

# The Really Angry Customer

**Trainer's Manual**

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Video written by Tracy Riddiford & Cathy Beitz

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## FOREWARD

This program is designed as a half-day group training session on dealing with angry customers over the telephone.

Just as the organisations that use this program are wide and varied, so are the desired outcomes of the participants attending. As a result, we have tried to make The Really Angry Customer, as generic and flexible as possible.

This manual will provide you with some background notes, along with practical activities and suggested running times. Feel free to add to or adapt the structure of this training session to suit your needs.

You do not need to complete all exercises provided unless they suit the specific requirements of your organisation. Of course, the time schedule we have provided is only a guide. The time spent on each activity is entirely dependant on the objectives of the trainer/facilitator and the progression rate of participants.

## PREPARATION

In order to maximise the benefits of this training session, we recommend that the trainers/facilitators familiarize themselves with the topic at hand. You should be comfortable with the material in both this manual and the video.

You have been supplied with master copies of OHT's and participant handouts. Make sure that sufficient copies of each have been prepared prior to the training session.

In the training room you will need the following: -

- Overhead projector or computer projection system
- Monitor and VCR player
- A whiteboard with markers and eraser
- Note paper and pens or pencils for participants

## SYNOPSIS

### The Really Angry Customer

Like many passengers hurrying to catch a plane, Jackson Smith arrives at the airport a little flustered. But unlike many passengers, he's trying to board a plane to get to the birth of his first child – in another state!

As Jackson attempts to collect and pay for his ticket he discovers all of his bank accounts have been frozen. With very little time and patience up his sleeve, he calls the bank to sort out the problem. This is where he encounters McKenzie, a call centre agent. As time ticks away and the story unfolds we discover that the bank thinks Jackson is dead. The truth of the matter is he may very well be, if he doesn't make it to the hospital on time!

With the stakes so high, Jackson has passed being just annoyed and is now down right angry! He immediately attacks McKenzie and we watch his angst levels rise and fall as she attempts to deal with the situation.

Eventually the problem is solved and Jackson gets access to his money. He collects his ticket and races off to board the plane.

### Featuring

**Cole Larsen** as Jackson

**Sally Bull** as McKenzie

**Don Barker** as Todd Salenger

**Nuala Hafna** as Customer Service Officer

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## COURSE STRUCTURE AND RUNNING TIME

This course has been designed to run as a half-day training session. If you do all of the course work within the allocated running time, your training session should run for approximately 3 hours and 39 minutes.

### COURSE WORK

### RUNNING TIME

Welcome & Introduction	15 minutes
Objectives & Agenda	10 minutes
Introduction	25 minutes
Video & Discussion	34 minutes
Activity 1 – Ineffective Complaint Handling	15 minutes
Activity 2 – True or False?	20 minutes
Activity 3 – Why do Customers Get Angry?	15 minutes
Break	20 minutes
Activity 4 – Do's and Don'ts of Handling Angry Customers	15 minutes
Summary & Debrief	50 minutes

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## PART 1

### WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

15 minutes

- Welcome all participants to The Really Angry Customer training session.
- Introduce yourself and tell the group something about your training background.
- Explain how the training session is to be structured, how long it will run for, when the video will be shown, when breaks will be taken, what refreshments are available and where the phone and rest rooms are.

### OBJECTIVES AND AGENDA

10 minutes

- Discuss the objectives and agenda of this training course with the group.

#### OHT #1

After completing the training session on The Really Angry Customer, participants will understand the following: -

Why customers become angry

- How to approach a customer who is attacking you personally
- What emotions you should avoid
- When to apologize
- How to turn low quality information into high quality information
- When and where to transfer an angry customer

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TRAINING ADVISORY BOARD

## INTRODUCTION

25 minutes

- Using your own research and the brief notes provided below, give participants a brief overview of handling really angry customers over the telephone.
- Invite questions and discussion from the group as you go.

Have you heard the story about 4 employees called Anybody, Somebody, Everybody and Nobody? There was a really important job to be taken care of for a customer. "Everybody" thought "Somebody" would take care of it. Anybody could have done it but "Nobody" did – leaving the customer very angry!

Just as it was in the 80's and 90's, customer service is still going to be the marketing weapon of the new millennium.

However, the face of customer service is rapidly changing. Business transactions, which were once taken care of by hopping in the car and going into a branch or outlet, are now often being taken care of on the telephone. For most organisations this shift was a natural progression as technology streamed ahead, making it, not only possible, but very cost effective at the same time. However, do our customers see the merit in this? Speaking to someone in Melbourne when your tap is leaking in Sydney takes a bit of getting use to.

Telephone customer service is arguably more difficult than dealing with customers in "face to face" situations. Developing a relationship with a faceless voice is not always easy. You're just a voice to the customer – so if they're upset, they're more willing to let you have it with all barrels blazing!

We all know how an angry customer has the potential to totally ruin your day. There are literally thousands of reasons why customers become angry. Maybe they've been left on hold for too long, received a faulty product or service, been overcharged or they perceive they have not been treated in the manner they deserve.

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Whatever the reason, customers rarely become angry for no reason at all. It's usually because they are dissatisfied about something and that dissatisfaction has been poorly managed.

OHT #2      When dissatisfaction is poorly managed customers become angry

With customers becoming more aware of their rights and demanding more value for money, they are becoming more willing to complain more often.

The first thing an angry customer does is attack you. It's very important to remember that you are not personally being attacked but are listening to someone who is in an attacking mode. When appropriate, a simple apology for the inconvenience or misunderstanding will often calm the customer down.

You should speak slowly and calmly in a well modulated voice. This will not only calm you but it will calm your customer as well. Have you ever tried shouting at someone who is being quite rational and calm in return? It doesn't work.

Never talk down to customers, accuse them of being at fault or try to catch them out. Instead, maintain a positive, professional, polite and respectful attitude. Assume the problem can be solved and never forget to thank them for bringing the situation to your attention.

When customers are in an emotional state they tend not to communicate very clearly. When this happens you need to take control of the situation and turn their low quality information into high quality information by starting at the beginning with some basic facts. You do this by using probing and clarifying questions. However, always remember to ask permission to ask questions.

Angry customers will be annoyed even further by probing questions if they see them as irrelevant or not a contributing factor to solving their immediate problem. Therefore, keep the customer informed as to why you need certain information.

Even if a customer's demands are impossible to meet, a blunt "No" or "Can't be done" will only worsen the situation. You must continue to be positive and assume the problem can be solved.

Always do your best to assist and solve your customer's problem before you transfer them. Sometimes transferring the call will be necessary. However, there is a time and a place.

It is important that as a service giver you demonstrate you understand the customer's position by showing empathy. You do this by acknowledging the customer's distress and expressing a willingness to assist. However, be careful not to be patronising.

### OHT #3 The Pumpkin Method

When a customer's abuse is aimed directly at you, it's difficult not to take it personally. However, you can overcome the harshness of abusive by employing 'The Pumpkin Method'. This method is based on the arbitrary nature of language – that is, words have no inherent meaning other than what we place on them. If we create another association with certain words we can lessen the severity of what's being said. For example if we started calling a pen a "thwg" and others heard us calling it a "thwg" – the next time we referred to the "thwg" they would know we were talking about a pen. Not because "thwg" means anything in itself but we have now created a meaning for the syllable. This applies to all language. If someone directs harsh language at us, that language has no meaning other than what we have associated with it. If we create another association for that language, for example "pumpkin", we can train ourselves to think that they have called us a big pumpkin! It's not anywhere near as offensive. In fact, it can be quite humorous. However, laughing at the customer is not recommended! \*1

Every customer service operator should know the limit of his or her authority. If you have done your absolute best to solve the customer's problem but still they are dissatisfied and angry, then this would be the time to transfer the call to a team leader or supervisor. Keep the customer informed and always explain why you are transferring them. Plus don't forget to prepare the new person handling the call with the customer's problem. There is nothing more annoying for the customer than having to explain the entire story again.

If you can't give customers exactly what they want it is important to tell them what you can do for them. Sometimes you'll find there is another solution that will alleviate the urgency of the situation, allowing you more time to solve the core problem later. This also applies to customers looking for information. If you don't have the information, offer suggestions for where they might find it or whom they might talk to.

Handling a disgruntled and angry customer successfully can be an incredibly rewarding experience. You should take a moment to discuss the call with a colleague or team leader and you should always pat yourself on the back for a job well done.

Remember that as a service giver your top priority is satisfying customers. If you don't do it who will?

1. © Pumpkin Theory  
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## PART 2

### THE VIDEO

Play the video "The Really Angry Customer"

14 minutes

Lead a short discussion around the video

20 minutes

Facilitator suggestion:-

- How do customers like Jackson impact on your day?
- Is it difficult to empathise with a customer's situation when they don't appear to have any empathy for yours?
- Do you think it's the fault of McKenzie or the system that has made Jackson so angry?
- What do you think was the first thing to set Jackson off?

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## Activity 1

15 minutes

## Ineffective Complaint Handling?

- Divide participants into groups of six to eight and ask them what they think the repercussions of poorly handling an angry customer are?
- Go through the responses on the whiteboard and discuss.

Facilitator suggestions: -

- Customer will go elsewhere
- Sales and profits will be negatively effected
- Customers will tell their friends and family about the bad service
- Has an adverse effect on the organisation's reputation
- You miss an opportunity to learn more about your organisation and its customers

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## ACTIVITY 2

20 minutes

## True or False?

- Ask participants to complete the True or False handout.

## H/O # 1

- Go through the handout and discuss the answers. Address any queries the group may have.

Facilitator's copy: -

## TRUE OR FALSE TEST?

Decide whether or not the following statements are true or false.  
Statement

Statement	True/False
Most customer complaints aren't legitimate.	False
Customers get angry when complaints are not taken seriously by the company.	True
Customers' perceptions, attitudes and beliefs define their parameters for complaints.	True
Customer dissatisfaction occurs when there is a gap between what a customer expects and what a customer receives.	True

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Dealing with angry and complaining customers is time consuming and costly. You should get rid of them as quickly as possible.	False
An angry customer who has had the problem dealt with effectively will tell approximately five people about how you fixed it.	True
Exceeding the expectations of a customer who has problems will increase customer loyalty.	True
Satisfying customers should be the top priority of management.	True
Dealing with angry customers is emotionally draining and stressful.	True
When handling complaining and angry customers you should stick strictly to company policy and procedure.	False

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## Activity 3

15 minutes

## Why Do Customers Get Angry?

- Divide participants into the same groups of six to eight and ask them why they think customers get angry?
- Go through the responses on the whiteboard and discuss.

Facilitator suggestions: -

- Their expectations of your organisation have been unmet
- You have failed to deliver on time
- Product or service was of poor quality
- Staff behaviour was inappropriate
- The need for revenge and justice
- Poor communication

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## Activity 4

15 minutes

## Handling the Angry Customer

- Divide participants into the same groups of six to eight and ask them to come up with a list of 5 Do's and Don'ts of handling an angry customer
- Go through the responses on the whiteboard and discuss.

Facilitator suggestions:-

- Do acknowledge the problem is legitimate
- Don't accuse the customer of being at fault
- Do think about the feelings of the customer and show empathy
- Don't give the customer the run around
- Do help the customer communicate clearly
- Don't interrogate the customer
- Do use simple language and avoid jargon
- Don't take the situation personally
- Do remain calm and in control of the situation
- Don't treat the problem as a them against us
- Do thank the customer for bringing the problem to your attention
- Don't interrupt
- Do be polite and respectful
- Don't get defensive and lay blame

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## PART 3

### SUMMARY & DEBRIEF

50 minutes

- Play the Video again.
- Go through some of the training points highlighted in the video using the OHT's.
- Ask for and answer any questions that participants may have.
- Let participants know if and when any follow up training is to be conducted.
- Give participants a copy of Hand Out #2 Summary Sheet.

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# PARTICIPANT HANDOUT MASTERS

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**TRUE OR FALSE TEST?**

Decide whether or not the following statements are true or false.

Statement	True/False
Most customer complaints aren't legitimate.	
Customers get angry when complaints are not taken seriously by the company.	
Customers' perceptions, attitudes and beliefs define their parameters for complaints.	
Customer dissatisfaction occurs when there is a gap between what a customer expects and what a customer receives.	
Dealing with angry and complaining customers is time consuming and costly. You should get rid of them as quickly as possible.	
An angry customer who has had his or her problem dealt with effectively will tell approximately five people of how you fixed it.	
Exceeding the expectations of a customer who has problems will increase customer loyalty.	
Satisfying customers should be the top priority of management.	
Dealing with angry customers is emotionally draining and stressful.	
When handling complaining and angry customers you should stick strictly to company policy and procedure.	

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## SUMMARY SHEET

Customers become angry when they have unmet expectations and the situation is not handled effectively.

Remember that a customer in an attacking mode isn't attacking you personally.

Do not get defensive and do not make excuses. Rather decide to handle the call in a rational way. Apologize when appropriate.

Speak slowly and calmly, never talking down to or accusing the customer of being at fault.

Maintain a positive, professional, polite and respectful attitude.

Start at the beginning and attempt to turn low quality information into high quality information by asking probing & clarifying questions, always explaining why you need certain information

Avoid saying "No" or "Can't be done". If you can't give customers exactly what they want, tell them what you can do.

Avoid transferring calls unless absolutely necessary. Know your limits and explain why you are transferring call. Brief the new person with the customer's problem.

Employ the pumpkin theory if you face personal abuse, threats or harassment.

Take accurate notes of the situation and always discuss difficult calls with colleagues. And finally, when you handle a really angry customer successfully, pat yourself on the back for a job well done.

# OVERHEAD TRANSPARENCY MASTERS

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## OBJECTIVES & AGENDA

After completing this training course you will understand: -

- Why customers become angry
- How to approach a customer who is attacking you personally
- What emotions you should avoid
- When to apologise
- How to turn low quality information into high quality information
- When and where to transfer an angry customer



When dissatisfaction  
is poorly managed  
customers become  
angry.

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# THE PUMPKIN THEORY

Create another association for language you find offensive or difficult to deal with.

Foul Word = Pumpkin

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A customer in an attacking mode  
is not attacking you personally.

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**DO NOT**

**Panic**

**Get defensive**

**Make excuses**

**Talk down to customers**

**Say "No" or "Can't be Done"**

**Accuse them of being at fault**

**Transfer call unless necessary**

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## DO

Remain calm

Show empathy

Take control of the call

Be polite and respectful

Speak slowly and calmly

Apologise when appropriate

Debrief calls with colleagues

Handle calls in a rational way

Assume the problem can be  
solved

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