

# Calming Upset Customers

*Staying Effective During Unpleasant Situations*

Third Edition

Rebecca L. Morgan, CSP, CMC

## **A Crisp Fifty-Minute™ Series Book**

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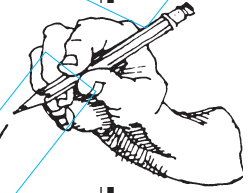
# Learning Objectives For:

## CALMING UPSET CUSTOMERS

The objectives for *Calming Upset Customers, Third Edition* are listed below. They have been developed to guide you, the reader, to the core issues covered in this book.

### THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS BOOK ARE:

- 1) To explain the psychology that governs upset customer behavior
- 2) To suggest procedures to take after the customer is gone
- 3) To present strategies for successful customer encounters
- 4) To advise managers about actions and attitudes



### ASSESSING YOUR PROGRESS

In addition to the learning objectives above, Course Technology has developed a Crisp Series **assessment** that covers the fundamental information presented in this book. A 25-item, multiple-choice and true/false questionnaire allows the reader to evaluate his or her comprehension of the subject matter. To buy the assessment and answer key, go to [www.courseilt.com](http://www.courseilt.com) and search on the book title or via the assessment format, or call 1-800-442-7477.

*Assessments should not be used in any employee selection process.*

# About the Author

Rebecca L. Morgan, CSP, CMC, is a people-productivity expert. She travels internationally to share her research and experience to help make people and organizations more productive and profitable. Her areas of expertise include sales, time management, communication, and creating customer service excellence.

In addition to authoring seven popular books—*Professional Selling*, *TurboTime: Maximizing Your Results Through Technology*, *Life's Lessons: Insights and Information for a Richer Life*, *Inspiring Others to Win*, *Best Practices in Customer Service*, *Speaking Successfully: 1001 Tips for Thriving in the Speaking Business*, and *Calming Upset Customers*—Rebecca has produced numerous audio-cassette programs, special reports, and customer service manager discussion guides. She's been featured on and in hundreds of media, including the Oprah Winfrey Show, 60 Minutes, *USA Today*, National Public Radio, *Home Office Computing*, and *Sales and Marketing Management* magazine. She has been a regular columnist for *The Customer Communicator*, and has had articles published in and/or been interviewed by *The Service Edge*, *First-Rate Customer Service*, *CRM Magazine*, and many others.

She's helped numerous companies create environments that delight customers. Her long-term solutions focus on profitability and attracting and retaining customers.

Rebecca has earned the designation of Certified Speaking Professional (CSP), which is conferred by the National Speakers Association (NSA). In 1993, when Rebecca received her CSP degree, only 214 people worldwide—less than 7% of the 3,200 NSA members—had earned this designation. She's also earned the Certified Management Consultant (CMC) designation, making her only the 15th person in the world to earn both designations.

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# Preface

Customers make or break a business. In many businesses, upset customers are rare. But when a customer is upset, the situation can cause great stress and tension to employees and to other customers. Knowing how to resolve the conflict quickly and professionally can make a big difference in how employees perform their jobs and how customers feel about the organization.

By reading this book and completing the exercises, you will learn:

- Why it's important to calm upset customers
- Why you want customers to complain
- Five things you can learn from upset customers
- Why customers become upset
- What you can do to avoid customers getting upset
- How your words make a difference
- What the upset customer wants
- How to diffuse defensiveness
- What to do after the customer has left
- What managers need to know about calming upset customers

This third edition of *Calming Upset Customers* includes updated research data, additional examples of calming statements, and a new section devoted to calming customers via e-mail. As before, this book provides practical, easily adaptable ideas that will help you to deal effectively with upset customers in all types of situations.

*Rebecca L. Morgan*

Rebecca L. Morgan, CSP, CMC

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## *A Customer Is...*

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The most important person to come into my organization,  
whether in person, on the phone, or by e-mail or mail.

The person who ultimately pays my salary.  
I really work for her.

Not someone with whom I should argue. Dale Carnegie said,  
“The only way to get the best of an argument is to avoid it”  
—especially with customers.

Someone with whom I will learn patience, although  
he is not always patient with me.

Someone who can make or break my day,  
depending upon how I react to her comments.  
I can easily control my life by controlling  
how I respond to situations.

Someone who has biases and prejudices just like I do.  
He may not like my hair; I may not like his clothes.  
Yet, he is a special human being and my customer.

Someone I take care not to offend. Even when she is wrong,  
I point out the mistake indirectly and politely.

Someone who is sometimes a challenge.  
I embrace the challenge and am glad  
when I can turn a frown into a smile.

Someone who is very special.  
She is my customer for a few short minutes  
and I focus on serving her needs 100% when I am helping her.

Someone with whom I will go the “extra mile.”  
He may not realize it, but I realize that  
the difference between mediocre and excellent is just 10%.

---



# Introduction

“  
If you can keep your head when all about you  
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you...  
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it.”

—Rudyard Kipling, “If”

Wouldn't it be wonderful if there were no upset customers to contend with? But that's not the way the world is. No matter how hard you try, you're bound to come across an upset person once in a while. You need to know how to respond quickly and professionally.

We have seen incidents of road rage, air rage, and general public anger escalate. C. Leslie Charles' popular book *Why Is Everyone So Cranky?* corroborates what we said in the very first edition of *Calming Upset Customers*—people are increasingly frustrated with everyday challenges, and often take out these frustrations on service personnel. This means that you have even more opportunity to hone your skills for calming upset customers! This book will help you develop those skills.

## *The Win/Win Solution*

A recent article in *Nation's Business* quotes Doug Green, founder of New Hope Communications: “We've found that the solution to every problem comes from the spirit of cooperation. I am sure we can come up with something that can make both of us happy, but we must approach this in a very cooperative manner.” This book will help you find those solutions.

## *“Upset” vs. “Difficult”*

This book focuses on calming upset customers, who are different from *difficult* customers. When a reasonable person gets upset, she may have momentary lapses of unreasonableness, but she is still basically rational and reasonable. But difficult people have a psychological need to get attention by disruptive and negative means. They are chronically hard to communicate with.

Many of the ideas in this book will help you serve difficult people as well as upset people, but some people will be unreasonable no matter what you do. Sometimes you will have to call in your supervisor.

## *Customers Are Often a Challenge*

You can learn from that challenge. The more you learn, the more you'll enjoy your job. Learning to calm upset people is not easy. There is no single technique that works with every upset person. But there are skills that can be learned, with a positive attitude\* and practice. By the way, the ideas and skills presented in this book also work at home

## *Who Should Read This Book?*

This book is designed to assist people who deal with the upset public to “keep their heads.” The ideas presented here have been useful to people in retail, banking, insurance, medicine, utilities government, hospitality, travel, manufacturing, and other vocations. These ideas and techniques can be adapted to your job, your personal life, and your customers.

“Customers” in this book refers to clients, patients, passengers, ratepayers, insureds, taxpayers, homeowners, guests, students, patrons, or any other member of the public that you deal with who ultimately pays your salary. The concepts discussed are applicable to face-to-face interactions, telephone conversations, and even e-mail and letters.

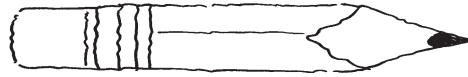
## *How to Use This Book*

This *Fifty-Minute™ Series Book* is a unique, user-friendly product. As you read through the material, you will quickly experience the interactive nature of the book. There are numerous exercises, real-world case studies, and examples that invite your opinion, as well as checklists, tips, and concise summaries that reinforce your understanding of the concepts presented.

A Crisp Learning *Fifty-Minute™ Book* can be used in a variety of ways. Individual self-study is one of the most common. However, many organizations use *Fifty-Minute* books for pre-study before a classroom training session. Other organizations use the books as a part of a systemwide learning program—supported by video and other media based on the content in the books. Still others work with Crisp Learning to customize the material to meet their specific needs and reflect their culture. Regardless of how it is used, we hope you will join the more than 20 million satisfied learners worldwide who have completed a *Fifty-Minute Book*.

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\*For an excellent book on this subject, read *Attitude: Your Most Priceless Possession*, by Elwood N. Chapman and Wil McKnight, Crisp Publications.



## ASSESS YOURSELF

Take the following quiz to assess your skills in calming upset customers.

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1 = Never    2 = Rarely    3 = Sometimes    4 = Usually    5 = Always

---

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. I feel I can calm most upset customers                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| B. When I'm with an upset customer, I:                       |   |   |   |   |   |
| ➤ stay calm  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ➤ don't interrupt  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ➤ focus on his/her concern without getting distracted        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ➤ respond to personal accusations without becoming defensive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ➤ reduce distractions of paperwork and telephone             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ➤ have attentive body posture                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ➤ have appropriate facial expressions                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ➤ have confident eye contact                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ➤ listen completely before responding                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ➤ take notes when appropriate                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ➤ show empathy   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ➤ let him/her know I want to help                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

CONTINUED

## CONTINUED

➤ know when to call on my supervisor	1	2	3	4	5
➤ have a confident, helpful tone of voice	1	2	3	4	5
➤ use words that don't escalate his/her anger	1	2	3	4	5
➤ avoid blaming my fellow workers or organization for causing the problem	1	2	3	4	5
C. After the upset customer leaves, I:					
➤ am in control of my emotions	1	2	3	4	5
➤ don't repeat the story more than once	1	2	3	4	5
➤ analyze what I did well and what I'd do differently	1	2	3	4	5

Add up all your points to assess your score:

81-100 = Excellent

61-80 = Good

41-60 = You need to hone your skills.

21-40 = You may need to ask your supervisor for help.

1-20 = Start working with this book right now!

To make sure you have a realistic view of your skills, photocopy\* the following assessment and ask your boss or co-workers to complete it, based on their observations of how you work with upset customers. If their answers are very different from yours, discuss their evaluation with them.

\*Permission is granted to photocopy for personal use only, not for classes or other uses.



CONTINUED

- shows empathy 1 2 3 4 5
- lets the customer know he/she wants to help 1 2 3 4 5
- knows when to call on a supervisor 1 2 3 4 5
- has a confident, helpful tone of voice 1 2 3 4 5
- uses words that don't escalate the customer's anger 1 2 3 4 5
- avoids blaming fellow workers or the organization for causing the problem 1 2 3 4 5

C. After the upset customer leaves, \_\_\_\_\_  
(name)

- is in control of his/her emotions 1 2 3 4 5
- doesn't repeat the story more than once 1 2 3 4 5
- analyzes what was done well and what needs to be done differently 1 2 3 4 5

Suggestions to help her/him become better with upset customers:

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*P A R T*

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1

# The Importance of Calming Upset Customers



PREVIEW



# Customer Satisfaction: Everyone's Job

In a survey of service quality conducted by the Financial Institution Marketing Association (FIMA) and Raddon Financial Group, it was discovered that 25% of customers had expressed a complaint in the previous 12 months. The survey stated, "In light of this significant percentage, everyone in the organization—from teller to president—must become increasingly aware that he or she is either serving the customer directly or is serving someone in the organization who serves the customer. All positions exist because of the customer."

Calming upset customers is rarely pleasant, but it must be done. If upset people continue expressing their anger and frustration without intervention, it can upset the whole office.

Why do you feel it's important to calm upset customers?

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## Upset Customers Don't Come Back

A recent study by e-Satisfy (formerly the Technical Assistance Research Program, a top research company on customer service issues based in Arlington, VA), showed that customer dissatisfaction is accounted for in the following ways:

- 20% is caused by employee actions
- 40% is caused by corporate products and processes that have an inherent and unwanted surprise for the customer
- 40% are caused by customer mistakes or incorrect expectations

Another survey showed that one out of every five supermarket customers had switched stores in the last 12 months. What made them switch? The way they were treated at the cash registers, mostly. People want and expect good service, and when they are not treated well, they don't come back.

It can be expensive for your company if your customers decide not to come back. Researchers at e-Satisfy found that the cost ratio between winning a new customer vs. retaining a current customer varies from two to one to 20 to one. That money could be spent improving your work environment, giving you a raise, or keeping you employed.

### *Word of Mouth Spreads Quickly*

If your organization has a reputation for quick, courteous responses to complaints, people will be more apt to begin their conversation with you rationally. When customers scream and yell, it's often because that's what their friends had to do to get some action from your organization. One study found that, on average, one dissatisfied customer tells 11 other people, who each tells five others. That's 67 (1 + 11 + 55) people spreading bad word-of-mouth about your organization. Most organizations will be hurt by that much bad advertising.

A recent International Customer Service Association/e-Satisfy Benchmarking Study of Electronic Customer Service found that poor handling of online contacts created at least 30% lower customer loyalty among the two-thirds of online contacts who are not satisfied. Additionally, the study found that poor handling of online contacts resulted in a high level of negative word-of-mouth; dissatisfied online customers told twice as many people as satisfied customers (both online and off) about their experience.

# You Want Customers to Complain

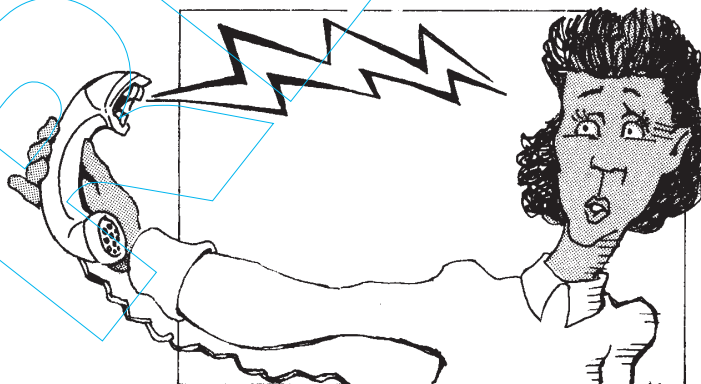
Yes, you do. Because if they don't complain, they'll just take their business elsewhere, and tell their friends not to do business with you. Consider what happens when you are treated poorly: do you usually complain? Most people don't. They just think, "I'm never coming here again."

A study conducted by e-Satisfy discovered that 96% of consumers do not complain to the retailer from whom they buy unsatisfactory items. This means that for every complaint the average business receives, there are possibly 24 silent unhappy customers.

Interestingly, e-Satisfy also found that, on average, for large-ticket items, 50% of customers complain to frontline employees, and 50% of complainers escalate to local management or corporate heads. The existence of an 800 number at corporate headquarters will, on average, double the number of complaints at that level. However, only one out of 100-500 will actually be addressed to a senior executive. Complaint rates vary by type of problem. Problems that result in out-of-pocket monetary loss have high complaint rates (e.g., 50-75%), whereas mistreatment, quality, and incompetence problems result in only 5-30% complaint rates to the frontline.

In addition, e-Satisfy found that customers who complain and are subsequently satisfied are up to 8% more loyal than if they had never had a problem at all.

Therefore, if a customer does complain, he or she is more likely to come back. The act of complaining can actually increase customer loyalty.



### Unhappy Customer Return Rates\*

No complaint:	9% (91% won't come back)
Complaint not resolved:	19% (81% won't come back)
Complaint resolved:	54% (46% won't come back)
Complaint resolved quickly:	82% (18% won't come back)

\*Percentage of customers with major cause for complaint (over \$100 losses) who will buy from you again.

Source: U.S. OCA/White House National Consumer Survey

In a study reported in the *Yankelovich Monitor*, 54% of adults agreed with the following statement: "It is usually a waste of time to complain to a big company when you're not satisfied with a product or service." Another study by Yankelovich Partners revealed that 90% of customers say they feel they pay enough to get the highest level of service. Yet, 64% say the service representatives they deal with don't care about their needs.

So remember: Encourage customers to complain when they have a problem. And then *do something* to help resolve the matter!

# A Learning Opportunity

We can learn from every experience, if we choose to do so. A difficult encounter can be an opportunity to learn something new, or to apply what you've learned. What can you learn from dealing with upset customers?

I can learn:

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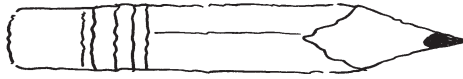
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## *What You Can Learn!*

Recall your worst encounter with an upset customer. You don't ever want to complain like that. Isn't anger ugly when expressed inappropriately? If you practice the following, you will become successful at preventing and calming anger in others.

- Have patience. It takes a lot of patience to listen attentively to someone while they are yelling.
- Identify specific organization procedures or practices that may be annoying to your customers. Then you can work to change these.
- Improve yourself. There may be something in your behavior that irritates people. You can work at changing this.
- Show confidence. People can tell whether you are confident in your skills. An irate person is more apt to hassle someone who appears unsure of himself.
- Learn how to calm upset people. You need to practice your calming skills.

Richard Bach, in his book *Illusions*, wrote: "You are never given a problem without a gift for you in its hands." We are given gifts in these upset people.



## CALMING UPSET CUSTOMERS IN YOUR WORKPLACE

Earlier, we looked at why it is important to calm upset customers, and to actually solicit complaints from unhappy customers. Now apply these ideas to your work situation.

Why is it important for *you* to calm upset customers?

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Why is it important for you to encourage unhappy customers to complain?

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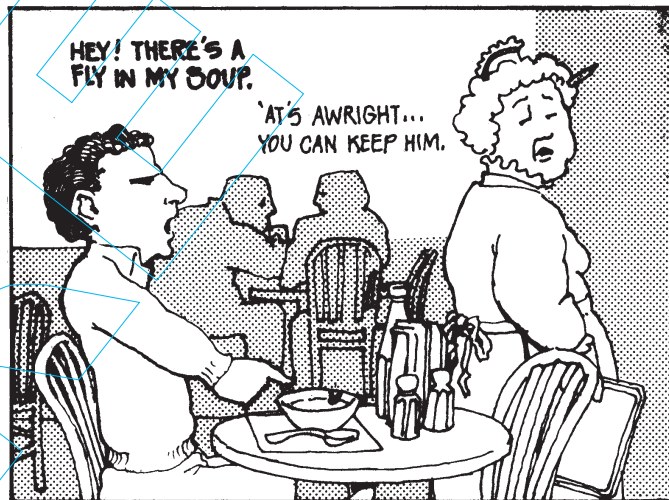
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# Why Customers Get Upset



PREVIEW

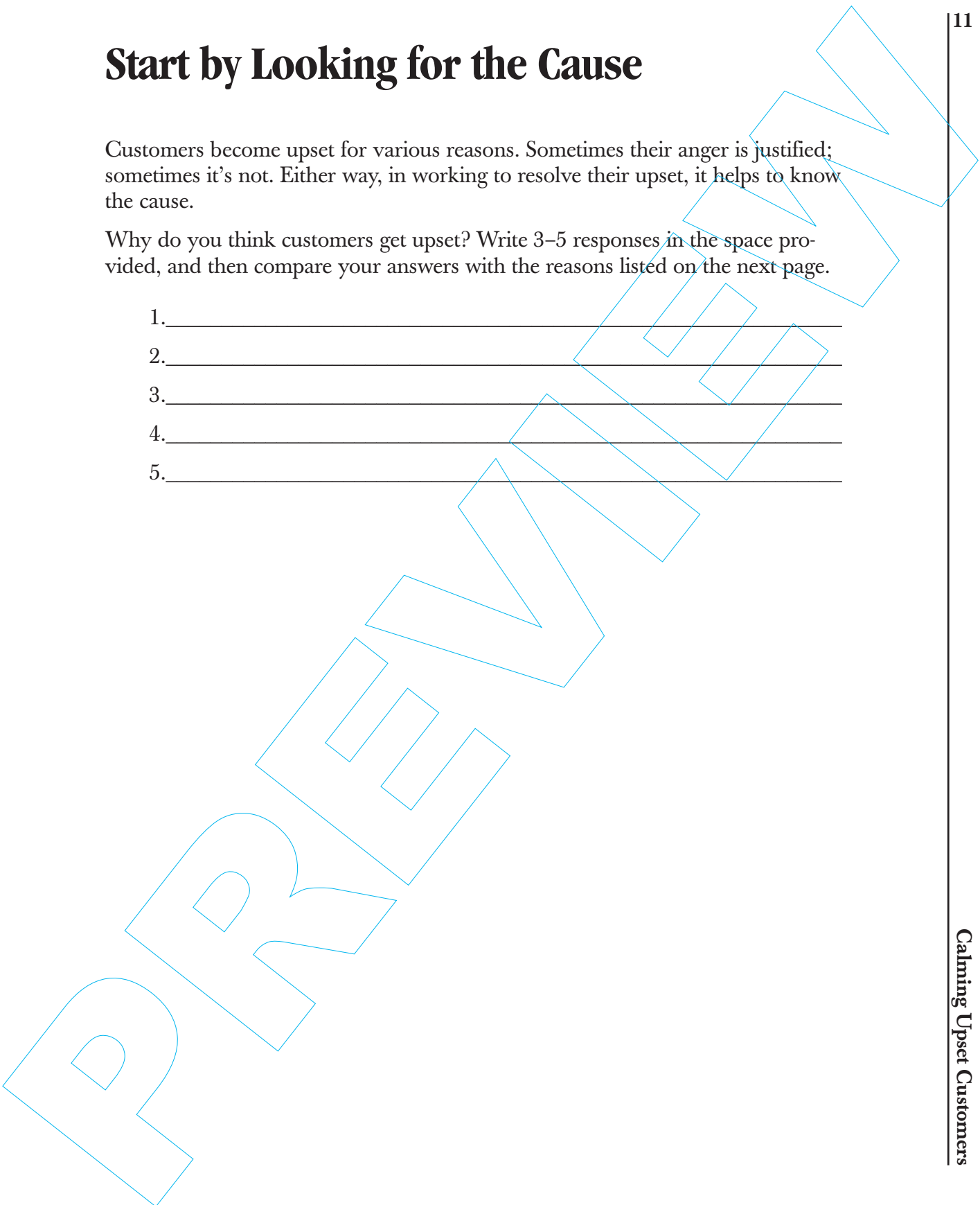


# Start by Looking for the Cause

Customers become upset for various reasons. Sometimes their anger is justified; sometimes it's not. Either way, in working to resolve their upset, it helps to know the cause.

Why do you think customers get upset? Write 3–5 responses in the space provided, and then compare your answers with the reasons listed on the next page.

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. \_\_\_\_\_



## A Customer Could Be Upset Because...

- She has expectations that have not been met.
- He was already upset at someone or something else (his boss, his spouse, his kids, a co-worker, or other business).
- She's tired, stressed, or frustrated.
- He feels like a victim—not much power in his life in general.
- She feels that no one will listen to her unless she yells and makes a ruckus.
- He will use any excuse to prove he is right, whether he is or not.
- She walks around with a chip on her shoulder—nothing is right in her life.
- You or someone in your organization was indifferent, rude, or discourteous to her.
- He was told one thing by one staff member and something else by another.
- She acted on something told to her by a staff member and it was wrong.
- He feels you or someone else in your organization had an unpleasant attitude toward him.
- She doesn't feel she was listened to.
- Prejudices—he may not like your hair, clothes, voice, and so on.
- She feels she can manipulate you to get what she wants if she makes a lot of noise.
- He's suspicious and thinks your organization or you are dishonest.

- She made a wrong assumption about what your organization would do for her.
- He was told he has no right to be angry.
- She was given a smart or flip reply.
- He was transferred on the phone without his consent.
- She was screened on the telephone.
- He is embarrassed about doing something incorrectly.
- Her integrity or honesty has been questioned.
- You or someone in your organization argued with him.
- You don't have enough job training to handle her situation quickly and accurately.

Studies suggest that the causes of customer complaints can be attributed to one of three areas: individual employees, the company, or the customer, with 80% of complaints traceable to the last two categories.

### *Upset People Have Little Patience*

Annoyances that a person usually tolerates become intolerable when that individual is upset. You can't control another person's behavior. You can, however, change your behavior to avoid causing annoyance. Look again at the reasons why customers get upset. Which ones do you have any control over? In the space below, list those you think you can at least partially control, and briefly note what your responsibility is:

**Causes I May Be Able to Control**

**Action I Can Take to Help**

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## Avoidable Upsets

The annoyances you have some responsibility for causing include the following:

- **You or someone in your organization promised something that was not delivered.**

If you promised the customer you would get back to him and you didn't, then he may become upset. With good reason. Most of us become upset when people promise action and don't follow through.

- **You or someone in your organization was indifferent, rude, or discourteous.**

Discourtesy is often unintentional. You may not have thought about your statement before you blurted it out. Some people try to make funny comments, but these may come across as rude. Treat every customer as you would a special guest or relative.

- **The customer feels you or someone else in your organization displayed an unpleasant attitude toward him.**

Perhaps this customer was surly himself, dressed unusually, or treated you poorly. This is no excuse for you to react unprofessionally.

### **Straighten Up and Fly Right!**

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While I was waiting in the airline check-in line, the ticket agent announced, "The line in front of me is for passengers checking in for Flight 64. The line to the right is for the problems."

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- **She doesn't feel she was listened to.**

People want to be listened to. They don't want to have to repeat themselves.

- **He was told he has no right to be angry.**

Everyone has a right to his or her emotions. Telling a person otherwise is sure to make him or her even angrier.

➤ **She was given a smart or flip reply.**

Sarcastic remarks only heighten anger, they seldom ease it.

➤ **He is embarrassed about doing something incorrectly.**

Make sure the customer understands what he needs to know before he tries to use your product or service. Go over any procedures about returns or guarantees beforehand. That way, you'll have fewer customers who are angry because of a misunderstanding.

➤ **Her integrity or honesty has been questioned.**

Treat customers with respect and dignity. If there is a problem, assume your organization has made the mistake until shown otherwise. Instead of saying, "You didn't pay us," say, "We don't have a record of receiving your payment. Would you be kind enough to see if your check has cleared the bank?"

Work to eliminate body language, voice tone, or facial expressions that convey distrust. Avoid projecting an "us versus them" attitude about customers.

Never call a customer a deadbeat, liar, cheat, thief, etc. Never threaten a customer.

### **Angel of Mercy?**

---

At 5:00 the nurse calls my name. As she's showing me to the examination room, I comment, "The doctor must be very busy today. I arrived at 4:05 for my 4:10 appointment." She responds, "I checked the waiting room for patients an hour ago. You must have been late for your appointment."

---

➤ **You or someone in your organization argued with the customer.**

As Dale Carnegie said: "The only way to get the best of an argument is to avoid it." This is especially true with customers. If you argue with a customer, you always lose—even if you win the argument. It's not good for other customers to witness an argument. They won't like seeing you treat a customer poorly, whether or not the customer was in the wrong.

# Returning Calls

Following up on the information you promised is one way you can avoid upsetting callers or visitors. Even if you have to call a customer back to say you're still checking, she'll appreciate knowing that you haven't forgotten and are doing your best.

Below is a simple form you can duplicate\* to keep track of the follow-up responses you promise. If you have customers in different time zones, this will help you remember to call them back during their workday. Keep this form in front of you to remind you of what you've promised.

## CALLBACK SCHEDULE

	Name	Phone #	Regarding
before 8:00	_____	_____	_____
before 9:00	_____	_____	_____
before 10:00	_____	_____	_____
before 11:00	_____	_____	_____
before 12:00	_____	_____	_____
before 1:00	_____	_____	_____
before 2:00	_____	_____	_____
before 3:00	_____	_____	_____
before 4:00	_____	_____	_____
before 5:00	_____	_____	_____

\*Permission to photocopy for personal use only, not for classes or other uses.