

# Q&A with Carol

What's Your Question?

Submit by May 15 for July issue (759 words)

## Stop Feeding the Irate Caller!

### **Question:**

*As a call center manager, I take calls from irate customers that get out of hand and get transferred to me by phone representatives. In the past, this happened 3 or 4 times a week. The number of irate calls I take has increased dramatically. To handle the increase, I have identified a supervisor to handle some of these calls. She and I are hearing the same complaint from many of these customers... "the phone representative was rude!"*

*We train them in phone courtesy as well as the technical training on our products and services. When I monitor calls they seem courteous and knowledgeable. Do we need to increase the time we spend monitoring or look into new training?*

### **Carol:**

Hopefully neither! It may take some attitude adjustment activities! The fact is customers have become more demanding. Competition is fierce and service often makes the difference when making a purchase or staying with a company.

In short, customers want the same things they always wanted. The problem we are seeing today is our phone representatives aren't always aware of customers' expectations. If they don't know what customers expect how will they deliver?

Callers want very basic things, accurate information, solutions to their problems, apologies if they have been disappointed, professional and courteous responses and a commitment to resolve their issues with a company's product or service and when it will be resolved. That's what customers want and expect. Since they are in a position to buy or not buy, our job is to find out what they want and give it to them!

Now let's look at the phone representative's position. They have some tough days. They may be under-staffed, processing more calls than before, and let's face it, customers are not always courteous! The tools they are given to use may not be as effective as they could be. And we ask them to reduce handle time!

We spend a great deal of time observing calls and analyzing the customer's experience during the calls. Here's what often happens when a call from an irate customer calls.

- The phone representative feels defensive. So the first thing on the agenda is to explain who or what department caused the problem! The caller doesn't care if Shipping didn't get the product out on time.
- Irate callers want to control the call and the phone representative wants to explain company policy. The caller doesn't care.
- The phone representative is trying very hard to think about excuses and may not hear the real "hot button" the customer is explaining.
- The phone representative wants to explain how "these things" can happen. The caller does not want to be educated!
- The biggest challenge we have is trying to fix the problem before we fix the customer's feelings.

In summary...our phone representatives are “feeding the irate or angry customer”. And what happens? The customer gets stronger, insists on talking to someone else and you get the call!

It sounds like it might be worthwhile to meet with your supervisor and/or training team and discuss some customer expectations. Then introduce techniques that can be used now. These same techniques can then be considered for your initial training program.

Here are some key things customers want:

- Listen to me.
- Apologize.
- Show empathy. Tell me you understand.
- Answer my questions.
- Give me your full attention.
- Be proactive and helpful
- Don't take things personally when I'm upset.
- Don't hide behind policy
- Don't tell me it's not your job.
- Don't blame me.
- Don't give me excuses.
- Don't use industry jargon.
- Deliver on your promises.

If you and your management team truly think about how it feels to be a customer and discuss the points above, you are one step closer to creating a professional culture focused on customer expectations.

Put up a sign that warns....”Don't Feed the Angry Customer!” And watch the reduction in transferred calls to management. Let me know how this works!

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If you have a specific issue relating to customer contact centers or have a question you would like addressed, please send your question to [question@trostle.com](mailto:question@trostle.com). Sources (name and company) are not used in Q&A articles.

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