

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS

4 minute read

We've heard it for as long as we have been alive: "The Customer is Always Right." This mantra, obviously created by a customer, has been the guiding force for retail and service businesses since the invention of capitalism. The premise is simple: the customer has the money, and the only way to get it from them is to make sure they are treated like kings and queens. Dealing with difficult customers is just part of the game.



Today, in the age of online exposure and instant opinion, it is more and more difficult to keep a high customer satisfaction rating. So, in hopes of avoiding the one-star review, how many of you are still living with the premise the customer is always right?

The reason I ask is that today's customers are very savvy and aware of your need for digital praise, and many of them will use this tool as leverage to demand things from your company that may not be in your best interests. They know the game and will exploit their position to gain some unreasonable terms or discounts, all in the name of you thinking they need to be satisfied.

When dealing with difficult customers, the easiest way to avoid falling into this trap is to make an early, accurate assessment of them. YES, it is possible to discern their motives early in the process. This takes dedication and discipline, but you can avoid difficult situations by simply talking- for a while- before starting any work. Talk about the mitigation process, and make sure to include ALL the potential issues that may arise on this loss. Walk the loss and go over your observations, leaving nothing out. Mention the issues that will arise from your mitigation efforts, including the possibility of having to move out during the process. Make sure that you do not leave out a single thing that may cause discomfort. Cover the need for contents moving and reconstruction issues and give them a realistic timetable for the entire process. **Finally, make sure that the client understands that THEY are responsible for payment of your invoice, NOT their insurance company.**

"The Customer is Always Right."

For most of you, this flies in the face of your normal process. I'm guessing that most of you go into a loss, put the client at ease right away, and tell them you will handle everything from here for them. This reassurance works to get the contract signed, but in the end will do a lot of damage to your company.

Here is why it works with difficult customers. If you are upfront and transparent at the start, you may pick up signals that tell you this client is not going to be easy to deal with. They may be hesitant to move out, or they may want you to do things that are not proper. They may balk at the financial obligation they are facing, or they may direct you to deal with their carrier and leave them out of it. ALL of these are red flags- signals that you can pick up on that tell you this is going to be a tough one. Without even starting work, you are now able to reach the conclusion that this project may not be in your own best interest. **Since you are not committed to it, you can simply state that "we might not be the best fit for you" and walk away. No harm, no foul.**



Think about all your past experiences with bad customers, the ones that are unreasonable and are clearly taking advantage of you. Now, admit to yourself that, in almost every case, you saw it coming early on but allowed yourself to fall into it further, saying things like, “I thought I could control it,” or “I just wanted to get it done and get out of there.” Just think about your peace of mind if you had simply opted out at the start.



On the commercial restoration side, it is far easier to “pre-vet” our customers than on the residential side. Most commercial restoration companies have in place a pre-loss program that gives them a lot of information about the client PRIOR to any loss occurring. At The CREST Network, our pre-loss program is called PREP™, and it allows restorers to collect data on the building, including the coverages, contractors working in the building, and management decision makers. This information gathering and relationship building takes place early in the relationship, so once the call comes in there is little to worry about - you know them, and they know you. It doesn’t eliminate every issue, but it certainly avoids a ton of them.

Dealing with difficult customers does not have to be difficult. Take the time to figure out who they are and what they are about, and you will save a lot of aggravation. Remember this old saying as well: *“Sometimes, the best project is the one that you did not do!”*



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