

Sometimes on-the-job stress is temporary because of short-term circumstances, such as covering for an ill coworker or an impending deadline. These situations can be tolerable, if nothing else because you know they will soon go away. But when stress is part of the job description, as it often is when you deal directly with customers, it's not quite as easy to handle. Since there are two types of stress involved here, you need to understand what you can do in each situation, because the remedy for each kind of stress is different.

The Two Levels of Customer-Related Stress

Customer service often involves problem solving, sometimes when you are face-to-face at the airport departure gate (or on the telephone at reservations) with upset customers. This is stressful not only because of the inherent conflict, but because as soon as you're done, there's another customer waiting. Taken individually, there are ways to cope with each customer call or in-person problem that can help diffuse the stress, both for yourself and the travelling customer. But when you do



Dealing with Customer Service Stress

this type of work all day long, it's easy to experience stress in a general sense, the kind that stays with you when you go home, that calls for other approaches to stress management.

Diffusing Stressful Customer Situations

The key to dealing with stressful customer situations is to be prepared, both practically speaking and emotionally. This means that you should expect the types of situations that cause customers to be emotional and have solutions and responses ready. Another important aspect of dealing with this type of stress concerns your attitude. When you understand that the customer is upset, you can bring empathy to his or her point of view - no matter what they say to you - this will help you deal with the heat of the moment in a calmer way. Look at each situation as a chance to accomplish something, both for the customer and for yourself. Keep yourself emotionally detached, yet focused.

In extremely stressful situations, learn breathing and visualization techniques that will keep you relaxed. Picture a calm place that's special to you. Perhaps a mountain campsite or deserted beach. Close your eyes and breathe deeply. Notice tension in your body and concentrate on easing it. Find a way to laugh and stay positive.

Dealing with the Overall Stress of Customer Service

No matter how well you deal with specific customer situations, doing it all day can take a toll. It's healthy to find an outlet for your daily stress, such as exercise or a hobby that takes your mind off work. Try relaxing music, and make sure your diet is low on sugar, which can add to the effects of stress on your body. High protein snacks or high fiber vegetables are always better than candy. Avoid too much coffee. Consider decaffeinated tea instead, which can help soothe away tensions at home and at work.

Ask Your EAP Resource for Help

The Company and the Union understand the stresses of your customer service job and they care about helping you deal with those stresses. They can help you with ways to cope, both with specific job situations and with lifestyle tips that will help you relax when you are away from work. Don't hesitate to ask for advice or assistance. Customer service stress has been well-studied, and resources exist to help you become a champ at working with every business's most important focus - happy customers. Contact your local IAM District 141 EAP coordinator or visit the district website EAP page at

<http://www.iam141.org/eap/staff.html>