

Tips for Staying Cool:

How to handle hot-headed customers

By Maryanne Dotson

They are out there. People who won't shut up. They explode like a bomb, and then demand your help in solving their problems. Next time, just BREATHE!

B – Breathe! Stressful situations cause us to “fight or flight” and muscles constrict, the heart beats faster, and yes, sometimes we forget to breathe! Taking a deep breath can cause those responses to slow down.

R – Relate to their feelings. Angry people are usually ones that been hurt or wounded. They look for people who understand and validate their experience first, regardless of the situation's outcome. Statements such as, “That must be frustrating” can demonstrate understanding. Seek first to understand, then be understood!

E – Engage them. This step bridges emotion and logic when deescalating the upset person. Examples include statements of personal commitment to them or stating the value of their business such as, “We value your account here and want to work to get this resolved.”

A – Ask questions. It's easy to assume you know the real reason of their frustration. But sometimes, we can offer solutions to problems that aren't really there! Simple questions like, “Tell me about it” gets them talking, diffuses emotion and reveals important facts.

T – Tell facts. It is easy to offer too many facts in the beginning and ignore the emotion in an angry customer. Only after deescalating the emotion, present the facts. If you are at fault, don't make excuses, but use facts to explain what happened and then plan the steps to correct the mistake.

H – Highlight benefits. Certainly some situations bring opportunity for change. If the person can benefit from a new product or service, certainly this is an opportunity to highlight the added convenience or cost savings.

E – End with agreement. Each person needs to agree on the outcome and the next steps. Although the resolution may not ideal, providing options and demonstrating understanding for the other person's point of view may improve odds.