



BATTLING WITH CUSTOMER SERVICE: HOW TO WIN THE WAR, PART 1 OF 2

Customer service, how I loathe thee. Let me count the ways. The never-ending loop of obnoxious hold music. The pressure to buy new products and services. The poor-quality, outsourced call to a distant land.

A call to customer service can be an infuriating ending to a frustrating experience. You're upset and looking for empathy, but all you encounter is disappointment. Could Company X have done something differently? Probably, but if you follow these tips when dealing with customer service, you'll be in the driver's seat for the next dispute.

1. Be prepared.

Seems basic, right? Unless you've called Company X several times, you're probably not familiar with their required information. Have every tracking number, account number, itemized statement, and order number before you call. Customer service representatives are held responsible for torturous call-handling metrics designed by masochistic management. Length of call, resolution (if the customer calls back to the company within an allocated amount of time), and randomly monitored calls are measured stringently. Bottom line: they want to help you quickly and completely, lest a superior crack a whip.

2. Be nice.

Customer service representatives speak with upset, irritated, and/or irate people all day. Every day. You may not agree with a credit denial, but screaming "the customer is always right, (expletive)!" will not help. Be pleasant and the rules may be malleable. Be another unpleasant customer and the guidelines will be set in stone.

3. Know when to call, know when to write.

If you need to request a price quote, add/remove a feature, or ask for explanation of a bill, e-mail is the most efficient route for your correspondence. For repair concerns or credit requests, call customer service. Repair specialists will need to troubleshoot and get access information should a technician need to be dispatched. Credit requests can be handled via e-mail, however, it is easier to reply with a "credit denied" form letter than to deny credit to a real, live person.

4. Get on record.

If something is not working properly, call the company immediately. If there is a cable, satellite, or phone outage, Company X will only be able to diagnose and correct the problem if they are notified a problem exists. This also establishes a record of communication should you need to request a credit or refund at a later date.

5. Be persistent, but not obnoxious.

Many companies have guidelines for dispensing credit that require denial the first time for any request that is not a previously-reported "out of service" issue or a known billing error. The second time a credit request is made, these guidelines can be relaxed. If you have followed the "be nice" tip above, you may be rewarded with your credit request.

Following these five tips will help you get what you want in the most efficient manner possible. Stay tuned for the next installment to find out how you can aggravate the customer service experience and actually delay resolution!

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