



ClearAction mentors executives for sustainable customer profitability.

www.clearaction.biz
1.877.CEM.ROI.4 toll-free
1.408.687.9700 direct

ClearAction means unique vision and rapid results.

4 Tips for Dealing With Difficult Customers

by Lynn Hunsaker

Are some customers just difficult people? Is there such a thing as a difficult person, anyway? Not really. The accurate viewpoint is it's a difficult situation or a difficult interaction — not a difficult person per se.

Why do difficult situations or interactions occur? Quite simply, people get impatient because of a situation not meeting their expectations. The root causes of resistance to just about any issue are:

- a) concern that their needs will not be understood or met
- b) concern about loss of control or self-esteem

Knowing this can help you de-personalize uncomfortable situations and let go of your natural fight or flight reactions. Let go of your initial emotion to handle the situation from a neutral position.

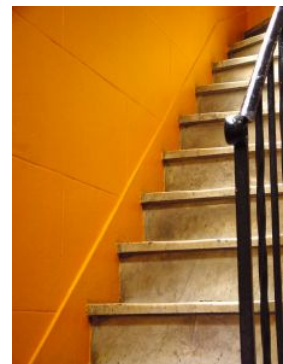
A customer service rep who attended one of my recent classes said she's feeling much happier in her job by conscientiously following the 4 steps to managing resistance:

- 1) identify the issues causing the resistance
- 2) understand the underlying factors of the issues
- 3) provide solutions
- 4) follow-up

Here's how she applied the 4 steps:

- 1) A sample was requested by a channel partner in another country, emphasizing urgency to ship immediately, so the service rep booked the order free of charge and scheduled shipping, but the channel partner wouldn't approve shipment.

- The service rep, frustrated from these situations over the past year, immediately placed herself in a neutral position; this way she found it easier to open herself up for a conversation to start identifying the real issues.
- The channel partner wanted a draft commercial invoice, but the service rep's company has system-generated documents printed at time of shipping, so the approval process was a chicken-and-egg dilemma.



- 2) The service rep strove to understand the underlying issues behind the channel partner's request for a draft commercial invoice: to satisfy the channel partner country's customs requirements to present a legitimate document from the shipper.

3) To provide a solution, the service rep offered an alternative by sending the system-generated order acknowledgment in her company letterhead.

- But the situation went back to step one, because the channel partner was upset that the order acknowledgment listed the sample free of charge.
- The service rep went to step two by asking why a dollar amount was needed in the order acknowledgment: the customs bureau of the channel partner's country requires a price declared to determine customs duties.
- The service rep went to step three by suggesting the solution of entering a unit price under the part number and total price in the special instructions field – this would satisfy the channel partner's need for price documentation and still accurately reflect that her company was shipping the sample free of charge.
- Because of time zone differences, 3 days were consumed without approval – just as it seemed all was resolved, the channel partner requested the service rep to re-print the order acknowledgment with a lower price per unit.
- The service rep felt very frustrated yet immediately placed herself in a neutral position, and went back to steps one and two: the channel partner wanted to save money by paying less customs duties.
- Under-declaring price for customs purposes is against company policy and against federal customs laws, so the service rep escalated the situation to her immediate manager and the regional sales director; they were able to convince the channel partner to accept the current sample order and approve shipment.

4) To follow-up, the service rep reflected on the series of events and realized there was a lack of understanding by her channel partner of federal customs laws in her company's headquarters country, so as a follow-up, she asked her company's export manager to send a letter explaining the relevant customs laws.

- My recommendation is to also ask her company's operations department to set up an automated solution for future sample requests from international channel partners; generally, if one customer has a certain need or concern, there are also many others with the same need or concern.

These 4 steps can make your job much more fun as you become skilled in handling difficult situations. The customer depends on it! And so does your career and your company's long-term success. Do these 4 steps work for you?

Find out how to customize these tips to your situation; contact the author lynn.hunsaker@clearaction.biz.