



Oh No!

You've Been Customer Serviced

Breaking free from scripted support

BY KATE ZABRISKIE

"I understand your frustration." Really? My bank account is overdrawn. I've bounced two checks, and it's because you made a mistake. Unless you're also having fees charged to your account, I'm not feeling it.

"We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused." That's what I was told after my flight was canceled at the last minute, stranding me in an unfamiliar city overnight. Had they pulled the plug earlier in the day, I would have had options. Inconvenience? The experience went well beyond inconvenience. I wasn't cutting it close. I planned. Still, I missed my sister's wedding rehearsal dinner — an irreplaceable moment. Their scripted apology infuriated me. I'm angry just thinking about it.

"Thank you for your patience." Patience? My internet has been down for three days, affecting my ability to work from home. I've called customer service several times and get the same line every time. My patience isn't a virtue; it's a necessity forced by the situation, and their gratitude feels mocking when what I need is action and answers.



Being “customer serviced” is a familiar scenario for many of us — it occurs when service providers rely on a series of well-worn phrases to pacify and calm us, and they end up achieving exactly the opposite effect.

- “I understand your frustration.”
- “I apologize for any inconvenience.”
- “I appreciate your patience during this time.”
- “Thank you for bringing this to my attention.”
- “We value your feedback.”

Has your blood pressure gone up? Do you feel irritated, annoyed or just downright icky? The words designed to de-escalate and reassure through their overuse now function as lighter fluid.

Getting Beyond the Manual

Shifting from scripted interactions or customer service speak to a more conversational approach can transform frustrating customer experiences into fulfilling ones. By communicating naturally and addressing issues directly, you can avoid “customer servicing” the very people you’re there to help.

Here are five tips to help you break free from scripted support and connect with customers on a human level:

Ditch the Jargon and Speak Clearly

Jargon creates a distance between you and the customer. Phrases such as “we understand your frustration” are often overused and lack sincerity. By avoiding jargon and focusing on specific details of the customer’s situation, you show you’re truly listening and empathizing with the experience.

- Instead of: “We understand your frustration.” (Overused!)
- Try: “What you’ve just described should not have happened. I can help.” (Emphasizes empathy and action)

Explain, Don’t Dictate

Scripted phrases such as “per our policy” sound robotic and shut down conversation. They can also make customers feel powerless. Instead, use natural language to explain the relevant policies or procedures. Frame it as a collaborative effort to find the best solution, outline the options available, and work with the customer to find the most suitable path forward.

- Instead of: “Per our policy...” (Sounds robotic)
- Try: “Let me go over the options we have available in this situation...” (Collaborative and informative)

Actively Listen and Encourage Elaboration

Active listening is key to truly understanding the customer’s needs. A generic “So what you’re saying is...” shows that you’ve heard, but it doesn’t necessarily show that you care. By asking specific questions that demonstrate you’ve been paying attention and are digging deeper to understand the root cause, you demonstrate genuine interest in resolving their issue quickly and efficiently.

- Instead of: “So what you’re saying is...” (Generic)
- Try: “Thanks for explaining that. To make sure I have everything clear, could you tell me a bit more about what happened with [Specific detail from the customer’s explanation]?” (Shows genuine interest and encourages elaboration on a specific point)

Personalize Your Approach

A personal touch goes a long way. Using customers’ names and acknowledging their specific situation shows that you care about their experience. It also demonstrates initiative by offering further assistance before they even ask.

- Instead of: “Your reference number is...” (Impersonal)
- Try: “I’ve created a reference number for you, [Customer Name], so you can easily track the issue online as we’re troubleshooting in the background.” (Adds a personal touch)

Offer Solutions, Not Just Apologies

While apologies are important, focusing solely on them doesn’t solve the problem. Empower the customer by offering concrete solutions and outlining the steps you’ll take to fix the issue. A solid plan shows initiative and demonstrates that you’re committed to resolving the situation in their favor.

- Instead of: “We’re sorry for the inconvenience.” (Doesn’t solve problem)
- Try: “Here are a few ways we can fix it...” (Empowers customer)

By adopting these five practices, you can ensure your interactions are engaging, sincere, and helpful, and that none of your customers feel as they’ve been “customer serviced” by you. ☘



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