

Challenging callers

Information and suggestions to help you deal with some of the more challenging callers you may come across.

Sometimes callers may become angry or rude while you're talking with them. This could be for a number of reasons, such as they're frustrated waiting for their payment to come through or they feel like they're being given the run around to solve an issue.

For information about handling callers who make threats against people (including themselves) or the Ministry please go to: [Threats and Security](#)

More information: [Challenging Callers - Doogle](#)

The difference between an inappropriate comment, a direct or an indirect threat

Inappropriate comments

Inappropriate comments include yelling, shouting, insulting, offensive conversation, unwanted sexual overtones and swearing.

Example: *"No wonder you guys get shot"*.

This isn't a threat, this is just an Inappropriate comment, often used with MSD to be insulting.

Direct threats

A direct threat identifies a specific target and is delivered in a straightforward, clear and explicit manner.

Example: *"I am going to come down to the office and kill you"*

It's direct, specific, and targeted.

Indirect threats

An indirect threat tends to be vague, unclear and ambiguous. The plan, the intended victim, the motivation, and other aspects of the threat are masked or equivocal.

Example: *"Do I need to go down to the Office and hurt someone to get this sorted?"*

This is an indirect threat as they are trying to justify these actions while keeping the context of the threat vague.

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Angry, abusive or inappropriate comments (but not threats)

You are not expected to listen to swearing and abuse.

Where the caller is verbally abusive (including yelling, shouting, insulting, offensive conversation, unwanted sexual overtones and swearing) you are not expected to listen to such calls. During these calls, make sure you get all the facts as this will help you understand the caller's needs. Listen to what they're saying and take notes if you need to.

During these calls

- make sure you acknowledge how they're feeling – you don't have to agree or justify matters but sometimes clients just want to feel heard
- apologise if you need to – but be sincere
- make sure you get all the facts as this will help you understand the caller's needs
- listen to what they're saying and take notes if you need to
- **never say:** "It's our policy" – an angry client does not want to hear about ministry policy or have someone else blamed

Remember, try not to:

- lose your temper – if you're both angry, you will never find a solution
- be defensive, aggressive or abrupt
- interrupt or try to apply logic – angry people are often not logical

- blame anyone – either the caller, yourself or the Ministry

At any time during the call, you can always place the client on hold.

Managing the call

1. Keep the client focused on moving towards a solution. Ask the client to stop the behaviour so you can both focus on the matter at hand:

- “[Client name] I really want to help today, however it is difficult with you talking to me in this way, so if we could please focus on...”
- “[Client name] I can hear you’re upset, but I won’t be able to help you with this if you continue to treat me this way...”
- “[Client name] I don’t appreciate the way you are speaking/treating me; the Ministry doesn’t tolerate this kind of behaviour. Please stop.”

2. When you do not feel safe during a call: You can transfer the call to a manager or end the call.

If the client is continuing in their behaviour and the call is not progressing you can transfer the call to your manager or warn you may end call:

- “[Client name], I am going transfer you to a manager at the <office / contact centre> to assist you with your enquiry.”
- “[Client name] if the swearing/yelling continues I may need to end this call.”

3. When warning to end the call: be sure that the tone in your voice is not threatening.

We want to use this as an opportunity for the client to change their behaviour and work with us, rather than escalate the situation.

4. If the behaviour continues you can politely terminate the call.

- “[Client name] I’ve asked you to stop, I will now end the call.”

Where caller details are known the event should be entered in [STAR](#) and a CEN added (templates below).

Call escalated to a manager

Kia ora, Note Type: Engagement Log Note subject: Client Engagement Short Description: Call escalated Contents: Client's call was escalated to Service Manager Client Service Support [SM name] Ng mihi
Reset

Call terminated

Kia ora, Note Type: Engagement Log Note subject: Client Engagement Short Description: Call terminated Contents: Client's call was terminated due to aggressive or abusive behaviour Ng mihi
Reset

If a client makes a threat or comment in support of harm towards the Ministry or our people, see: [Threats and Security](#)

Impersonating a client

We handle huge amounts of information about people's lives so keeping this information safe at all times is really important. To keep this information safe, you must be sure the caller is genuine so no personal information is given to people who don't have the right to it or who are trying to commit fraud. You can do this by thoroughly [ID'ing and verifying the client](#) at the beginning of the call.

At times, people will call us pretending to be clients. This could be for a number of reasons, the most common reasons are they're trying to:

- access private client information e.g., current address or bank account number
- change private client information e.g., stopping the client's benefit
- get a client's payment

CSR process

When you're talking to someone and have doubts about their identity, ask additional [verifying questions](#)

Still have doubts? Don't proceed with the call and politely decline their request for information - if the caller is unhappy with this, transfer them to a Service Manager Client Service Support.

If the caller was posing as a client, complete the below template and email it to your service manager (cc in your Contact Centre Manager).

Caller posing as a client - info template

Kia ora, I've just spoken with someone who was posing as a client, the details from the call are as follows: - Date and time of call: - Client's SWN: - Phone number displayed: - What information the caller requested: - What information was given to the caller: - What identifiers were used, and did the caller provide these before being asked? - Was the caller hesitant in their responses to questions relating to identifiers? - Was the caller Male / Female/ unable to identify? - Were there any distinctive characteristics of the caller's voice? - Was there anything else unusual about the call? A copy of this information has been saved to CMS. Ng mihi

Reset

Your Service Manager Client Service Support will notify the client's case manager immediately if you suspect an impostor caller has been trying to access a client's file. The case manager may discuss options with the client (where appropriate).

For details on what to do if you realise during/after the call that it wasn't the client you were speaking to, see [When a client tells you that someone has stolen their information](#)

Repeat callers

Sometimes clients will ring repeatedly. This can be for a variety of reasons e.g., following up on their benefit application

If you have a repetitive caller, always try to help:

"I've noticed you've phoned a few times today about this and I'd like to help resolve this for you."

Ask:

- What is the client calling about?
- Has the client already called before about the same reason?
- Are you able to resolve the call without having the client call back?
- Are there any notes on the client's record?
- Is the client unhappy about a letter, can you access the letter and go through this with the client?
- Is the client requesting to speak with their case manager? Can the client be referred to the Manager Client Service Operations of the service centre for their site?
- Is the client frustrated and having a vent, or are they being unreasonable and a nuisance?

If the client is upset that things have not yet been completed or processed, reiterate the following:

- The service centre has 5 working days to complete the processing once they've received everything
- Once an email/voicemail has arrived, the office has 24 hrs to action it and/or call the client back
- If the delay is putting them into hardship, you can always discuss ways we can help with hardship assistance now or offer to request through the region S2P queue for an appointment/refer as a walk-in

Only offer to send an email or transfer a caller if it has gone past these standards.

Managing Challenging Callers

Service Manager Client Service Support | This page offers links to helpful documents which offer guidance when managing challenging and difficult callers.

Here is a list of documents available and a summary of what they each cover:

- [Dealing with angry callers](#)
This document offers 9 helpful tips for dealing with angry callers.
- [Master tips](#)
This document offers master tips for managing challenging callers including some useful phrases and a step by step process for how to handle the call from start to finish.
- [Listening tips, tricks and skills](#)
This document offers tips on how to use active listening to resolve calls.
- [Dealing with different or difficult people](#)
This document offers techniques and strategies for managing conversations. It offers some useful phrases and examples of how to handle challenging calls.

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1. Acknowledge the other person's anger quickly. Nothing adds more fuel to someone's fire than having their anger ignored or belittled. The faster you verbally recognize their anger, the better.

2. Make it clear that you're concerned. Tell them you realise just how angry they are. Let them know you're taking the situation seriously. Make notes of every possible detail they give you.

3. Don't hurry them. Be patient, and let them get it all out. Never try to interrupt or shut them up. In many cases, the best move is to simply listen. They'll wind themselves down eventually. In some cases, they'll realise they blew the situation out of proportion and feel foolish for it. They're then likely to accept nearly any solution you offer.

4. Keep calm. Most angry people say things they don't really mean. Learn to let those things pass.

5. Ask questions. Your aim is to discover the specific things that you can do to correct the problem. Try to get precise information about the difficulties the problem caused, rather than a general venting of hot air.

6. Get them talking about solutions/options. This is where you'll learn just how reasonable this client is. By the time you get to this step, their anger should have cooled enough to discuss the challenge rationally.

7. Agree on a solution/options. After you know exactly what the challenge is, you're in a position to look for some kind of action that will relieve the challenge. Propose something specific. Start with whatever will bring them the best and quickest relief. Don't get into a controversy over pennies at this point.

8. Agree on a schedule. Once you've agreed on a solution, set up a schedule for its accomplishment. Agree to a realistic time frame that you know you can handle. The biggest mistake you can make is to agree to something that can't be done. More importantly another CSR will get it because you haven't come through for the client!

9. Meet your schedule. Give this schedule top priority. You've talked yourself into a second chance with this client, so make sure you don't blow it. Once you've satisfied the client with regard to this situation, you'll have earned another opportunity to serve their needs in the future...and the needs of those they'll tell about how well you handled it.

REMEMBER - DON'T OVER PROMISE.

Master Tips

No matter how angry or unreasonable your client is, your ultimate three goals are to:

- * Calm them down
- * Communicate your understanding of their problem, empathize, fix it and
- * Hear a hearty 'thank you!' when it's over

Pre Call/Frame-up

Assume that the Client has a Right to be Angry

Nobody makes mistakes on purpose, but they do happen. Working in our Contact Centre means you are going to encounter an irate client at some time. The most common response is to evaluate the merit of the complaint while you're listening to it. Try to curb that common response and replace it with the assumption that the client has a right to be angry, even before you know the details. Perhaps the client feels betrayed because the service did not meet expectations. The client may be angry because he or she made incorrect assumptions that led to improper expectations. The client may be angry because of previous experiences, previous contacts with the ministry or simply because the problem occurred at a very inconvenient time in the clients schedule. Regardless of the circumstances, accept the client has the privilege to be irate. Listen carefully to how the anger is expressed so you can find the root cause of the emotion.

Keep Cool

Try to remain calm and don't take the situation personally. This may be easier said than done, especially when a client is screaming about a problem that you had no part in creating. However remember "Customer Service Representatives who control their emotions deal from a position of strength."

Belief

This is the cornerstone of handling a client's interaction with you. Yes, the client may be lying and be incorrect about their situation. It is important to understand that the client believes that someone or something has wronged them. That is their belief.

Discussion

- *Talk with the person next to you about a call you took where the client was angry:*
 - *Did you have an immediate reaction?*

THE GREETING

Always greet the callers the same way, with the same pitch and tone to your voice. Smile as you answer the phone (yes, people can really tell)! Your 'body language' – in this case your tone, inflection, pitch - can say more about you, than the words that come out of your mouth. It's just like an actor going on stage, when you put your headset on, you become the ministry's contact centre representative. You are on 'stage'.

Discussion

- *Sit back to back with the person next to you*
- *Repeat how you would normally answer the screen pop*
- *Ask for their feedback about whether you had a smile on your face when you said it – did they 'hear' it*

LISTENING

You will very quickly hear how the client is feeling. Once you've asked the person to explain their problem or issue to you, it's then crucial that you simply listen before you say anything.

Ask yourself 'Are they being angry/aggressive or just assertive?' – there's a difference!

Assertive communication is a constructive way of expressing feelings and opinions. People are not born assertive; their behavior is a combination of learned skills. Assertive behavior enables you to:

- a. Act in your own best interests.
- b. Stand up for yourself without becoming anxious.
- c. Express your honest feelings.
- d. Assert your personal rights without denying the rights of others.

Assertive behavior is different from passive or aggressive behavior in that it is:

- a. Self-expressive
- b. Honest
- c. Direct
- d. Self-enhancing
- e. Constructive, not destructive

Assertive behavior includes both what you say and how you say it.

Listen to the problem, rather than the criticism. That can be hard to do when someone appears to be attacking you. However, it is absolutely essential to focus on "what" is making the person angry rather than on the anger itself. Stop and listen to your client's complaint. I'm not certain whether it's natural instinct or just plain stubbornness – but as soon as a client starts to complain, we start to think of how we will respond to the accusation before we are done listening, and too often the case, already have the response ready to fight back. Take a second, relax, and listen – hear what is being said. On occasions a complaining client will be rude, angry, and use vulgar language - stay the course and remain calm and level headed.

Let the angry client talk through their problems and get it all out of their system without interrupting. Allow the client to express their opinions. Allow them to communicate their feelings however they choose to without passing judgement. If you interrupt the client, you will make them more irate. It is like pouring petrol on a raging fire. By interrupting them 'mid-flow' they are likely to be highly charged emotionally and you run the risk of them getting even more upset. As they talk make indications that you are listening such as "uh huh", "OK", "really?", etc.. This step is important because the more time a client spends airing their grievances, the more time they have to calm down.

By letting them speak until they've completed what they want to say, you'll soon become aware of a plateau which is the point at which their anger is at its fiercest and then, once this climax point has been reached, they'll start to slow down and regain their composure before reaching the end of what they've had to say – Then, and only then, is it your time to start talking.

Take written notes if necessary to better understand why the person is upset. Ask questions, gather the facts and assess the problem.

The vast majority of client complaints have some legitimacy to them, so this should always be your first assumption. Write important information down to ensure accuracy; to help you get to the bottom of the problem; and make it easier for you to relate the situation to someone else if needed. Avoid making the client repeat themselves, this will only frustrate the client more and they will think you are not listening. Put yourself in their shoes – how would you feel?

Discussion

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A communication skill called active listening is especially useful in emotional situations because it enables you to demonstrate that you understand what the other person is saying and how he or she is feeling about it. Responding productively to emotional statements can have a positive affect. Active listening means restating, in your own words, what the other person has said. It's a check of whether your understanding is correct. This demonstrates that you are listening and that you are interested and concerned.

Active listening responses have two components:

- a. Naming the feeling that the other person is conveying
- b. Stating the reason for the feeling

Here are some examples of active listening statements:

"Sounds like it's really upset you with what happened at Service Centre."

"I can tell this has annoyed you getting this second letter"

"You sound really frustrated as you can't get an answer to this."

"It makes you angry when you get told two different things."

"Sounds like you're really worried about what you were told."

"I can hear you're feeling very frustrated about this situation that's occurred."

"I can understand that how you are feeling if that happened."

"I understand that's it's not OK to have to ring 3 times to find out."

Actively listening is not the same as agreement. It is a way of demonstrating that you intend to hear and understand another's point of view.

Listen to the inflections and emphasis that the client places on specific topics to identify the emotional catalyst. Listen to the emotion as well as the words. This will help you to identify the specific item or items that need primary attention. Resolving a technical issue may be only partially effective if it does not also address the client emotional concerns. It may not be possible to completely resolve the emotional distress, but it is appropriate to acknowledge it.

Deal with the emotion first, then the problem. Remember that the client anger is not directed at you personally, even if the client's language is directed at you. If the client's language is attacking and borderline abusive, it is because the client is looking for acknowledgement and response to the emotional distress as well as the technical or administrative issues. It may be necessary to repeatedly acknowledge the clients emotion to diffuse the situation and reassure the client that you are attentive to the importance of the emotional distress as well as the technical issue e.g.

Client is very upset about not getting her accommodation supplement paid into her bank account this week.....

'I can hear that this has really upset you as you were expecting this money' or 'I can see that this has made you really angry, because you believed it was going to be paid this week'

It's often the emotional distress that is connected to the issue/problem that is causing the client to behave this way. In the case above, the client may have been waiting for this money to pay for her child's camp fees and as a consequence, she has had to try and make other arrangements with the school for this.

Do not respond with emotion.....

When the client is done venting and you have acknowledged the emotion that they are feeling (you may also detect that there is a 'plateau'); then in a calm, non-judgmental tone, repeat their problem. An example is:

"So what I hear you saying is that, you dropped off your application for accommodation supplement last Tuesday and you believed that this would be actioned and the payment in your account this week, is that correct?"

By repeating the problem at hand, you've demonstrated your ability to the client that you heard and understood their problem.

Listen and clarify. Never defend or justify.

The client doesn't care if it's busy or if you're having a bad day, they only care that they get taken care of. No excuses, just solutions.

Above all be patient, polite and professional. It becomes more difficult for a rude client to keep attacking someone who is treating them with respect.

Sometime the client anger will erupt again and return like another set of waves. When that happens, be patient and wait for the client to run out of steam before you approach the fire again. Acknowledge the emotion and reiterate your compassion, acknowledge the client right to be angry and the catalyst for the emotional distress. Take quiet deep breaths and wait patiently for your turn to speak. We call this shifting gears

Discussion and practice

ANOTHER LITTLE TRICK.....

When you encounter a loud and abusive client, respond by speaking softly and a bit slower and with a very steady tone. If you try to shout over the client or interrupt, then the client will concentrate on the verbal battle for attention and will not pay attention to the importance of your message. It will become a battle ground. Often the client will reduce their tone and volume to match yours.

Ultimately the client does want your advice and assistance to resolve the problem. Once the client remembers why he or she contacted you, the client will be receptive to your soft spoken conversation.

Don't allow yourself to dehumanize the client. Sometimes you can pretend the client is standing in front of you. It will be more difficult to lose your temper if you picture the client standing there.

Responding under pressure -

One of the main problems you can face is that when under the pressures of a really tough conversation your logical thinking mechanism can desert you. It's a medical fact, that when we perceive ourselves to be "under attack", our brain functions focus upon "fight or flight" objectives, leaving us exposed when asked to perform a simple task (think of the exam questions, the driving test, the simple question on a TV game show!). It is therefore vital that you are able to develop useful phrase to use (see examples above) and think about which ones are most likely to work for you and best reflect you and the ministries values to utilise in such situations. Talk about this with your team, examine your experiences, compare these with the each other and rework appropriate responses.

Empathy

Be careful with being too empathic - Empathy implies that you feel the same way as the client and truly understand their feelings. It can create further issues to say "I understand your anger" – but if you do not truly understand, the client may shoot back "You have no idea!"

APOLOGISE IF YOU NEED TO

If the client has been getting the runaround, and you are still not the person who has the answer, tell the client that you will find out who can help and try to fix it.

Apologise if you need to. Apologise can sometimes be interpreted as admission of guilt. There are three types of apology that can be used – choose the most applicable:

Direct: "I apologize that we did not send your application on time."

Blameless: "I apologize for the fact you are frustrated - let's see if we cant turn this around."

Fake: "It sounds like we owe you an apology."

Many clients interpret this to be an apology when in fact none is ever made.

Always apologize even if you did nothing wrong – but be sincere. From your clients' perspective, they have a legitimate complaint, and they expect an apology. It could be as simple as "I'm sorry we've inconvenienced you." or "I'm sorry I know how frustrating this must be for you". A sincere apology will usually diffuse a lot of frustration that the client has.

"I apologize that you have been passed on to so many people and had to ring several times. Although I do not have the answer to your question, I will try find the answer so you don't have to be passed on again or ring back."

Never say "It's our policy." An angry client does not want to hear about ministry policy

Never blame someone else in the ministry. Always keep a united front: "I apologize for the experience you have had and I will do my best to help you."

SOLUTION MODE

After they complete their story, you need to sort out the facts. You start to move into solution mode so you need to know when to ask open questions – so you get more information and when to ask closed questions for clarification.

For example, “Now, would you mind if I just clarify some things with you. You said you’d paid..... is that correct?” If you’ve assumed correctly, the client will say ‘yes’ and then you can move on. If not, they might wish to explain things further before you can proceed to the next stage. Once they’ve acknowledged that you have understood them correctly, you can then start to work upon a resolution to the problem.

MAKE IT RIGHT IF YOU CAN

Let the client know the steps that will be taken to solve the situation. If it can be solved immediately, explain why and how. If you can’t solve it yourself, explain who can and outline the steps that will be taken to make that person aware of the client’s concern. Be specific about what the client can expect as an end result.

There is never going to be a successful outcome every time and what may be a satisfactory resolution for one client may not appease another but what is important is to go about trying to resolve the problem in the correct manner.

SUMMARY

Summarise what the problem was, what you have done about it, what the client needs to do (if anything) and the outcome.

Thank the client for calling and complaining. Why? With the simple act of complaining, they are giving you the opportunity to fix the problem. Puts a different spin on it doesn't it? Thank them for letting you know that something is wrong and didn't work like it normally does; for giving you the chance to make it right and for the opportunity to fix it for them.

IN A NUT SHELL

The first thing that most angry people need to do is:

- have their say

So you need to:

- listen and make acknowledging signals
- Calm things down, talk quietly and slowly, and acknowledge their feelings 'I understand how you feel', 'it must have been really annoying', 'I can understand that'
- Repeat back what you have understood so far: 'Mr Brown, let me just recap'
- Tell them what you are going to do, 'Right, Mr Brown, this is what I am going to do', and by when
- Always do what you say you will
- Thanks the client for calling

Turning a challenging call into a positive experience is very rewarding.

SOME USEFUL PHRASES

- So how can I help you?
- Thanks so much for your patience and cooperation
- Sir, could you please explain the situation so I can help you resolve this?
- I'm so sorry to hear that? I don't blame you for being frustrated.
- Let's see if we can work together to resolve this, OK?
- I can see why you feel that way?
- I see what you mean?
- That must be upsetting?
- I understand how frustrating this must be for you and I really appreciate your patience?

Phrases to Avoid at All Costs

- Our policy is...
- Calm down!
- What's your problem?
- That's not our/my fault!
- I can't help it if someone was rude.
- I'm not going to repeat this again!
- Listen to me!
- You're not listening to me.
- I can't do that.
- Excuse me!
- Why don't you be reasonable?
- There's nothing else I can do?
- I'm not putting up with that sort of language!



Active Listening Tips and Tricks

The art of.....Paraphrasing

During a call it's important that you reflect back to your caller what you have heard so far, just to make sure you are on the right track...this process is called paraphrasing.

Do...

- Use your own words to reflect back what you have heard
- Be tentative when you paraphrase – ask the clients permission and check out wit the client that you got it right
- Concentrate on the real gist of what the client is saying – it's best to talk about a couple of big things, than to attempt to reflect back all the little things the client has said

Avoid...

- Parrot-phrasing – repeating back what you have heard word for word doesn't work
- Over-paraphrasing – only use this skill when it's appropriate
- Using the same paraphrasing "starters" over and over – this can become annoying for clients

Paraphrasing Starters

- "Are you saying that...?"
- "Let me see if I have got this right...?"
- "It sounds as if.."
- "From what you are saying, I'm gathering that..."
- "Is it that...?"
- "So for you the biggest issue is.....have I got that right?"
- "I just want to talk through what I've heard you say so far is that OK?"

Open Questions

Used to encourage the client to talk...

"Can you tell me a little bit about your situation..?"

"What happened next?"

"How can I help?"

"What is it that you'd like me to do?"

"What have you tried so far?"

"Tell me more..."

"What can I help you with today?"

Questioning Tips

Beware of getting into the question/answer, question/answer game with a client – this can feel like an interrogation. Mix things up by paraphrasing, using minimal encouragers and summaries

Beware of setting up a Doctor / Patient expectation where the client feels disempowered. Use your skills to encourage your callers to make their own choices

Avoid starting questions with the word "WHY". This can be seen as an emotive and judging word and can cause a client to become defensive and feel challenged

Avoid using leading questions that suggest the right answer and don't provide the caller a choice. For example "Surely you knew your benefit would stop if you didn't show up for your appointment"

Engage

Explain

Encourage

Minimal Encouragers

Remember to let the caller know you are listening when they are talking. Offering little verbal prompts to encourage them to continue has a great impact on the caller feeling valued and important.

- "I see.."
- "Hmmm"
- "Yes.."
- "And.."
- "Really.."
- "Uh Huh.."
- "Go on.."
- "Right"



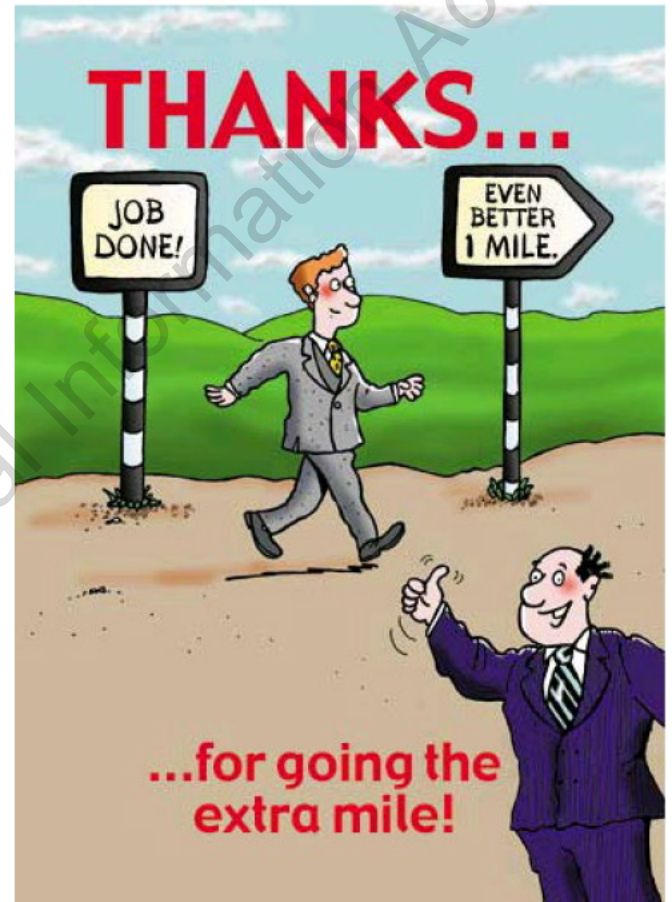
Active Listening Tips and Tricks

When the Answer Isn't Yes

Ever had a situation where you needed give a response to a caller that you just know they are not going to warm to, like having to say "NO"?

Check out the following suggestions that might help...

- "A better alternative might be...."
- "Let's consider other options..."
- "To qualify for this..."
- "What we could do instead...."
- "Another option is...."
- "How about we try this.."
- "We are unable to assist you, however you could contact...."
- "What you have applied for is not appropriate for your situation as...."
- "The correct avenue for you to approach is...."
- "What I am able to do is...."
- "What you have outlined for me today may qualify you for...."
- "Agencies such as....may be able to assist in this instance"
- "Let's go through the current policy...."
- "You could contact.... Instead."
- "A really good option for you to consider is...."
- "Let's check the criteria...."
- "What I recommend instead is..../ What do you think about that?"
- "Yes, we can help you by referring you to...."
- "The best option available for you is..../ How do you feel about that?"
- "I think that your needs would be better met if we..../ How do you feel about that?"
- "Why don't we try..../ How do you feel about that?"
- "Where do you see your position...."
- "You have other options, these are...."
- "We may be able to assist, however first you will need to explore your other options...."



Minimal Encouragers

Letting clients know we are interested in what they are saying helps them feel valued and important. Try using the following minimal encouragers very now and then to 'show you care'

- "Mmm"
- "and then..?"
- "go on"
- "really"
- "I see"
- "uh huh"
- "yes"
- "Right"
- repeating the last couple of words the client says

DEALING WITH DIFFERENT or DIFFICULT PEOPLE

Here are some thoughts, ideas, philosophies, mindsets and techniques that may be useful for CSR's:

The mindset

There are times when clients are going to be angry.

→ *As a CSR, recognise and accept that clients have a right to be upset or angry.*

Angry clients want you to be helpful even if you can't solve their entire problem.

→ *They might want choices and alternatives so that they don't feel helpless.*

Any client wants to be acknowledged. They want to feel you are making the effort to understand their situation and their emotional reactions to it. Often the simple act of acknowledging that a person is upset will help to calm them down, provided the acknowledgment is phrased and toned correctly.

Clients may want you to help solve their problem but remember to acknowledge their feelings before going into problem-solving mode. If you go straight into problem-solving mode without acknowledging their feelings clients may see this as uncaring, unfeeling and unhelpful and can intensify their anger. If and when the client is ready to talk about fixing things try using co-operative language.

Examples of co-operative language...

"What I can do to help you is..."

"Is it possible that..."

"One option might be to..."

"Have you thought about..."

"Have you tried..."

"If you like you can..."

"Have you considered..."

"Were you aware that..."

"That's never happened as far as I know but I'll check for you..."

"An alternative might be to..."

"Let's consider other options..."

"We could look at..."

"Why don't we try..."

"I can help you by referring you to..."

"To qualify for this..."

"Have you tried options such as..."

"Were you aware that XYZ agency can help you with that...?"

Taking the bait

Sometimes clients may say things (intentionally or non-intentionally) that get you to react, usually in an emotional manner.

Examples:

"Are you people thick or something?"

"Are you saying my children have to starve because of this?"

"What language do you speak?"

"Am I speaking to a Kiwi?"

"It's alright for you, you've got a job"

Consider such statements as "bait" or "triggers" If you respond emotionally to "bait" or "triggers" it might result in you being upset and can throw you off balance as a result of being angry or intimidated.

Remember: in order to remain composed and in control of yourself and the call you must avoid responding to nasty attacks emotionally. The key point about "bait" and "triggers" is that you recognise it but don't take it, think to yourself 'I'm not going to get suckered in by that suggestion or comment'.

Suggestion: have a think about your own "triggers" or the last time you responded emotionally to "bait". What are these triggers? How could you have responded differently?

Consider these two examples.

Example A:

Client: *"What the hell is wrong with you people! This happens every year! I return my renewal form and my benefit still gets cut and I get the run-around. If you people knew what you were doing, this wouldn't happen. And, this is the last time you are going to do this to me!"*

CSR: "Please don't talk to me like that, there's no point in getting angry at me. The call centre doesn't clear the renewal forms it is done at the site"

Client: *"I can talk to you like that! My children are hungry and I have bills to pay!"*

Example B:

Client: *"What the hell is wrong with you people! This happens every year! I return my renewal form and my benefit still gets cut and I get the run-around. If you people knew what you were doing, this wouldn't happen. And, this is the last time you are going to do this to me!"*

CSR: "I can hear that you are really upset about this Mr Key"

Client: *"Damn right I'm upset. Now what are you going to do about it?"*

CSR: "I just need to get some information from you first so I can help you. Can you give me your client number please?"

Client: *"Yes, its 359..."*

Some things to remember:

- ❖ Your state of mind can go a long way towards successful client satisfaction
- ❖ Compassion and understanding can transform difficult clients into satisfied clients
- ❖ The first thing that most angry people need to do is have their say so you need to listen and acknowledge to the client that they have been heard. Communicate your understanding of their problem and show empathy.
- ❖ An angry client presents you as a CSR with a perfect opportunity for you to practise your skills
- ❖ Thank the client for bringing your attention something that needs to be fixed or done better. The client is doing you a favour when they comment on bad service as it gives you the chance to try and make things right
- ❖ Thank the client at the end of the call

Helpful mindsets when dealing with angry clients:

When a client is angry the trick is to look beyond their angry behaviour and realise you are witnessing a low state of mind not a personal attack. Recognising this fact is the first step in controlling your own reactions and starting to deal effectively with the client. Instead of leading with your defences, lead with your ear.

It is time to listen.

It's not enough just to hear the words; you must really listen so you truly understand the client. The client may have their own unique view of things – their anger is a result of their own state of mind lowered by negative thoughts. If you keep your own good feeling and listen with compassion, you'll more than likely begin to defuse the clients anger.

Strategy for responding to client issues:

Providing clients with a great experience, handling complaints and turning around angry clients doesn't have to be a battle when you have the skills and the attitude.

Here's an easy to remember acronym

B L A S T

- B* - Believe
- L* - Listen
- A* - Apologise
- S* - Solution
- T* – Thank

Believe

everything that the client communicates to you.

Listen.

Always stop and listen to your client's situation or complaint or feedback. Acknowledgement, empathy and active listening should help diminish a client's anger. It might be natural for you to start thinking how you will respond before you are done listening or you may already have a response or a defence ready. But try and take a couple of seconds, relax, and listen. Even if your client is rude or angry or using bad language (remember what we said previously – they have a right to be angry) just stick with it and remain clam, level headed and

professional When the client is done venting, in a calm, non-judgmental tone, acknowledge how this has made them feel, paraphrase and acknowledge their problem. The clients anger should be diminished somewhat if the client feels you understand them.

Here's some examples of paraphrasing:

"So you're saying that..."

"It sounds like..."

"It seems to me that you're... Is that right?"

"In other words..."

"Let's see if I've got this right..."

"By that do you mean...?"

"What I'm understanding from all this is..."

"Let's see if I understand correctly..."

"So you were under the impression that..."

"So what you're saying is..."

Apologise. If a client says they have been wronged or has received bad service always apologise. *That is their belief.* Even something as simple as "I'm sorry you have been inconvenienced" or "I'm sorry about how long that took to get processed for you". A sincere apology can sometimes diffuse a lot of frustration that the client has.

Solution. If the client hasn't already told you ask them what can be done to make things right for them. This may or may not be something you can do for them. Remember to listen and acknowledge and apologise if necessary before offering solutions. Remember the sequence – do not attempt to deal with the problem until you have dealt with the feelings first.

Hint: *if you find yourself explaining the same thing again (or over and over), or the client does not appear to be listening and continues to interrupt, these are hints that the client isn't ready to deal with the problem. If this occurs, go back to the acknowledgment component – we call this 'shifting gears'. Don't escalate the emotional temperature. You can defuse their (and your) emotional temperature by listening and reflecting their point of view fully before adding any more of your own view. This will keep the situation calm and create a dialogue instead of an argument.*

Thank. Doesn't matter when; thank the client for their feedback or complaint. They are giving you the opportunity to either make things better or to pass on their concerns to someone who can help.

Other useful skills to demonstrate...

Use the clients name in the conversation where you can (without it sounding forced or unnatural).

Always give the client your full attention and *presence* – don't interrupt at the beginning.

Presence is the state of giving your full attention to the client and the matter in hand.

Presence is the absence of distractions.

Presence happens naturally when you are right there with the client (ie no distracting thoughts in your head). Clients will almost certainly sense it when you are not fully present.

Always let the client know that they have been heard. Use minimal encouragers and paraphrasing to ensure you have understood exactly what it is that the client is conveying to you.