

De-escalatingirate Customers in the Workplace- The Power of “Yes”

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The Events of 2020....

- The stress that “essential” workers feel is at an all-time high. You are doing your best to show up for work and interact with customers, while at the same time taking care of your own needs and the needs of your family.
- Customers are not able to accomplish important tasks with the speed and efficiency that they are used to. They may be frustrated, angry, and even scared. This is a recipe for confrontation and violence in the workplace.

My Job Has Never Been More Difficult



Using Verbal Skills to De-Escalate an Irrate Customer. Let's discuss....

2 strategies:

- The Power of Yes
- Distraction-

The Angry Customers Are Ready to See You Now



The Power of Yes

- When confronted by an irate customer, consider starting your verbal response to the customer with the word “Yes.”
- It makes no difference that the answer to their concern will eventually be a “No.” When the first word the person hears is “Yes,” followed by an acknowledgment of their concern, it’s a game-changer.

Examples

- Yes, I understand how that would make you angry...
- Yes, I understand why you feel the way you do...
- Yes, I understand what you would like me to do...

The Fight is On

- What happens in the brain of an irate customer when they hear “No, I can’t do that” or “No...that is not possible...”

Fight or flight mechanism

Autonomic Nervous System

They do not process your objective reasoning that follows the word “No.”

It's Not Personal.....!

- Somehow, saying “Yes” makes the confrontation less of a personal dispute.
- Saying “No” can be perceived by the irate customer as a personal confrontation with the employee. This could increase the motivation of the customer to threaten or assault the employee.

Is Their Brain on Auto Pilot?

- Midbrain and cerebellum
 - Older parts of the evolutionary brain
 - Cerebellum coordinates automatic movements
- The amygdala, which alerts the body in survival situations.
- Primitive

Much of the following content comes from a great author:

- Joe Dispenza D.C. - Author of *Evolve Your Brain- The Science of Changing Your Mind* , 2007

The Brain in Action

- People act unconsciously most of the time
- The customer needs just one stimulus from the environment...and that stimulus may YOU saying “No”...and an entire set of programmed set of responses and behaviors starts to happen...

Transitioning From Yes, to Reality

- Example:

“Yes, I can see why you would be angry at the bank. I am sorry that this delayed the purchase of your house. However, the banker you are yelling at cannot solve your problem right now.”

“Let’s figure out how we can best help you....”

The “Distraction” Technique

- Make a statement completely off topic that is complimentary, or expresses interest in the person based on something obvious, like the message on their tee shirt or their baseball hat. We will discuss....

Words Convey Confidence

- Use the correct words

If you “know...” then don’t say “I think....”

If it “is,” then don’t say “It may be...”

There is an analogy we will discuss here... the skills of conducting an interrogation.

Be In Control



“If You Could Sit Over There...”

- Giving direction to an unhappy customer as to where the person should sit, stand, or wait, etc
- Act like you are in charge of the customer interaction. Give direction, be clear with instruction.
- Confidence in your answer
- Confidence in your body language

“Soft” Strategies to Handle the Angry Customer

- Assign them to a staff member that they will always deal with that is skilled at dealing with difficult people.
- Take the time to walk them through every step of the process. Spoon feed them and even assist them gather the information they need.
- Document that you did so, and document what you accomplished with them. This is time consuming and frustrating, and well worth it.

Policy

- Blame it on Policy!!!

Probable Scenarios with Angry Customers

- Plan and prepare ahead of time
- Is there a policy...
- Is the policy communicated AHEAD of time
- Examples include.....The customer that is not wearing a covid mask in your office

The Angry Customer

The Dangerous Customer

- Are they the same person?
- How do you know when the angry customer transitions to a dangerous customer?

Not Acceptable



Customer Behavior - Not Acceptable

- This strategy of “Yes” should not give the impression that it is somehow our responsibility as an employee or a business owner to mollify a customer acting in this way.

- The purpose of this strategy is:

To give our staff members more reaction time, and a better opportunity to succeed in a dangerous situation.

Threatening behavior is never appropriate, and should not be tolerated.

“Choose to Lose”a Customer

- If you have a customer that demonstrates this behavior, act immediately to make sure they are no longer a customer.
- Not as easy for us governmental or administrative employees....

“Hard” Strategies

Is it possible to tell them they must have an appointment?

Tell them that bags or large containers are not allowed in the room-
blame it on policy.

Position yourself safely in your office or interview room. Is the customer between you and the door, blocking your exit?

Consider sitting where you can defend yourself quicker and make a fast exit from the room when the customer becomes irate or threatens you with a weapon.

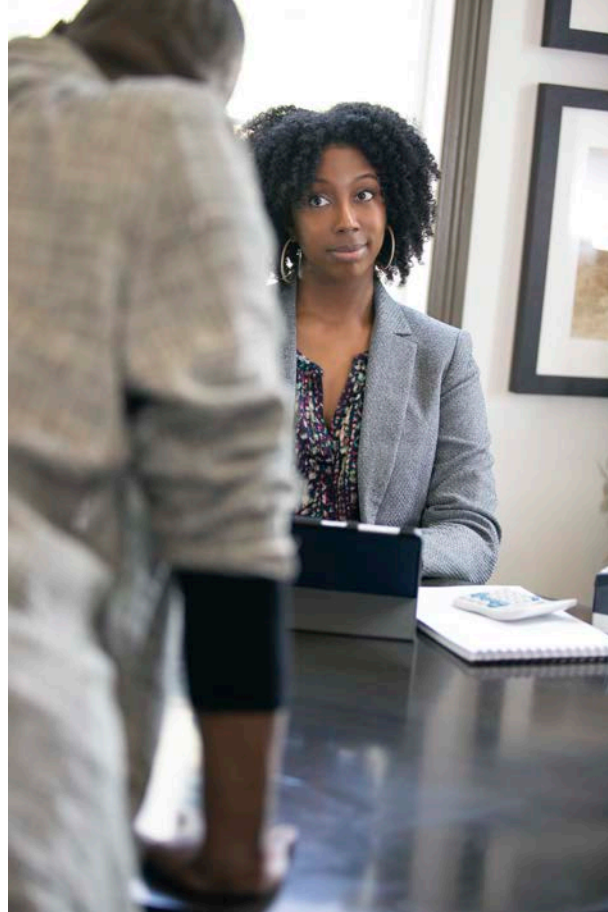
Hard Strategies continued

- If you have a feeling that the customer has a weapon, ask them. Being direct will quite often result in a truthful response. Being direct will not cause any negative or unsafe situation that did not already exist. Being direct also exhibits confidence. (Taking the bull by the horns!)
- If the customer makes a veiled threat of any kind, do not ignore it. A verbal threat, even if said just in anger, is unacceptable. Deal with this comment before taking any action on the customer's business.
- Try joking about a bomb at an airport...

Decision Tree example

- If the customer starts to shout loudly at me, these are my options.
- If the customer slams his fist down on my desk, these are my options.
- If the customer won't sit down, or stands between me and the door, these are my options.
- If the customer reaches into a case, or I have a reasonable belief that this person is going to harm me, these are my options....

It's Ok if You Decide That This Appointment is Over



Planning and Preparation

Invest the time and training to analyze your options ahead of time...

What you will do during a crisis, and when you will do it.

Plan for this type of situation and consider and analyze all your options, before there is a crisis.

Active Threat Strategies

- Separate from the offender when you feel the situation has regressed to the point that you feel unsafe. Or place obstacles between you and the offender if you can't escape from the area.
- If you are hiding an object to use as a weapon for self defense, take it out only when you are legally justified to use it, and when you have decided that you are ready and willing to use it.

(don't use to it to scare or threaten)



- Evacuate or Lockdown. Call 911 and let the police deal with this person.

Safety Policy and Training

- *Red Binder Syndrome*. It means that the decision makers have a written crisis plan, but it won't work. They don't know it won't work because they have never practiced it.
- Unfortunately, many businesses and organizations suffer from the *Red Binder Syndrome*, or, they still have no crisis plan at all.

We Should Not Just Hope for the Best....



Crisis Training

- We must plan and practice what to do when an active shooter or other dangerous intruder is able to pass through our security barriers and enters our office or building. Most of us work in office environments that don't even have any security barriers.
- Training provides the means to regain your composure, recall at least some of what you have learned, and commit to action. Athletes and musicians refer to this as muscle memory.
- Repetition in training and preparedness shortens the time it takes to orient, observe, act, and decide.

Crisis Training continued

- With an active shooter/ active threat situation, evacuation is always the first and best option to consider. If you can get out, do so immediately.
- In some situations, it is not possible or safe to evacuate, and we have to consider hiding, or going into a “Lockdown.”
- A Lockdown usually requires pre-planning that cannot be done during the attack.
- Do you have a workspace that you can secure and be hidden from view on a moment’s notice?

Mass Notification System MNS

For those of us in office buildings with multiple floors, or large factory type spaces, we must create a communication system that can be used to immediately notify staff members throughout the facility that there is an active threat in the building. Without a notification system, many people in the building won't even know what is happening.

Chain of Command

Your organization must have a chain of command inside your facility when the leader is not on site and immediately available.

We will discuss in more detail.....

Effective Building “Security.”

Proactive interaction with visitors.

We will discuss in more detail.....

A Culture of Reporting

- Employers and employees must create a culture of reporting concerning threats made by co-workers. Similar to making a joke about a bomb in an airport, joking about violence or threatening violence is no longer acceptable in our workplace.

What a Year...



The 2020 virus has created a new shopping environment, with new safety concerns

- For maybe the first time in our society, people are wearing masks. We are getting used to not being able to recognize people we are interacting with, or are in close proximity to.
- In the past, masks were actually unlawful to wear in some areas, banks for sure.
- Now every customer in a store is masked- what a great opportunity for a criminal to take advantage of this situation.

The 2020 virus has created an new office building environment, with new safety concerns

- For employees returning to their office, and their office building- there are far less employees around. You may be the only person using the 3rd floor for example. You may be alone in the building....
- There are far fewer people to help you, or to spot danger
- We have contractors and vendors cleaning work areas. Are they even real contractors? Would you even question it?
- What a perfect opportunity to be a burglar, or worse.
- There is reduced security staff, if any.

Solutions



Solutions

Make eye contact with people that are:

- Sharing the ATM kiosk area with you
- Entering an elevator, or staircase with you
- Take note of physical features like hair color and style, not clothing necessarily because a bad guy may remove clothing like hats and jackets during their escape

Conclusion

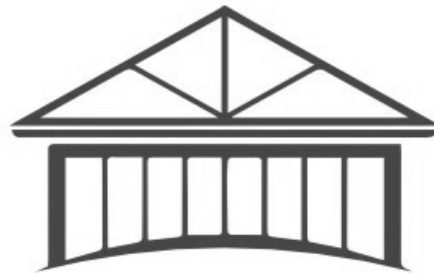
- Training for a low probability, high risk event that most of us would not be prepared for is the foundation of crisis training. It does not require special skills or equipment. It requires only thoughtful planning and preparation.

Thank You for Participating

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Serve and Protect Law LLC™ can help companies with Workplace Violence and Active Shooter prevention, resources, and training.

We provide companies with safety solutions for their employees, and we help them plan and prepare for any Crisis Situation that could be dangerous to their employees, or their business.

- We conduct facility risk assessments for commercial buildings;
- Write policies and procedures to make organizations OSHA compliant;
- Provide training to company employees;
- Conduct table-top training exercises for company leaders preparing them for a Crisis Situation, and
- Conduct company-wide Active Threat training exercises that all employees participate in.