



Tips and Suggestions for Dealing with Tricky Situations

Care about the person and the situation – find something that you genuinely care about and it will avoid you looking false

- Speak their language, use their words and don't use corporate speak to deal with the situation
- Listen to what they really have to say – and if you're not sure clarify the situation by reframing or repeating what they've just said.
- Don't say sorry or it's not my fault – and if you feel you should apologise be specific about what you are apologising for
- Become a friend not a foe – if they see you as their enemy then reconciliation becomes even harder
- Build rapport – chances are you already know something about them or the situation, it reminds them that actually you've noticed them
- Disagree on the facts not the emotion of the situation as it's easier to stay calm when talking about facts and figures
- Don't make them feel they are wrong (even if you think they are)
Try and see it from their side – if you were in their shoes how would you feel?
- Don't just listen, take action and let them see that you're really going to deal with the situation

Negative

- What's the problem?
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- You need to talk to someone else
- You are on the wrong extension
- I haven't a clue
- There's nothing I can do
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- I can't do anything about that.
- This isn't as bad as the last problem
- I am sorry you had to wait so long

Positive

- How may I help you?
- Let me put you through to...
- Let me put you through to...
- I need to look into this. The best thing I can do is to call you back
- I'm afraid that I can't do x however I can do y
- The reason we... is because
- This is much better than the last situation
- Thank you for being patient

- You certainly have a problem I can help you resolve that situation
- Your problem is really serious This situation is a little different
- I would hate you to experience a problem like this again I feel confident that this situation will not arise again
- You're calling at a very busy time I'm working with another customer. May I call you back when I am finished?
- You don't understand! I may not be speaking clearly enough
- Please listen to me! Allow me to explain again
- Please don't speak to me like that I realise you are upset and I want to help you however I am not in the habit of being spoken to like that, nor do I speak to people who use that kind of language OR could you please repeat that last sentence, as I am taking notes

Here is a summary of guidelines and procedures which can help when you're confronted with a particularly difficult person or situation:

- Your efforts ought to be directed at solving a substantive problem, not "taking care of" a difficult person. If you insist on one "winner," there probably won't be one.
- De-escalation of loud voice and angry gestures is usually best accomplished by modelling: lower your own level of emotional behaviour and you'll probably affect the other person's actions.
- Your approach to these situations should be your own as much as possible – a good fit with your natural style. All the ideas here are legitimate – but only some will work for you.
- Preparation in advance is a big help. Learn deep breathing and relaxation techniques, cognitive restructuring, assertive skills. A confrontation is not the time to start practicing!
- If you're going into a situation where it's likely you'll confront a difficult person, set up some ground rules in advance to cover typical problems (e.g. time limits for talkers in a group meeting).
- If there are particular individuals in your life who are predictable problems, you can practice methods which are custom designed for responding to them.
- Get to know yourself and your own triggers for emotional response. As someone said, "Get to know your own buttons, so you'll know when they're pushed!"
- So-called "*I-messages*" really can help – take responsibility for your own feelings without blaming the other person.
- Acknowledging the other person's feelings while seeking a resolution is usually helpful. ("I can see you're really upset about this.") But be especially careful not to patronise or come off sounding like a too-empathetic counsellor.
- It's not often possible to solve a situation on the spot. Look for a temporary way out so you can seek a solution in a calmer moment.
- Remember, you do have some options for action. Any of them can cause you more trouble with a difficult person if you become a manipulator, so apply them sensitively – but firmly – and with the main goal of getting on with your life.

Remember that all the customer really wants to know is what you are going to do about it and when so:

- Agree actions
- And follow up

Remember to fix the problem, not the customer's behaviour

Making good decisions requires good information – a person without facts is just a person with an opinion

Whatever the situation, remember your job is to strive for a win-win situation therefore conflict avoidance is essential.

- **A:** Avoid if possible
- **B:** Breathe, stay calm
- **C:** Control your reactions and emotions
- **D:** Detach yourself personally from the situation
- **E:** Empathise; see it from their point of view