

Communicating in Difficult Situations

1. Listen for full understanding of the person's perspective. Allow them the opportunity to give you a clear picture of what they are trying to say.
2. Put the person at ease using nonverbal cues that show interest and concern.
3. Take the time you need to really understand the situation. In the long run, spending a few more minutes now will save time in avoiding conflict.
4. Respond to concerns the consumer may have in an affirming manner. Restate their concerns in a way that shows you have heard their issues.
5. Focus on the overall goal of the situation. Avoid personalization of the issues. Keep the conversation professional.
6. Understand what you do today will have an effect on tomorrow. The more effective you are in dealing with the issue at hand, the less the issue will grow and consume your energies.

Handling Hostility

The following are suggestions for handling consumer hostility:

1. Do not get angry or defensive. Recognize your own reactions. Remember that this is a professional, not personal, issue.
2. Do not patronize or lecture. Saying things such as, "why don't you just calm down" will only escalate the problem and is disrespectful to the consumer.
3. Allow the consumer to voice his/her concerns. Respond with acceptance and understanding. Be empathetic. Listen to understand the situation from the consumer's perspective.
4. Be positive – don't attack them. Show respect for his/her discomfort.
5. Greet anger with calmness – set the mood for calm discussion and resolution.

6. Understand the facts regarding the situation that is upsetting the consumer. If you do not have the facts, state what you will need to find out and when you will get back to them.
7. Focus on present and future. Avoid allowing the consumer to get stuck in the past. Emphasize what can be done positively in the future, not what has happened in the past.
8. Ask questions – “How can I help?” Often the consumer knows what they want from you. If you understand their wants, you will be able to discuss future possibilities with that in mind.
9. Summarize for clarification and understanding.
10. Be honest about your next steps. If you cannot fix the problem outright, do not make promises that you cannot keep. If there are consequences to the behavior, let the consumer know.

Things to Consider When Dealing with Someone Who is Hostile

1. Try to evaluate as honestly as you can by reasoning with yourself whether his/her anger is justified.
2. Put hostile people in perspective. You are probably nothing but an afterthought to them, so do not take their antics personally. They are not concerned about you because they are too busy worrying about themselves.
3. Take your pick – positive or negative. You cannot concentrate on constructive, creative alternatives or solutions while you cling to negative feelings. Vent your emotions to a fellow worker or your supervisor and cool off. Think about the result you really want, the consequences or outcome that will benefit the consumer the most.
4. Do not expect hostile people to change. They will not, and in a way that is good because their behavior is predictable. They may not change but by choosing a better approach you can change the outcome.
5. Learn to respond as well as listen. Ask questions instead of making accusations. If you let others save face, you give them room to change their minds.

6. Request feedback. Use open-ended questions to let emotional people vent their feelings before you try to reason with them and explore options.
7. Be straightforward and unemotional. The more you remain calm and matter of fact, the sooner you gain another's confidence. People want to feel you are leveling with them, that they can trust you. Remember that respect from others begin with self-respect.
8. Be gracious. Someone else's rudeness does not give us the right to be rude. Treat the other with the kindness you would like to be shown and allow them to feel important. When our own egos are healthy, we are rich; we can afford to be generous.