

DTD Episode 38 Show Notes

Defeat *YOUR* Drama: Too Many Angry Customers! How Can I Respond?

Matt from New York

If you'd like me to share customized strategies for your drama situation go to my website <http://podcast.defeatthedrama.com/defeat-your-drama/>. You can type or record your message. Use your real name or an alias for anonymity. Note that recorded or written messages may be used on the podcast.

Matt from New York wrote in:

I work in a high paced environment and often our customers are very demanding. They can get really condescending and very loud. Often they are angry. Sometimes they even swear. My boss says that we can refuse to serve them if they get too out of hand. I have a tough time staying professional. I want to yell back. Sometimes I do but my boss has said that's unacceptable. I get so mad. How can I respond without losing my job?

Matt, so sorry to hear about your struggles. Let's get you some customized solutions.

As always, In the Defeat Your Drama segments, I will provide solutions based on the information provided. I will obviously not have full details so will provide customized strategies based on what you share. Always consider your own specific circumstances before taking any action. These are suggestions not guarantees.

#1 Don't Take it Personally

I know it's hard. They are yelling at you or treating you like you aren't intelligent. It feels very personal. Keep telling yourself that they aren't angry at you. They are just frustrated at the situation. Picture the negative energy of their anger passing around you rather than at you. You don't need to defend yourself. Try to hear past their method of communication, the loud or condescending tone, and instead focus on their message. Look for the nuggets of

information that will help you help them. What are they frustrated about? What do they need? How can you help them?

You can learn more tips about focusing on message over method from episode #31 <http://goo.gl/x9uuFa>

#2 Maintain a Friendly Tone and Body Language

You already know this but it bears repeating; less than 10% of our communication is from the words we use. We convey most of what we think via our non-verbal cues like body language, tone of voice, volume and speed of speaking. Anytime you are communicating with someone who is showing frustration or anger by elevating their voice or the speed of conversation, the number one goal must be to keep your own tone level. Speak a little slower than normal and keep your volume quieter. If you raise your voice to match theirs they will just elevate their volume to “win” the volume wars. And it may also make them more aggravated. An angry person doesn’t necessarily think to themselves, “oh, they must be speaking louder because I was speaking louder.” No, on the contrary they generally decide that you are yelling at them and forget to consider why.

So, continue to smile and affirm that you are there to help. Keep the pace of your speaking slow and your volume low. Hopefully they will hear you and match your tone.

#3 Be their Hero

Let them vent. A listening ear will often go a long way. Show empathy first. Acknowledge their frustration and assure them that you are there to help. Reiterate that you want to fully understand the issue so that you can find the best course of action to resolve the issue as quickly as possible. Restate what you hear them saying and ask if there is anything else. Once you get a sense of the full picture outline the steps you will take to resolve the situation and make a commitment to follow through.

#4 Do Set Boundaries if They Are Swearing or Won’t Settle Down



If you've tried all of the tactics and they have moved into the world of disrespect and abuse your boss has given you license to end the conversation. In extreme circumstances I suggest you follow through. Begin by reiterating again your desire to help them. Ask them to take a few minutes to calm down a bit. Tell them it's hard to hear what they need when they are yelling or swearing.

#5 Talk to Your Boss About the More Global Issue: What is causing all of the customer frustration?

The fact that this happens often begs the question; why do you have so many angry customers? Ask your boss for permission to work on that as a team. You can lead the charge or ask your boss to head it up. As a team create a list of the main causes of customer frustration. You will see patterns. Are you missing deadlines? Is quality not good? Is communication after a hiccup lacking? Are they waiting in line too long?

Figure out the main causes of customer anger and then engage in some simple process improvement as a team. In episode 13 I covered a very simple process improvement strategy that can be easily adopted. Here's the link: <http://goo.gl/MDv646>