

Customer Power ~ Dealing With Rude Salespeople

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Reader's Problem: Sales clerks and waiters are often really rude to me. I feel frustrated because they don't seem to respect me as a customer. I don't want to be rude myself, but can't figure out what else to do.

Kidpower Answer: It is normal to feel as if the only way to fight rudeness is with rudeness. However, trying to fix poor service with insults or anger is not likely to get you the results you want and often leads to a bad reaction that can ruin your day.

Wishing poor service will change without you doing anything is usually a waste of time. Pleading is apt to leave you feeling bad about yourself. Instead, you can almost always find positive solutions that will get you what you want and leave everyone feeling treated with respect and consideration.

People who don't take good care of their customers might be:

- so caught up in their own unhappy feelings that they don't realize the impact of their behavior;
- afraid of taking responsibility;
- misusing their power; or
- upset because another customer or their boss was just horrible to them.

No matter what the reason, as a customer you have choices and you are not helpless. Allowing someone who is responsible for providing you with service to behave in an unkind or thoughtless way can be damaging to all parties involved -- to the business, to the person behaving poorly, to future customers, and of course to you!

Whether you are in a store, a restaurant, or anywhere else, you are much more likely to get better service

if you are prepared to set respectful strong boundaries when people are rude to you. This means:

Being prepared to speak up for what you want. The challenge is to stay very calm, respectful, and firm while advocating for yourself or someone else instead of acting upset about the other person's behavior. You can feel any way you need to inside -- but you will be most effective if you can manage to act as if you are calm.

Being prepared to persist. Most people dislike being told what to do, so you want to be prepared to give positive responses to possible negative reactions.

Being prepared to interrupt. A common pitfall is to hope for an opening and wait while someone who is being rude goes on and on and on and on. Instead, it is more effective to stop this person mid-sentence by saying very clearly and politely, "Excuse me!"

Being prepared to listen. People who have to deal with the general public often say that they are constantly faced with unreasonable demands and completely disrespectful behavior from their customers. If you are so frustrated that you can't listen, you might miss an opening for finding a win-win solution.

Being prepared to state a consequence. You have the right to refuse to buy anything from someone whose behavior is upsetting to you. You also have the right to insist on getting assistance from a supervisor or manager who might have the authority to solve your problem. I have often found that it is worthwhile to go up the chain of command, because solutions that everyone said were impossible were eventually authorized by the owner or manager.

Preparing people to deal with potential problems through successful practice is at the heart of the Kidpower method. In order to practice, think about times you have felt frustrated as a customer and rehearse out loud what you want to say and how you are going to say it. Ask someone else to act out the role of the person causing the problem so that you can try out different solutions. Here are three examples.

1. **Place:** *Grocery Store*

Problem: The grocery clerk admonishes you for needing help with opening a plastic bag.

Possible Boundary-setting Statement: You say very politely, "I am a customer here and I feel as if you don't appreciate my business when you complain about providing help with a plastic bag."

Possible Negative Reaction from the clerk: "We are just too busy to do this. You should do it yourself."

Possible Positive Response from you: "I understand that you are busy, and I would have done this myself if I could have. However, I don't think any store is too busy to treat its customers with care and respect."

2. **Place:** *Restaurant*

Problem: The server in a restaurant refuses to pay any attention to you after you have been seated.

Boundary-Setting Options: To get up and leave, saying very politely, "It looks like you are just too busy to help us tonight. We'll go someplace else." OR, to get up and go over to the manager and ask, "Can you please help our server to help us out? We are worried that she/he is so busy that we have been overlooked." OR, to get up and go to the server and say in a very kind voice, "I see you are busy. However, we are here to enjoy an evening out and would really appreciate some acknowledgment of our presence and some reassurance that you will be getting to us soon."

Possible Negative Reaction: Calling you names. OR, saying, "FINE!" in a grumpy voice.

Possible Positive Response: Saying very sincerely, "I am sad that you feel that way. This is a great restaurant and I hope that you will realize that it is important to treat your customers with respect and care, even if you are busy."

3. **Place:** *Clothing Store*

Problem: The clerk is very negative and complaining because you have asked for a gift box for a sweater you just bought.

Possible Boundary Setting Statement: "My understanding is that this is a service that stores like yours normally provide. I am confused about why you are so unhappy about this. I certainly don't want to get you in trouble for doing something against your store's policies. Perhaps there is someone with more authority than you who can help me."

Possible Negative Reaction from the clerk: To become so apologetic that you feel as if you need to take care of her or his feelings.

Possible Positive Response: "It sounds as if you have been having a bad day. I can understand that. However, it is important to me to feel treated with care and respect when I go shopping and I want to know that this is something I will be able to count on you for in the future."

You can use these situations or make up your own. If you don't have someone to practice with, you can use a mirror and go back and forth between both parts.

Remember to act aware, calm and confident while you are practicing, even if the other person is being very rude. Check your body language to make sure that your arms are down rather than folded, your hands are open rather than clenched, your feet are both on the ground, your shoulders are relaxed rather than hunched, and that you are sitting or standing as tall as you can. Keep looking right at the other person. Check your facial expression and tone of voice to make sure that you look and sound pleasant and firm rather than unsure, irritated, or whiny.

Our students have told us that even a few minutes of practice have given them far better tools and choices in getting the kind of service they want -- and that they have the right to expect as customers.