



## **Conflict Resolution**

### **What is Conflict Resolution?**

There is no one-size-fits all solution to difficult or angry customers. Nevertheless, you should prepare in advance before one of these situations arrives.

You can't control whether a customer leaves the encounter happy or not, but there are subtle ways to influence how a customer responds to your actions.

## **Customer Interaction**

### **Prepare – Have a Plan**

Don't "wing it" when you run into an angry customer. Have a plan in place. Practice responding to different concerns. It might even help to have a script prepared but realise that the customer will hear it in your voice if you're giving him or her a "scripted" response. Keep your replies real and genuine, or the customer will notice and probably won't like it.

What's worse than an exchange with one emotionally charged participant? An exchange with two emotionally charged participants. It's important that you stay calm throughout the conversation. Don't let the customer bait you into retaliating. Always watch your tone. Speak slowly and softly. Remember that the customer isn't attacking you personally. Any anger or abuse is caused by a core problem, which you'll need to uncover before you can start on a solution.

### **Listen – Let the Customer Talk**

The best way to find the core problem is let your customers have their say. Don't interrupt, don't ask for clarification.

Take notes if you need to follow up on anything. Let them get it all out. But never make the mistake of tuning them out.

The stories your customers tell you drove them to reach out to you. To them, these are the issues that provoked them to take action. They're expecting a similar reaction from you. If they feel like you're dismissive or not paying attention, that's all it takes to lose them as a customer.

It isn't always clear what made your customers so angry. What the customer complains about isn't always the actual problem. This is where you have the chance to play detective. In many cases, the customer started out with certain expectations for your product or service, and that expectation wasn't met.



## **Sympathise – Find a Solution**

Besides a fix to their problem, most customers are also looking for someone to tell them, “No, you’re right. This shouldn’t have happened. Your reaction is entirely reasonable.”

What they don’t want is someone asking them, “What’s the big deal? Why are you so upset?”

Be sincere when you express sympathy. Make sure you don’t use empty phrases that could backfire, like, “I know how you feel.” Odds are, that won’t go over too well. Instead, try something along the lines of, “That sounds like a terrible experience. Let’s figure out a way to make this right.”

In many cases, the solution may seem pretty obvious. The customer may want a refund, a replacement product, or an apology. But don’t just assume the solution you see immediately is everything.

Never lie to the customer. You may be tempted to tell them whatever you have to de-escalate the situation. Don’t do it. You’ll get found out eventually. And don’t make promises that you cannot deliver.



## External Conflict

### Verbal De-Escalation

- Verbal De-escalation is what we use during a potentially dangerous, or threatening, situation in an attempt to prevent a person from causing harm to us, themselves or others.
- Without specialized training, we should never consider the use of physical force.
- Verbal De-escalation consists of tactics to help limit the number of staff who might be injured on the job

### Non-Physical Skills

Verbal De-escalation tactics that are non-physical skills used to prevent a potentially dangerous situation from escalating into a physical confrontation or injury. Some tactics are:

- Simply listening
- Distracting the other person
- Re-focusing the other person on something positive
- Changing the subject
- Motivating the other person
- Empathising with the other person
- Giving choices

### De-escalating effectively

- To verbally de-escalate another person, you must open as many clear lines of communication as possible.
- Both you and the other person must listen to each other and have no barriers.
- Barriers to Communication are the things that keep the meaning of what is being said from being heard.

- Communication Barriers:
  - Pre-judging
  - Not Listening
  - Criticising
  - Name-calling
  - Engaging in power struggles
  - Ordering
  - Threatening
  - Arguing



## Listening

There are Three Main Listening Skills:

**Attending:** Giving your physical (and mental) attention to another person.

**Following:** Making sure you are engaged by using eye contact. Use un-intrusive gestures (such as nodding of your head, saying okay or asking infrequent questions.)

**Reflecting:** Paraphrasing and reflecting, using the feelings of the other person (Empathy).

- Be an empathetic listener
  - Do NOT be judgmental.
  - Do NOT ignore the person or pretend to be paying attention.
  - Listen to what the person is really saying.
  - Re-state the message.
  - Clarify the message.
  - Repeat the message.
  - Be empathetic!
  - Validate – “I understand why...”
  - Try to establish rapport with the other person.

## Body Language

80% - 90% of our communication is non-verbal. It is very important to be able to identify exactly what we are communicating to others non-verbally. You may be trying to de-escalate the situation by talking to the other person, but your body language may be showing a willingness to get physical. It is also important that we recognize and understand the non-verbal cues from another person who has the potential of escalating.

When people are angry, they sometimes do not “listen” to the words that are being said. Remember the difference between “hearing” and “listening”. Often, they do “see” and react to what you are “saying” with your body language. You must always be very careful with the message you are sending!

Never point your finger this may seem accusing or threatening. You should also avoid shoulder shrugging this may seem uncaring or unknowing. A natural smile is good, a fake smile can aggravate the situation. Use slow and deliberate movements – quick actions may surprise or scare the other person.



## Personal Space

Invasion or encroachment of personal space tends to heighten or escalate anxiety. Note: Personal space is usually 1 ½ to 3 feet (Far enough away so you cannot be hit or kicked)

- Do not touch a hostile person – they might interpret that as an aggressive action.
- Keep your hands visible at all times – you do not want the other person to misinterpret your physical actions.

Challenging postures that tend to threaten another person and escalate any situation include:

- Face to face
- Nose to nose
- Toe to toe
- Eyeball to eyeball
- Touching
- Finger pointing

## Protecting Yourself

Protect yourself at all times

- While de-escalating another person, you want to be in a non-threatening, non-challenging and self-protecting position.
- Slightly more than a leg's length away, on an angle and off to the side of the other person.
- Stay far enough away that the other person cannot hit, kick or grab you
- Use of physical force is NEVER recommended.
- Physical force would only be used as a last resort to prevent injury to yourself or to another person.
- Use of physical force usually results in someone (you?) getting hurt.

## Tone of Voice

Always think about your tone of voice

- A lowered voice level may set a tone of anger which could create fear or challenges.
- A raised voice may set a tone of anticipation or uncertainty which may promote excitement or disruption.
- Speak slowly – This is usually interpreted as soothing.
- A controlled voice is one of calm and firmness which promotes confidence in both parties.
- Humor may unintentionally offend someone and escalate the situation.
- Always be respectful to the other person.
- Using “please” and “thank you” or “Mr” or “Ms” indicates respect.



## Ask for help!

- Bring in another trained person to assist whenever possible. (No help will arrive until someone else knows your situation. Until then, you are all alone).
- There is less chance of aggressive behaviour if two people are talking to one person.
- It will be beneficial to have a witness, if the situation deteriorates and someone is injured.
- Use the panic button if available
- Remain calm – Listen – really listen!
- Avoid overreaction.
- Validate! “I understand why you might be upset.” (This does not indicate that you agree with them).
- Remove onlookers – or relocate to a safer place. (Onlookers can become either “cheerleaders” or additional victims). Send an onlooker for help.
- Watch for non-verbal clues or threats.

## Notification & Follow Up

Always record and follow-up even if it was a minor situation, minor situations can lead to major situations. Records will help all parties when evaluating re- occurring events.

After your personal safety is secured, there are other steps that must be taken:

- Intervention must occur to end the situation, if that has not yet occurred. This may be accomplished by supervisors, security or police, depending on the circumstances. Make sure your appropriate chain of command has all of the facts.
- Document and record the incident on the IHL hub
- You should receive medical treatment for any physical injuries.
- Counselling for post-traumatic stress and fear resulting from the incident may be appropriate.
- Look at steps to be taken to prevent other similar situations from occurring in the future.