

Assertive Customer Service

Being Assertive

Assertiveness is a learned thinking approach, which includes building relationships and it will always bring the best results. When people choose to behave assertively they come across in a direct and solution focused way.

- They use an appropriate number of 'I' statements to show confidence
- They get to the point without being abrupt
- They can distinguish between fact and opinion, and they will use questions to seek solutions and check facts
- An assertive person will speak firmly, clearly and understandably
- They will maintain steady and comfortable eye contact and use expressive and open hand gestures
- They will also maintain an upright posture which shows concern and attention

Firstly, show that you listen and understand, for example,

'I appreciate what you are saying'

'I see your point', 'I understand that'

'I can see that you are frustrated by this delay'

'I understand that you are angry about this matter'

Assertiveness is not about winning, but about finding a true compromise, which takes both parties needs into consideration.

Secondly, express how you feel. You can disclose your feelings with a simple statement, for example

'I feel guilty'

'I feel unsure about', or

'It's a totally unacceptable situation for you to be in and I do feel quite embarrassed'

This will reduce your anxiety enabling you to relax and take charge of yourself and our feelings.

Next, say what you want to happen. Avoid unnecessary padding and keep your statement simple and brief, for example,

'I think the best option is for us to go back through the paperwork'

'I'd like you to', or

'When is it convenient for you?', or

'I'm going to deal with this personally straight away'

Next, consider repeating yourself if necessary. Stay with your statement or request by repeating it calmly over again if you are not heard the first time.

This technique enables you to maintain a steady position without falling prey to manipulative comment, irrelevant logic or argumentative bait. It teaches persistence without having to rehearse arguments beforehand.

Field negative responses. Neutralise your feelings and indicate that you have heard what the customer has said without getting drawn in, for example, *'Yes that's right'*. Acknowledge their response and continue with your statement or request instead of feeling defensive or aggressive, for example, *'Yes, I recognise that you are up to your eyes in it right now, but I really would like you to provide me with the following information please.'*

Finally, find a workable compromise. When there is a conflict between your needs and wishes and those of someone else you need to negotiate from an equal position.

Remember that compromising on a solution to a difficult situation need not compromise your self-respect, for example,

'On one hand Mr Marshall I understand the points you're making, on the other hand it does not change what was agreed'

It is always best to seek a win-win situation rather than trying to score points with a customer.

Co-operation works better than confrontation. This involves getting to grips with the content of the call and communicating effectively what each party wants.

An assertive approach involves a genuine respect for those you deal with and a recognition of their rights as well as your own

Some of these rights might include things like knowing who you are talking to, being treated with respect as an equal human being, saying if the conversation is inconvenient, expressing your needs and feelings and having them listened to, expressing your opinions and thoughts and having them listen to, asking questions and requesting answers, asking for what you want and need, saying no or yes for yourself independently, agreeing or disagreeing with the other person and saying I don't understand if that is the case and asking for further explanation.

Assertiveness and acknowledgement of rights is also about declining responsibility for the mistakes and problems of others without feeling guilty, changing your mind, making mistakes as a fallible human being and admitting to them too.

So assertiveness is exercising your own rights whilst also respecting the rights of others, in this case your all-important customers.

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