



Enterprising Rural Families™

This newsletter is an instrument of the *Enterprising Rural Families: Making It Work* program of the University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service. For further information concerning the Enterprising Rural Families program or on-line course contact information@eRuralFamilies.org or go to <http://eRuralFamilies.org/>.

TIP OF THE MONTH:

WORK TEAMS

With the emphasis on business and marketing planning in today's world, taking stock of who contributes to your business and what part they play in the overall operations, are key factors in developing a winning strategy for your operation.

So who is on your work team? You may think it is just family members who help with the business, but in widening the circle, you'll want to include non-family employees, seasonal help, advisors, lenders and others who you feel have an important stake in your business and your success.

Work teams provide feedback on labor issues, management style, advertising and promotion, distribution and other issues about your business. Meeting regularly with your work team gives you input from various sources and on many topics, Does a new procedure seem to be working? Are tasks getting done or would shifts in labor and duties work better? Are customers satisfied with your business?

Some producers feel more comfortable forming concentric circles of work teams: (1) family members, (2) employees, (3) advisors and stakeholders.

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Dealing with Angry or Hostile Customers

Angry and difficult customers are a challenge that every entrepreneur will face. When your time comes, will you be ready? (Gaebler Ventures)

Small business owners know that angry customers are an unavoidable part of doing business. Sooner or later, you are going to encounter people who are not happy about some aspect of their relationship with your company.

Robert Bacal, author of *Defusing Hostile Customers*, describes the difference between angry and hostile behavior. Anger refers to an internal state (feeling) experienced by people. It can be shown through a raised voice, animated gestures, or turning red. Hostile behavior, on the other hand, is intended to intimidate, throw you off balance, demean or control you, or make you feel guilty. There can be some latitude when dealing with angry behavior, but employees must be on guard if the behavior appears hostile.

It is important to make safety the bottom line. Your safety and the safety of co-workers, customers, and the general public is critical. Always make protecting yourself the top priority.

AVERT violence

If the situation is not so tense that you have to leave (or have the person removed), you may want to use the following steps that can help AVERT violence. These steps are designed to reduce the level of anger so that any necessary negotiations can be more effective. (These steps, in altered form, also appear in David Burns' book *Feeling good: The new mood therapy*.)

Ask. When confronted with an angry customer, many people react with fear or defensiveness. To avoid succumbing to these emotions, you need to find out what is really happening. Ask the person a series of specific questions designed to find out *exactly* what he or she wants or means. If the person attacks you with vague, insulting terms, ask him or her to be more specific and point out exactly what it is the person dislikes.

Viewpoint. Focus on seeing the situation from the customer's point of view. You may assume that you know all the "facts" of the situation. But remember that the other person may see the situation differently and even have their own version of the facts.

Express agreement. Regardless of whether the customer is wrong or right, try to find some way to agree. Taking a "we-can-solve-this-problem" attitude is always helpful. It reassures the angry person that his or her opinion is valued. When a customer is attacking you, the last thing he or she expects is for you to agree with something that's been said. When finding something with which to agree, however, make sure it doesn't place yourself or your company in a compromising position.

Refocus. By the time you ask for the unmet expectation or demand, understand the customer's viewpoint, and indicate where you agree, much of the anger often disappears. This is a time to refocus with the customer, to find out how he or she would like to proceed.



Deal with the person and then with the problem. People often need to vent, regardless of whether you're the appropriate target.

Come to ***Terms***. The terms on which you and the customer can proceed should represent a win-win situation. At this point in the conversation, explain your viewpoint tactfully and assertively and state what you are willing to do.

Remember, the AVERT technique is not intended to be a negotiation tool, but rather a method for reducing anger so rational decisions can be made and personal and workplace safety can be maintained.

But an angry customer isn't necessarily a former customer. In fact, the majority of angry customers will continue to do business with you, especially if you go the extra step to provide a satisfactory resolution to their problem.

Gaebler Ventures offers some simple things you can do to train your staff to deal with angry customers and keep them coming back.

• **Resolve the Problem Quickly** The worst thing you can do when dealing with angry customers is to put off their complaint or send them on a wild goose chase to find someone who will help them.

• **Don't Take It Personally** Even though the problem may have been out of your control, the customer will likely focus frustration toward an employee because at that moment the employee represents the company. Avoid the temptation to take the complaint personally.

• **Admit Your Mistakes** If you or a member of your staff has made a mistake, admit it. Sometimes simply admitting a mistake will be enough to satisfy the customer and resolve the problem.

• **Be Nice, But Firm** It's good business to always maintain an attitude of courtesy and respect toward your customers, even when they are treating you badly. But being nice doesn't mean that you have to always give in, either.

• **Support Your Employees** Your employees need to know that you will stand behind them when they are placed in the difficult position of dealing with an irritated customer.

• **Make a Peace Offering** If all else fails, make a peace offering in the form of a minor concession or free merchandise. A peace offering communicates that customers are important to you and that you are willing to do what it takes to make things right.

For an in-depth discussion of dealing with angry customers, view the following publication: *The Personal Nature of Agriculture: Lenders and Angry Customers*. B-1113 http://ces.uwyo.edu/LIFE/Personal_Nature_Main.htm

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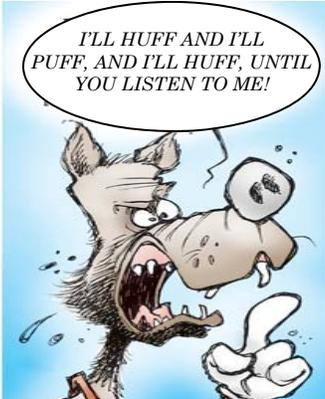
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I'LL HUFF AND I'LL PUFF, AND I'LL HUFF, UNTIL YOU LISTEN TO ME!

TO PACIFY ANGRY CUSTOMERS YOU MUST ...

- 1. Resolve the problem quickly.**
- 2. Don't take it personally.**
- 3. Admit your mistakes.**
- 4. Be nice, but firm.**
- 5. Support your employees.**
- 6. Make a peace offering.**



Thank you so much!



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