Learn to Apologize to Customers Like You Mean It

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Session Description

As support professionals, we do our best to help customers resolve their issues. Sometimes we look like rock stars, and sometimes resolution is more difficult, maybe even unattainable. In these cases, emotions run a little higher and it’s crucial that we treat the customer with respect and sincerity, avoiding trite responses like the classic “we regret any inconvenience this has caused.” That’s sounds a lot like “sorry, not sorry,” and insincere apologies can increase contact volume, especially in email, chat, and social media. In this unique session, you’ll find out how to better empathize with your customers by avoiding passive aggressive nonapologies when providing customer support.

Speaker Background

Leslie O’Flahavan has delivered writing courses for support center staff, customer service agents, and social media managers, helping thousands of professionals hone their customer-focused writing skills. Leslie helps support organizations train agents to write well in all service channels, measure the quality of their writing, and revise and maintain their entire library of canned answers. She is also the coauthor of Clear, Correct, Concise E-Mail: A Writing Workbook for Customer Service Agents.
Breakfast Briefing 2
Learn to Apologize to Customers Like You Mean It

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Why does this apology sound so ridiculous?

“Customer satisfaction is our highest priority. We regret any inconvenience to the customer.”

‘We still have the body’: Maryland woman finds a live scorpion in a bag of spinach

A Maryland woman who wanted to make lunch this week was met with an unwelcome surprise. What appeared to be a live scorpion in her bag of spinach.

A Giant representative offered to refund the price of the spinach — about $2, Boddapati said. A Giant representative said in a statement that it apologizes for the incident. “Customer satisfaction is our highest priority,” the statement said. “We regret any inconvenience to the customer.”

— Justin Wm. Moyer
The best apologies are...

- Sincere
- Specific
- Personal
- Proportionate to the offense

United Airlines: An apology masterclass

First apology from Oscar Munoz, CEO

“This is an upsetting event to all of us here at United. I apologize for having to re-accommodate these customers. Our team is moving with a sense of urgency to work with the authorities and conduct our own detailed review of what happened. We are also reaching out to this passenger to talk directly to him and further address and resolve this situation.”
Second apology

The truly horrific event that occurred on this flight has elicited many responses from all of us: outrage, anger, disappointment. I share all of those sentiments, and one above all: my deepest apologies for what happened. Like you, I continue to be disturbed by what happened on this flight and I deeply apologize to the customer forcibly removed and to all the customers aboard. No one should ever be mistreated this way.

I want you to know that we take full responsibility and we will work to make it right.

It’s never too late to do the right thing. I have committed to our customers and our employees that we are going to fix what’s broken so this never happens again. This will include a thorough review of crew movement, our policies for incentivizing volunteers in these situations, how we handle oversold situations and an examination of how we partner with airport authorities and local law enforcement. We’ll communicate the results of our review by April 30th.

I promise you we will do better.

Third apology

We continue to express our sincerest apology to Dr. Dao. We cannot stress enough that we remain steadfast in our commitment to make this right.

This horrible situation has provided a harsh learning experience from which we will take immediate, concrete action. We have committed to our customers and our employees that we are going to fix what’s broken so this never happens again.

First, we are committing that United will not ask law enforcement officers to remove passengers from our flights unless it is a matter of safety and security. Second, we’ve started a thorough review of policies that govern crew movement, incentivizing volunteers in these situations, how we handle oversold situations and an examination of how we partner with airport authorities and local law enforcement. Third, we will fully review and improve our training programs to ensure our employees are prepared and empowered to put our customers first. Our values – not just systems – will guide everything we do. We’ll communicate the results of our review and the actions we will take by April 30.
Apologies inside your support organization

List the three most common apologies your agents must give to customers:

1. __________________
2. __________________
3. __________________

Jot down the words they commonly use when they apologize: __________________

Do your customers accept your apologies?

How do you know if they do or do not?

• __________________
• __________________
• __________________
1. Replace the wording, “We regret any inconvenience this may have caused…”

2. Pair “I’m sorry we…” with “We should have …”

3. Follow your apology with an empathy statement.

Response from Support Analyst David:

Hello Susan. Thank you for contacting ComFinity Live Chat Support. My name is David. Please give me one moment to review your information.

I regret any inconvenience this outage may have caused you, but I'll be more than happy to resolve it for you...
Improved response from Support Analyst David:

Thank you for contacting us about the outage. We’re really sorry about the inconvenience of missing the season finale of The Voice. We would like to do some troubleshooting to solve the problem. Do you have time to do that now or would later this evening work better?

“I’m sorry we...” plus “We should have...”

• I’m sorry we gave you the wrong information about how to update your online account. We should have checked first to see whether you had a Vendor account or a Supplier account.

• We’re sorry that you had trouble finding the images you had stored on StockFoto. We should have let you and our other Platinum Package customers know that we were updating our database, so our online library had some glitches yesterday.

• I’m sorry we took so long to reply to your request to update your expired VPN certificate, especially because you were at a client’s site, not in your office. We should have gotten back to you within an hour, which is our standard response time.
Follow apology with an empathy statement

- I’m sorry you’ve had to contact us four times to request that your email address be removed from our distribution list. I, too, would have expected this task to be taken care of after the first request.

- We sincerely apologize that your daughter had to wait two hours for our airport shuttle to arrive. As a parent myself, I would not have been happy that my child was stuck at the airport for a long time.

- We’re sorry our software update wasn’t compatible with your laptop’s operating system. I can understand why you want to revert to the previous version.

QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?
Let’s stay in touch...

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