

HANDLING CONFLICT IN A DIVERSE WORLD

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Conflict often results when two people disagree over something. When service breakdowns occur, there could be underlying or other issues fueling it. In fact, because of the diverse world in which we live, if you put two people together in a given situation there is likely to be disagreement at some point. In a service environment, you should anticipate and prepare for this possibility. The first step is to recognize that there is typically no one universal answer or solution to any problem. As a service provider, you must be open to alternate possibilities when working with your internal and external customers. For example, if a customer calls or comes into your organization, you should greet them professionally and be prepared to actively listen in order to discover their needs or issue. Once identified, you should consider organizational policy, procedures, what you have been taught in training or learned elsewhere related to positive global customer service and anything else that would assist you in making a customer-centric decision on how to handle the situation.

The key in dealing with your customers is to remain open-minded. Factors like your background, personality and culture will typically play a role in how open-minded or adaptable to change you are. Unfortunately, on many points people from many cultures are fairly close-minded. For that reason, we have cultural, political, military, organizational and interpersonal conflict. As an example of how cultural differences might impact an interaction between you and a customer, consider the following: People from most cultures that are governed by religious leaders (theocratic) are often closed-minded. Theocratic countries include Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Mauritania, Yemen, Oman, Iran, and The Holy See (Vatican). Israel is also often referred to as a theocracy, although it operates as a parliamentary democratic republic. In a theocratic culture, God tells people what is important and everything else is secondary. Following the religious teachings of leaders is very important, often required by law and taken very seriously as part of the cultural and personal value system. For example, if you were from an Islamic culture and in the financial or banking business, or doing business with someone from such a culture, you could not charge interest on money. To do so would be in direct contradiction to the teaching of the Islamic faith since the Koran prohibits charging or benefiting from interest (Haraam in Arabic) on money. Someone from a westernized or capitalistic culture (e.g. the United States, Canada or some European countries) might say that this is not a wise business practice or might even inflame a conversation by saying that the concept is “stupid” or does not make sense and would disagree with a theocrat. As you can imagine, if you found yourself in such a situation, conflict and argument will likely follow because not only have you challenged the person’s values, but you also insulted their religion.

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