

Who Do You Become During Customer Challenges? by Marilyn Suttle

You wake up in the morning to a bright sunny day. Everything is going well... until it's not. One crisis after another starts popping up before you have a chance to finish your first cup of coffee. How do you handle a day like that? Since you're good at what you do, you roll up your sleeves and gear yourself up to put out the fires and get things back on track.

- You resolve what seemed like an unsolvable dilemma with a long-term client who's fed up, and your efforts restore her faith in your company.
- You delegate a big office issue to someone barely ready, but eager for the responsibility, and he produces stellar results.
- Then, a potential new client asks for a turnaround time that you normally can't deliver, but you call in a favor with a vendor and make it happen. By the end of the day you're feeling like a superhero!

As you gather your things to leave for the day, the rug gets pulled out from under you. Your boss asks for the quote you were scheduled to complete that day. You didn't finish it, because the day's events took precedence. Your boss is unaware of the day's events and is furious.

As you begin to explain, he shuts you down in front of everyone, *"Don't bother! I don't want excuses. Just leave. We'll deal with this tomorrow."*

Upset, you leave the office and head to a restaurant where you're scheduled to meet five friends for dinner. They get an ear-full. Each of the five have their own way of dealing with your upset feelings. Notice whether you feel better or worse after each friend talks.

Denying Denny says, *"Calm down! You're blowing this whole thing out of proportion. It can't be that bad. Lighten up – after all, you don't want to bring everybody down do you?"*

What's it like to have your feelings denied? Does it feel like he wants you to stuff your emotions and put on a smiling mask? Instead of feeling better, most people find themselves feeling worse and less connected by this type of response.

Interrogating Irene says, *"What exactly were those emergencies you had to deal with? Was there any way you could have gotten that quote done for your boss? Has anything like this ever happened before?"*

How do you feel when you're asked a lot of questions? It can feel like you're being accused or interrogated - as if the questioning party is trying to lay blame instead of being supportive.

Advising Anthony says, *“Let me tell you what you need to do – you need to get to work early tomorrow and get that quote done, and have it sitting on your boss’s desk when she comes in. Then explain to her what happened. After all, you don’t want to lose your job over this!”*

What does it feel like to receive unsolicited advice? Does it leave you feeling angry or stupid? Unsolicited advice has a way of adding more stress and distance between people rather than bringing about better feelings.

Other-side Orin says, *“You’ve got to look at it from your boss’s point of view. He probably had a lot of pressure to get that quote out and when you didn’t deliver, of course he was upset.”*

How well do you respond to a friend who takes the other person’s point of view instead of yours? Even if valid points are made, it can be alienating or feel like a betrayal.

Pity-party Patty says, *“You poor thing. That was just too much for you to have to bear. I feel so sorry for you. It just breaks my heart to imagine you dealing with that kind of pressure.”*

How does it feel to be pitied? A small dose of pity might temporarily feel good, or at least better than some of the other responses, but for most – being pitied leaves you feeling pitiful, small and underestimated.

What do you want to hear from a friend when you’re upset? What’s the most helpful response that leaves you feeling resilient, understood, and less stressed? Try on this:

Compassionate Casey says, *“Wow, sounds like you had a tough day.”* Continuing the conversation by mirroring back: *“You went above and beyond to solve a customer’s problem and leave her feeling good about your company when she was headed out the door. You gave an employee his wings instead of micromanaging. And you landed a new customer because of the strong relationship you developed with your vendor. Then without even stopping to find out, your boss reads you the riot act in front of the whole department and didn’t give you a chance to explain. What an upsetting experience.”*

A compassionate approach generally leaves people feeling heard, understood, and relieved. It’s easier to deal with tough times, when someone can put your feelings into words without trying to fix, deny, analyze, give advice, or pity you.

Which approach do you typically take when you’re dealing with an upset customer or colleague? Denying Deny, Interrogating Irene, Advising Anthony, Other-side Orin, Pity-party Patty, or Compassionate Casey? If you’re not sure – ask a trusted coworker.

Pushing away feelings only bottles them up. It builds up leading to a blow up when you’d least expect it. Ease the pressure with compassion. A compassionate approach is like giving someone a verbal massage. Remember - empathizing with your customer’s experience, doesn’t mean you’re necessarily agreeing with them. You simply “get” their experience. By doing so,

you make it easier for them to cope with their current realities and create a connection that increases long-term loyalty.

How can you become more like Compassionate Casey?

Don't let your customers discomfort make you uncomfortable. When you're calm and compassionate (meaning you're not taking it personally) it means you've developed the emotion management skills necessary to offer extraordinary customer service. Practice, role-play, and get feedback, to grow your skills.

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Marilyn Suttle is the coauthor of *Who's Your Gladys? How to Turn Even the Most Difficult Customer into Your Biggest Fan*. Marilyn travels internationally to deliver service excellence keynotes and workshops. Marilyn inspires her clients to excel by creating strong, productive relationships in every area of life. She specializes in creating "Suttle Shifts" in the way people think and act to produce massive results. When you need a keynote speaker or success coach, Marilyn can be reached at (248) 348-1023, marilyn@marilysuttle.com or visit www.whosyourgladys.com.

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