

Handling an Irate Caller

One of the most important duties of every county is to ensure that their county residents are satisfied with the county's services. Often times, this includes talking to a resident who, for whatever reason, is angry or upset. Tactics for dealing with an irate caller are something that can be learned. Possessing these skills will help make you a very valuable employee.



Actively listen. Let the angry caller talk through their problems and get it all out of their system. As they talk make indications that you are listening such as "uh huh", "really?", etc. This step is important because the more time the caller spends airing their grievances, the more time they have to calm down.

Allow the caller to express their opinions. Allow them to express themselves, stepping in only if they become abusive.

Maintain your personal integrity at all times. If the caller is abusive, calmly interject something to the effect of "I appreciate your frustration with the situation; however attacking me will not improve anything. I would like to help you."

Be sympathetic. Make sure the caller knows that you understand their frustration and acknowledge any mistakes that have been made. Recognize the caller's feelings about the mistakes - that is, how it must have felt to be in their situation.

Be empathetic. When appropriate, show empathy. Empathy implies that you feel the same way as the caller and truly understand their feelings. It can create further issues to say "I understand your anger" if you do not truly understand, as the customer may shoot back "You have no idea!" Using a phrase like "I can imagine how upsetting that must have been" is a better way to phrase this.

For additional information, including assistance in implementing any of these guidelines, please contact your regional Risk Control Specialist or the NCACC Risk Management Pools. We will be glad to assist you.

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Risk Control Best Practices



Handling and Irate Caller (cont.)



Ask questions. After they complete their story, ask about the facts and details of the matter at hand.

Move into solution-mode. Know when to ask open-ended questions, and when to stick with "yes" or "no" questions.

Apologize when appropriate. Apologies can often be interpreted as an admittance of guilt. There are three types of apologies that can be employed in these situations, choose the most appropriate:

- Direct: "I apologize that we ..."
- Blameless: "I apologize that you are frustrated - let's see if we can turn this around."
- Fake: "It sounds like we owe you an apology." (Many customers interpret this to be an apology when in fact none is ever made.)

Offer to try to fix the problem. Never promise to outright fix the issue, but always promise to try. If you make an attempt and fail, it will create further issues if you promised total resolution.

Gain agreement on your resolution. Make sure your caller understands what has been done at the end of the call. Even if the issue is not totally resolved, gain agreement on whatever resolution has been reached.

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