

THE ASSERTIVE CUSTOMER

Anita had been considering purchasing a new sofa and had her eye on one at a local furniture store. Then she received a letter from a department store offering a 10% discount for new credit card customers. Anita confirmed that the department store carried a similar sofa. She decided to apply for the credit card and order the sofa from the department store.

A friend suggested she ask the local furniture store if they would meet or beat the discount offered by the department store. She visited the furniture store and spoke with a sales associate. He offered her a 15% discount if she ordered that day and made a minimum deposit. Anita placed the order.

Shortly after the sofa arrived, Anita received a bill for the balance and discovered that not only had she not received the discount, she had also been charged for delivery. Expecting a fight, Anita called the local furniture store and demanded an explanation.

As the customer representative, how would you manage this call? What tone of voice would you use with Anita? What questions would you ask her? How would you provide quality customer service in this situation?

THE ANGRY CUSTOMER

Joel ordered a new computer for his son through a mail-order company. The catalog indicated that the computer came with all the necessary software and hardware so his son could start using it right away. When the system arrived, Joel was a little befuddled by all the cables and connectors, but managed to get it put together. However, when he plugged it in and tried to use it, the system was unresponsive—the monitor only showed a question mark icon.

Joel was frustrated and angry, thinking he had been misled about the features and reliability of the computer he had ordered. After spending two hours setting up the computer and trying to get it operational, Joel called the Technical Support telephone number listed on the packaging. When his call was answered, he angrily accused the company of sending him defective equipment, stating that his office computer (from another manufacturer) always ran smoothly and all he had to do was turn it on each morning.

Being a casual computer user, Joel did not realize he had to perform some basic functions to configure the operating system. He also did not realize that he had to install the software, which was included in the package.

As the Technical Support representative, how would you handle Joel's call? How would you determine the nature of his problem? How would you get him to calm down so he will listen to you? Could you help him regain confidence in your company and confidence in his ability to set up the system?

THE PASSIVE CUSTOMER

Enrique had recently had some remodeling done to his kitchen and needed to repaint the walls. Since the adjoining dining room was the same color, he wanted to match the paint that had been used by the previous owner. He found a partial can of paint in the garage marked “dining room” and decided to call a paint store to see if they could match it.

Because he was a first-time homeowner, Enrique did not have much knowledge about paint. However, since buying the house eight months ago, he had been into the local hardware store several times and they always pointed him to the right light bulbs, gardening tools, and other items he needed.

He called the local hardware store and said he needed some “Desert Sand” paint.

As the sales associate answering Enrique’s call, how would you go about helping meet his needs? What kind of questions would you ask him? What could you do to retain Enrique as a loyal customer?

THE TALKATIVE CUSTOMER

You serve as a volunteer for the local educational television channel. Every year you participate in a major fundraiser in which viewers are offered special merchandise for making an annual donation pledge. Calls generally pour in right after the on-air solicitation is run, so you have to juggle a lot of callers in a short period of time.

While everyone's phone lines are ringing, you get a call from a gentleman named Manny, who claims to be a long-time supporter. He makes a generous pledge. As you are getting payment information and mailing instructions for his thank-you gift, he begins to tell you about his experience with last year's fundraising drive. Apparently he had planned to give the merchandise as a holiday gift but did not receive it in time. He continues, telling you all about his grandson, the intended recipient of the gift, and how much he enjoys your programs.

How could you handle talkative Manny without losing a loyal supporter? What would you do to get all the information you need for this year's pledge and move on to other potential donors?

THE ANALYTICAL (DETAIL-ORIENTED) CUSTOMER

Lisa wants to buy a new stereo system. She has called several local stores to get descriptions of a few different systems that interest her.

She calls your store and begins to ask very detailed questions about a stereo's components. She also wants to understand the basic features of the product warranty and your store's return policy. Finally, she has a magazine review that says there is a minor glitch with the stereo's CD changer, but that most models had been returned to the supplier and fixed. She wants to know whether the stereos offered in your store have had the CD changer repaired.

How can you satisfy Lisa's need for information without taking too much time away from your other customers? How can you convince Lisa that your store can make her the happiest?