discuss policies/procedures that are an obstacle to excellent service



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### After the incident

- Don't "over-vent" to coworkers
  - you re-experience stressful emotions
  - you take yourself and others out of production
  - it poisons others' opinions of customer
- Instead...
  - vent for 10 seconds
  - start a weekly after-work contest
  - tell your dog!



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### The bottom line

- Partnering up to ensure service recovery:
  - solves problem
  - salvages relationship
  - increases loyalty



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### Questions



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## The “Ugly” Customer



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## Who is s/he?

- Seems similar to “Mad”, but isn’t
- Is:
  - demanding
  - direct
  - task focused
  - intimidating (sometimes intentionally)



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## Succeeding with demanding customers

- Step 1: Say and show you want to help
  - act energetic, interested
  - focus on action; no small talk
  - mirror firm behavior, without rudeness



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### If you *can* help demanding customers...

- Step 2a: Do it quickly:
  - don't brainstorm; give clear choices
  - stay action-oriented
- Step 3a: When you solve the problem:
  - don't expect a warm thanks
  - give yourself a pat on the back!



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### If you *can't* help or satisfy them ...

- Step 2b: Stay on task:
  - don't take it personally
  - don't apologize too much
  - remind customer s/he has choices
- Step 3b: Afterwards, take a break:
  - give yourself a pat on the back!



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### Succeeding with demanding customers

- Afterward, learn from your experience:
  - consider how you handled situation:
    - what you did well and would do differently
    - how you worked with coworkers
  - with coworkers and boss
    - share what works and doesn't
    - resolve what will be a recurring problem
    - discuss policies/procedures that are an obstacle to excellent service



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## The bottom line

- If you can...
  - take action quickly
  - avoid wallowing in apologies
  - avoid taking it personally

*... you'll build strong problem-solving muscles and manage your stress!*



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## Conclusion

- Be a “people person” with **Good customers**
- Be a problem solving partner with **Mad ones**
- Be task-focused with **Ugly customers**
- Create long-term relationships and customers for life



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## Questions

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## More information

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