Defusing the Angry Customer

Susan Gaffield
Kentucky Employee Assistance Program

Debbie Hibbard
Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives

VERBAL DE-ESCALATION
What is Verbal De-escalation?

- Nonphysical techniques
- Diffuse anger and tension
- Prevent a hostile situation
- Improve communication under stress

Why Verbal-De-escalation?

- Because we work with the public and provide services
- We are concerned with:
  
  Customer Service
  Customer Satisfaction
  Customer Complaints

- The best way to defuse customer anger is with good customer service.
Escalation

- Rage
- Anger
- Frustration
- Dissatisfaction
- Customer Complaint

- A 2007 consumer survey showed that 70% of customers were in a rage before they call.

Consumer Survey

What makes customers so angry?

- 70% want Apology
- 72% Tell their story or express anger
- 78% Explanation
- 83% Assurance mistake not repeated
- 84% Service or repair
- 69% Thank you for your business
- 57% Money back

Source: Customer Care Measurement & Consulting and Arizona State University (2007)
Customer Satisfaction

Our job is to be polite,
get past their anger, 
and solve the problem.

Verbal de-escalation skills can help us do that.

*Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret.*

---Ambrose Bierce

---

Verbal De-escalation Techniques

Goals

- To calm ourselves
- To calm our customer
- To maintain safety

*People who fight fire with fire usually end up with ashes.*

---Abigail van Buren
Calm Ourselves

Why?
To communicate effectively
  To maintain professionalism
  To solve the problem

Calm Ourselves

How?
Recognize our “Hot Buttons”

Learn how to control our own emotional reactions

*First keep peace with yourself, then you can also bring peace to others.* --Thomas A. Kemp
Calm Ourselves

How? Relaxation Skills

- Improves breathing rhythm with slow deep breaths
- Release tension that builds with stress
- Decrease anger reaction
- Promotes a “thinking” response

Relaxation Skills

Deep Breathing

- Inhale slowly through your nose to the count of 4. Fill up your abdomen, not your chest.
- Exhale slowly through your mouth to the count of 4. Feel your abdomen flatten as the air is released.
- Practice to get a smooth flow of air and to use the abdomen more than the chest.
Relaxation Skills

The Relaxing Sigh

- Sit or stand straight
- Sigh deeply
- Inhale naturally
- Repeat

Calm Ourselves

How?

Cool Thoughts

Make a list of calming thoughts to replace hot ones:

- Stay calm. Getting upset won't help.
- I expect people to be upset when they believe they have been treated badly.
- I am here to help. I can't do that if I'm upset.
- I won't take this personally.
- Listen, breath and focus on the solution.
- I choose my words and feelings, not the customer.
Calm Ourselves

Practice

• Write down a few quick calming thoughts

• Read the list to practice or memorize them

• Imagine yourself feeling calm and communicating calmly under stress.

Why Calm Others

To communicate effectively
To maintain professionalism
To solve the problem

People who fly into a rage always make a bad landing.
-- Will Rogers
Calming Others

How?

Know customers’ “Hot Buttons”

Be polite and choose respect

Give them at least some of what they want

What do customers want?

70% want Apology
72% Tell their story
78% Explanation
83% Assurance mistake not repeated
84% Service
69% Thank you
57% Money back
De-escalation Techniques

On of the best ways to calm others is with your ears.... by listening to them. --Dean Rusk

- Listen
- Empathize
- Validate
- Apologize

De-escalation Techniques

Voice

- Rate
- Volume
- Tone
- Inflection

They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.

--Carl W. Buechner
De-escalation Techniques

Body Language

- Posture
- Hands
- Arms
- Personal Space

---

De-Escalation Techniques

Respectful Attitude

- Facts
- Nonjudgmental
- Cooperative effort
- Explore solutions

*The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn’t being said.*

-- *Winston Churchill*
Safety

- Stay calm
- Listen; repeat with understanding
- Set limits
- Change the focus; clarify facts; what you can do
- Avoid challenging posture
- Keep near an exit
- Pre-arranged signal with staff
- Get assistance; call security
- Leave the room

Summary

- Relax
- Listen
- Empathize
- Disengage
- Discuss
- Offer solutions
- Get assistance
De-escalation Results

- Effective communication
- Cooperative effort
- Problem Solving
- Safety

*It is through cooperation, rather than conflict, that your greatest successes will be derived –Ralph Charell*

Resources at the State Library

Debbie Hibbard
Division of Library Services
Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives
Relaxation and Communication

And a few videos...

- Conflict Communication Skills (DVD)
- How to Handle the Irate, Angry, Rude, and Sometimes Abrasive Caller (DVD)
- That’s Just Rude!: Exploring the Rudeness Matrix (DVD)
How do I find materials?

- KDLA Catalog
  - https://kdla.on.worldcat.org/discovery

- Kentucky Libraries Unbound (KLU)
  - http://kdla.ky.gov/employees/downloadingmedia/Pages/default.aspx
KDLA WorldCat Discovery

Search Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives and beyond.

Search Results
Kentucky Libraries Unbound

More KDLA Services

- **Interlibrary Loan**
  - Get materials we don’t have in our collection

- **Ask A Librarian**
  - Ask a question, get help with research, etc.
Thank you for attending!

To get the PDF:
• In the Files box, click “Defusing PDF”
• “Download File(s)”
• In the pop-up window:
  • “Click to Download”
  • “Save”
  • Choose where to save
  • “Save”

Call KEAP at:
• 502-564-5788
• 800-445-5327
• http://personnel.ky.gov/empl/keap/

Call KDLA at:
• 502-564-8306
• 800-928-7000, option #3
• KDLAReferenceDesk@ky.gov
• facebook.com/kystatelibrary
• @KYStateLibrary