



Dealing with Difficult Customers

LESSON OBJECTIVE: Teach employees how to deal with customers who may be upset.

ESTIMATED COMPLETION TIME: 3 minutes for the video. Add extra time for discussion.

HOW TO USE: Show the short video "Dealing with Difficult Customers." In this video, Pat Sullivan, owner of Sullivan Hardware in Indianapolis, shares how he instructs his employees to deal with difficult customers. After the video, you may review the main points and talk about your own store's policies.

OPENING COMMENTS: While none of us like dealing with upset customers, it's inevitable that sooner or later we'll have to. It's important to know how to deal with them properly. Remind employees that upset customers represent an opportunity to turn a bad experience into a good one, and gain a loyal customer.

Main points to review:

- Ask the customer why he or she is upset and listen carefully to the reason. If you need to, take notes and repeat back the complaint to the customer to make sure you have all of the details correct. Then, thank them for bringing the matter to your attention.
- When talking to the customer, use phrases like "I see" and "I understand." These show the customer you are listening while not implying that the customer is right or wrong.
- If the customer has already talked to an employee about their complaint during a previous store visit, try to connect the customer with that employee to minimize confusion.
- If the product is a return, examine the product together so you understand the problem. Sometimes, the problem is less serious than the customer thinks or it's the result of a misunderstanding. Some customers will realize they caused an issue themselves, which can change their expectations of you trying to solve the problem.
- If the customer is very upset, you want to avoid embarrassment and to avoid disturbing other customers. You also don't want the upset customer to negatively affect the attitude of other customers. Ask them to step aside to a place off the main store floor where you can talk.
- After you understand the complaint, ask "What can we do to make this right?" Offer a solution that's in line with store policy.
- Sometimes you can solve the problem and offer compensation in the form of customer service instead of just a free product.

ADDITIONAL TRAINING: For more training on selling skills, NHPA members may take the "Selling Skills and Customer Relations" course, available on www.yournhpa.org. If you are not a member, call 800-772-4424 or visit www.yournhpa.org.