Serving the Cranky, Crabby and Crusty: Working with Difficult Healthcare Customers

Supplementary Information Packet

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Sponsored by Community Health Association of Mountain/Plains States (CHAMPS)
www.CHAMPSonline.org 303-861-5165
Difficult Customers DO Grow on Trees!
Draw Kevin’s Tree Below:

The Three Main Roots:

Personality Root  Situation Root  Process Root
PROFILE OF THE DISSATISFIED CUSTOMER

ACCORDING TO RESEARCH, MORE THAN 60% OF DISSATISFIED CUSTOMERS ARE SO SICK AND TIRED OF POOR SERVICE THAT THEY THINK IT’S FUTILE TO COMPLAIN ANYMORE.

AN AVERAGE CUSTOMER WHO HAS A COMPLAINT TELLS NINE OR 10 PEOPLE ABOUT IT; ON THE OTHER HAND, CUSTOMERS WHO HAVE COMPLAINTS RESOLVED SATISFACTORILY TELL ONLY FIVE OTHER PEOPLE.

FOR EVERY COMPLAINT A CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS RECEIVES, THERE ARE ABOUT 19 OTHER DISSATSIFIED CUSTOMERS WHO DID NOT TAKE THE TIME TO COMPLAIN.

IT COSTS FIVE TO 10 TIMES MORE IN RESOURCES TO REPLACE A CUSTOMER THAN IT DOES TO RETAIN ONE.

A CUSTOMER MUST HAVE 12 POSITIVE EXPERIENCES TO OVERCOME ONE NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE.

MOST COMPANIES SPEND 95% OF SERVICE TIME REDRESSING PROBLEMS AND ONLY 5% TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHAT WENT WRONG TO MAKE THE CUSTOMER ANGRY IN THE FIRST PLACE.

HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL RESEARCH SHOWS THAT COMPANIES CANBoost profits by almost 100% by retaining just 5% more of their customers.
What is Frustrating YOUR Customers?

Put yourself in the shoes of your average customer. How unhappy or frustrated would you be with these factors if you were served here? Then, put a check mark next to the three that need fixing first. Remember, high scores (4-5) mean it is a problem.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How Frustrated are Our Customers With:</th>
<th>Frustration level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They encounter a “don't care” attitude</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are treated like “just another customer” instead of an important individual when they have needs</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They find poor service quality</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have too much “red tape” and difficult policies</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have low stockage on needed items</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We do not have the healthcare services they seek</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They wait in line too long</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are treated rudely at times</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No one listens carefully and completely to them.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They can’t get help easily from anyone: they have to go to the manager often to get help.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer friendly policies and procedures</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone system is responsive and easy to get through</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website is uninformative and poorly designed and hard to navigate</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirty and unattractive, messy facilities: waiting areas, rest-rooms, etc.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messy outside and parking lot area</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We don’t have the latest services they are looking for.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate advertising or information</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicated, ineffective suggestion and complaint system</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Working With Difficult Customers

Customers Only Want Two Things
1. Solve my problem
2. Leave me feeling good about the transaction
When we fail in one or both of these, almost any customer can become "difficult"

2

But What Kind of "Difficult"?
• Difficult, wanting to be pleasant
• Difficult, focused on a problem
• Difficult, unaware of their demeanor
• Difficult, using their demeanor to obtain advantage
• Difficult, control given to the moment
• Difficult, standard mode of operation
• Difficult, out of control
• Difficult, openly hostile
• Each type of "difficult" requires its own unique intervention.

"Eighty percent of customers' problems are caused by bad systems, not by bad people."
- John Goodman President, TARP, Inc.

What systems are in place in your organization that are causing problems for customers?

3

7 BEHAVIORS GUARANTEED TO FRUSTRATE CUSTOMERS
• Apathy
• Brush-off
• Coldness
• Condescension
• Robotics
• Rulebook
• Run-around

Listen, Apologize, Solve, and Thank

Step 1: Listen
Don't make matters worse by interrupting an upset customer.

Especially avoid phrases like:
• You don't seem to understand ...
• You have to ...
• We won't ... We never ... We can't ...
• You're wrong ...
• Or by making excuses

Empathic Phrases
• I can see why you feel that way
• I can see what you mean
• That must be very upsetting
• I understand how frustrating this must be
• I am sorry about this
• This has been a hard situation for you...

As you listen, never take it personally! You're getting hit simply because you are there!

Step 2: Apologize

• I'm sorry this happened to you
• I'm sorry this misunderstanding occurred
• I'm sorry for this inconvenience
• I'm sorry we've disappointed you
• I'm sorry this has turned out to be such a hassle to you. I can understand why you're upset: I would be also.

Step 3: Solve

NEVER EVER SAY, "Sorry, it's our policy!"

Don't argue about who created the problem. Take ownership! Remember: UNDER PROMISE and OVER DELIVER

Step 4: Thank Them!
Serving Difficult Guests

1. When working with unhappy customers, remember this acronym: LAST: Listen, Apologize, Solve and Thank

2. Listen warmly and attentively, especially if they are emotional. Validate their emotions by saying something like. “Wow, I can see why you’re upset…I would be too.” “I’m sorry this happened and that you were inconvenienced.” Don’t try to problem solve too quickly…let their emotions settle out before moving on to finding solutions. If they are using abusive language say, “I really want to help you but I’m having trouble with the kind of language you are using. Can we try a different approach in working together?”

3. Apologize and warmly thank a customer who raises a complaint and reward them in some way for doing so. Good things to say to them are:
   - “We are sorry this inconvenienced you. I understand why you are frustrated…I would be too. Let me see what I can do to solve the problem.”
   - “We appreciate your courtesy and candor in bringing this problem up. We are sure others had it but did not take the time to tell us.”
   - “We appreciate customers like you who take the time to point out areas we need improvement it. We know it takes courage and caring on your part.”
   - “Could you suggest any solutions to this problem? You might be aware of some we don’t know about.”

4. Solve: Involve the complaining customer to share in problem solving. Invite them to share what would make them happy:
   - “When you’re unhappy, we’re unhappy: What can we do that will make you happy.”
   - “What would be an ideal solution for you?”
   - “What do we need to do to have you leave here happy and make you want to come back.”

   Note: If they ask something that you simply cannot do, just kindly say, “I can see why that would make you happy, and now I will tell you what we can do.” Then try to give them a couple of choices and ask, “Of those choices, which would you prefer?” *P.S. Use and not but!

5. Thank: Thank them again and give your customer a “care token” (small gift or compensation) when bouncing back from a service error.

Keep your whole body language and voice open, warm and smiling!

And always remember: They may not remember what you said, but they will always remember how you made them feel!
Some Tips for Dealing with Difficult Customers

General Tips

• Put yourself in their shoes: how would you feel if this had happened to you?
• Remember to not take it personally: they are probably not really upset at you though they sound like they are.
• Listen deeply and empathically until you see they feel understood (they will get less emotional).
• Take notes: it shows the person that you are paying attention.
• Use their name: it defuses anger almost every time.
• Smile, but genuinely and disarmingly or they might think you are mocking them. Be friendly.
• Tell them exactly what you are going to do to solve the problem.
• Keep your promises. Under-promise and over-deliver!
• Ask them what might solve the problem for them.
• Thank them for bringing the matter to your attention.
• If possible, “bounce back” by giving them something free, even if it is just candy!

Specific Tips For:

The Hostile Aggressive Customer

• Stand up to the person, but don’t argue over who is right, and who is winning.
• Don’t fight with them: be clear, assertive and confident but not aggressive.
• Say, “In my opinion,” “I see it differently,” “Looks like our facts don’t fit.” “Tell me more about what is on your mind, Mr. Smith.”
• Don’t let them cut you off. Look them in the eye and say, “Mr. Jones, you interrupted me. Please let me continue.”
• Be ready to be friendly. They can actually become allies and friends. (Don’t make them into enemies!) NEVER HUMILIATE THEM.

The Exploding Customer

• Do nothing at first but look them right in the eye. Let them run down.
• Deal with the threat (it may not even have much to do with you).
• If possible, steer them away from others into a more private location.
• Offer some sort of concrete, realistic help right away.
• Get in and make a statement, “I want to hear what you have to say, but not this way.”

The Complaining Customer

• Keep in mind that they feel helpless or perhaps hopeless. Show them confidence that you can help them.
• Listen actively and acknowledge. Paraphrase and state back their complaint, without necessarily agreeing with it.
• Don’t over-apologize or it sets you up for even more complaints.
• Get them into a problem solving mode. Ask specific problem solving questions.
• Assign simple tasks to the complainer and involve them in the solution search. “Why don’t you write down your complaint and leave it here with me.” “Think about what would make you happy and come back in a few minutes to talk to me again.” Focus them on the problem and away from side-issues and emotions.
Learning Objectives

- Identify several types of difficult “guests” and how to adapt your service to each one
- Learn what makes people difficult and how to show empathy while still protecting your interests
- Find out how to keep difficult people from “rubbing off” on you and ruining YOUR day (and the days of those around you)
- Learn the LAST model for working with difficult customers

AAFP

This live webcast has been reviewed and is acceptable for up to 1.5 Elective credits by the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP). Application for 1.5 hours of prescribed CME credit for the archived version of this webcast will be filed immediately after the live event. Kevin R. Miller has indicated that he has no relationships to disclose relating to the subject matter of his presentation. The AAFP invites comments on any activity that has been approved for AAFP CME credit. Please forward your comments on the quality of this activity to cmecontact@aafp.org.

Biography of Kevin R. Miller

Kevin Miller is President of VisionBound, International, a training and consulting business working with local, national and international companies, school administrations, and government groups. VisionBound, International helps these organizations develop leaders, improve communications, and move “from good to great”. Kevin has over 20 years experience as an educator, trainer, author, consultant and leader in corporate, non-profit, educational, community, military, and community settings. He graduated from Brigham Young University with a degree in business management in 1979 and holds graduate degrees in Adult and Continuing Education from Kansas State University, a Masters in Secondary Education from Utah State University, and a third graduate degree in Strategy and Operations. Kevin has also served on active duty as a regular Army officer all over the world, and has developed and taught leadership doctrine for the army and served as the Professional Development Manager at Brigham Young University. He has been married for 28 years, has four children and one grandchild, and enjoys traveling.

Description of CHAMPS

CHAMPS, the Community Health Association of Mountain/Plains States, is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing a coordinating structure of service to non-profit primary health care programs whose primary purpose is to serve the medically indigent and medically underserved of Region VIII (CO, MT, ND, SD, UT, and WY). CHAMPS also serves the Region VIII State Primary Care Associations that assist those nonprofit primary health care programs (CCHN, MPCA, CHAD, AUCH, and WYPCA). Currently, CHAMPS programs and services focus on education and training, collaboration and networking, policy and funding communications, and the collection and dissemination of regional data for Region VIII Community Health Centers and Primary Care Associations. For more information, please visit www.champsonline.org or call (303) 861-5165.
Presentation Slides

I Promise you Three Things:

- What you learn today is going to benefit you both professionally and personally
- You’ll feel more comfortable and confident in approaching patients, patients’ families and others you work and serve with
- You’ll have some FUN!

"Hoowha" Service!

This Ain’t McDonald’s Folks!

Brain-starter

- Why can customer care/service even be a “life and death” matter in the healthcare world?

It Would be GREAT if they all were like these...

But SOME are like these!

And they are the true test of our service skills!

Kevin R. Miller
Presentation Slides, continued

**Why do we have them in our lives?...?**

By Gary Larsen

**WHY SWEAT DISSATISFIED CUSTOMERS?**

- Current customers are very valuable and new ones are very expensive (10x more to replace than to retain!)
- Each unhappy customer tells 9-10 others.
- It takes 12 positive experiences to overcome one negative one
- Satisfied customers are very forgiving.
- Customers respond more strongly to the way you treat them than to anything else.

Some material taken from Front Line Customer Service. Call p. 61

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**What’s the LVC of a Taco Bell Customer?**

$2500.00

What about your customer?

Don't let 'em walk away from us!

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When was the last time you dealt with a difficult customer?

What made them become difficult?

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**What makes a customer a Difficult customer?**

- Difficult personalities
- Previous experiences
- Emotions
- Happenstance

Which of these can we do something about??
When was the last time you were a “difficult” customer?

What had gone wrong?

First umpire: Some’s balls and some’s strikes and I calls ‘em as they is.

Second umpire: Some’s balls and some’s strikes and I calls ‘em as I sees ‘em.

Third umpire: Some’s balls and some’s strikes but they ain’t nothin’ till I calls ‘em.

H. Cantril

Difficult? Customer

“Difficult” is a human perception.

What Kind of “Difficult”?

- Difficult, wanting to be pleasant
- Difficult, focused on a problem
- Difficult, unaware of their demeanor
- Difficult, using their demeanor to obtain advantage
- Difficult, control given to the moment
- Difficult, standard mode of operation
- Difficult, out of control
- Difficult, openly hostile

Two Excellent Books!

DEALING WITH PEOPLE YOU CAN’T STAND

By Rick Brinkman and RickKirshner

COPING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

By Robert Bramson

DEALING WITH PEOPLE YOU CAN’T STAND

How to Bring Out the Best in People at Their Worst

By Dr. Rick Brinkman & Dr. Rick Kirshner

Kevin R. Miller
Two Main Sources: Unmet Needs and Fear!

Question....
What percentage of people in a given work populace are truly “difficult”? 

First Root
Chronically Difficult Personalities
- At least seven types (Dr. Richard Bramson’s book, Coping with Difficult People)
- About ten percent of any population
- Try to turn their energy from negative to positive and make them your friends by meeting their unmet deep needs.
- Or, just do the best you can and move them along.

7 Types of Difficult People
By Dr. Robert Bramson
- Hostile Aggressives
  - Sherman Tanks
  - Snipers
  - Exploders
- The Complainer
- The Clam
- The Super Agreeable
7 Types of Difficult People
(cont'd)
- The Negativist
- The Expert Know-it-all
- The Indecisive

Situationally Difficult Guests
- Something in their lives is making them difficult
- Your part is likely very small but may be the "last straw" to them.
- Don't judge them. Care about them.
- Listen and do your best to solve what you can (you can't fix most of what their situation is, but you can care and listen)

"Stairway to Heaven Story"

Remember......
Quit
Taking
It
Personally!
(tupid!!)

Third Root
Your Processes!
- Something in your business processes is frustrating them.
- Fix what you can! Challenge the processes!
- Create and accept only customer-friendly processes wherever you can.

The customer service environment can be a fertile ground for producing difficult customers
We Create Them!
Work Environment

Then we deal with them!

What is Promoting YOUR Customers?

How much is laying around in your operation?

A customer making a comment!

NO SKATE BOARDING
NO BICYCLING
NO ROLLER SKATING

GO SKATE BOARDING
NO BICYCLING
NO ROLLER SKATING
**Customer Pet Peeves!**

- Waiting in Long Lines
- Passing the buck
- Making Excuses
- Getting Defensive
- Blaming the Customer
- Ignoring the Customer
- Fighting Back
- You’re “just another customer” attitude

**7 Behaviors Guaranteed to Frustrate Customers**

- Apathy
- Brush-off
- Coldness
- Condescension
- Robotism
- Rulebook
- Run-around

**Make a promise now!**

NEVER, EVER, EVER BAD-MOUTH A CUSTOMER (INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL!)

**a good response.....**

“I’m sorry we didn’t get to see her at her best.”
80%

“Eighty percent of customers’ problems are caused by bad systems, not by bad people.”

John Goodman
President, TARP, Inc.

Great Book!

A Complaint is a Gift
Using customer feedback to strategize
Johanna Miller and Claude Mollers

Kevin R. Miller

“All organizations are perfectly aligned to get the results they are getting!”

Arthur Jones
Including your clinic!

Kevin R. Miller

What are the wrong things to do with a difficult customer?
(that will just make them explode?)

Kevin R. Miller

Be Careful!!

Symptoms - You’re losing it

- tight neck and shoulders
- cringing at the sound of the telephone
- grinding your teeth
- being short or curt
- raising your voice unnecessarily

Kevin R. Miller
Three Main Types (From “The Difficult Guest”)
- Distracted
- Disappointed
- Disruptive

Step 1 Listen
Don’t make matters worse by interrupting an upset customer.
Especially avoid phrases like:
- You don’t seem to understand...
- You must be confused...
- You have to...
- We won’t... We never... We can’t...
- You’re wrong...
- Or by making excuses

Step 1 Listen (Cont’d)
Empathic Phrases
- I can see why you feel that way
- I can see what you mean
- That must be very upsetting
- I understand how frustrating this must be
- I am sorry about this
- This has been a hard situation for you...

As you listen, never take it personally! You’re getting hit simply because you are there!

The Understanding Continuum
- They feel understood
- Eyes, Heart, and Spirit (plus ears and brain)
- Ears and Brain

CHAMPS Webcast: Serving the Difficult Customer
Kevin R. Miller, June 15, 2006
The Understanding Continuum

**VALIDATION IS...**
The act, process or instance of confirming or corroborating the meaningfulness and relevance of what another person (or self) is feeling.

Adapted from: Gary and Joy Lundberg, *I Don’t Have to Make Everything All Better*

**PUT MORE SIMPLY...**
Validation is being able to empathetically listen and understand another person’s point of view without having to change it.

Adapted from: Gary and Joy Lundberg, *I Don’t Have to Make Everything All Better*

**VALIDATING QUESTIONS**
- How did you feel about that?
- What did you do?
- What would you like to do?
- What do you think caused the problem?
- What did you think when it happened?
- Are there other options?
- What do you think the outcome will be?
- What would you like me to do?
- Would it help if I (name something you can do)?
- And then what did you say?

Adapted from: Gary and Joy Lundberg, *I Don’t Have to Make Everything All Better*

**DO NOT SAY**
- That’s just the way it is.
- Those are the rules.
- I don’t make the rules.
- That’s your problem, not mine.
- Tough luck.
- Go complain to someone who cares.
- I don’t know what to tell you to do.
- I don’t have the time to help you.
- You sure blew it.
- YOU.........
Step 2: Apologize

- I’m sorry this happened to you
- I’m sorry this misunderstanding occurred
- I’m sorry for this inconvenience
- I’m sorry we’ve disappointed you
- I’m sorry this has turned out to be such a hassle to you. I can understand why you’re upset: I would be also.

TRY TO NEVER SAY WHAT?

“Sorry, it’s our policy!”

Step 3: Solve

Don’t argue about who created the problem. Take ownership!

Ritz-Carlton Hotels

Under promise, over deliver ~

Step 3: Solve

Move to the present principle

- Customers often dwell in the past.
- Problems can only be solved in the present.

Restaurant
Recovery Story

CHAMPS Webcast: Serving the Difficult Customer    Kevin R. Miller, June 15, 2006
Dealing With the Chronic Complainer
- Listen Actively
- Establish the Facts
- Resist Temptation to Apologize
- Force the Complainer to Pose Solutions to the Problem

Dealing With the Angry Customer
- Listen actively until they feel understood
- Establish the Facts
- Speak softly and avoid anger
- Work together to solve the problem

The White Board Principle
After finishing with a customer, mentally “wipe the white board clean” and greet the next customer as if they, and their problem, is unique and fresh to you.

“Every human being is absolutely unique. Who will listen to that uniqueness?” Stephen R. Covey

Thanks for Listening!
Let’s work together to bring our service to new levels of excellence! Our customers deserve the very best!
Contact me if you’d like some “on the ground” training and consulting in customer service and leadership for your team. 801-916-7433