## **Defusing Hostile Customers**

### Richmond Centre for Disability Volunteer Training September 23, 2017

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# Learning Objectives

#### What You Will Learn:

- How to identify hostile or violent behaviour in customers
- How to defuse or de-escalate situations
- How to use these techniques in different customer service situations



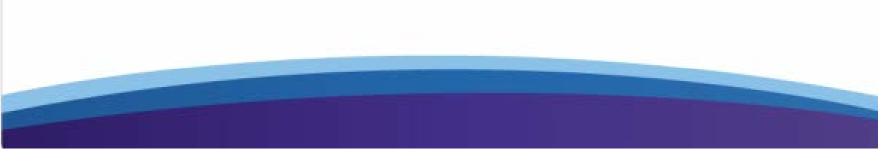
# Section One: Recognizing Hostile Customer Behaviours



### **Customer Service Has Its Challenges**

- Be aware of human behaviour and interpersonal styles
- Workers in all types of customer service roles need to recognize the warning signs and know how to defuse behaviour that doesn't seem right





## **Customer Service Challenges Scale**



### Why Do Customers Become Hostile?

- ✓ Wide variety of reasons
- Frustrated with level or service or faulty product
- ✓ Treated unfairly
- Just having a bad day



# **Observe Customer Behaviours**

#### Look for Preliminary Signs of Hostility or Aggression:

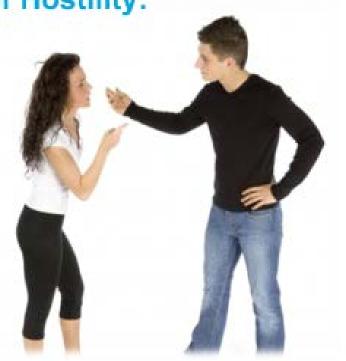
- Clenched fists
- Tense muscles
- Hunched shoulders
- Red face
- Fidgeting, pacing around, restless

- Staring or avoidance of eye contact
- Rapid movement; waving hands in air
- Raised voice and choice of words
- Angry tone of voice /language

# **Observe Customer Behaviours**

#### Look for Physical or Verbal Signs of Hostility:

- Yelling or screaming
- Swearing/cursing
- Threatening
- Shaking fists in air
- Physically threatening someone
- Physical violence



# **Telephone and E-mail Behaviours**

#### **Telephone and Email Challenges:**

- Inability to observe behaviours or physical signs
- May require different defusing approaches



# Prevention Is the Key

# What You Can Do Ahead of Time:

- Prevent hostile situations from escalating
- Learn defusing techniques
- Know when to get help and protect yourself and others



# **Review of Section One**



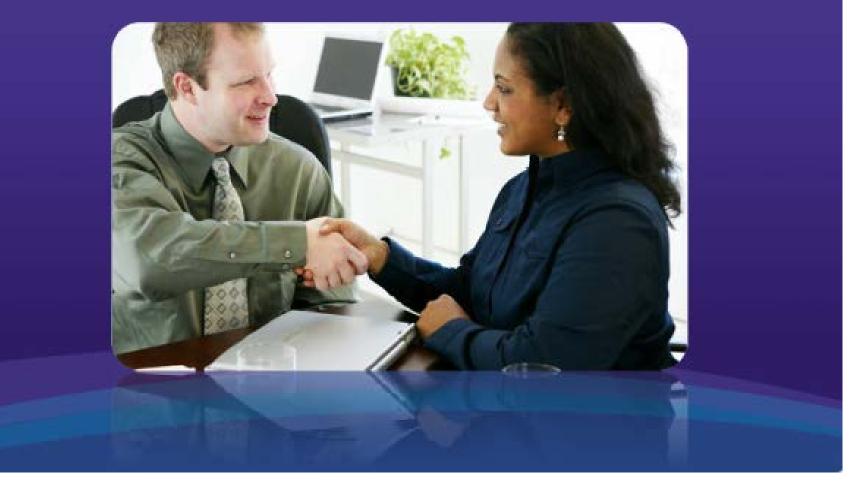
#### What is a behavioural cue? Select all that apply.

- a) Physical signs a person displays
- b) A device used to improve billiards performance
  - c) Something you should try to observe in your customers
- d) A verbal warning

# Which of the following is a sign of preliminary hostile behaviour?

- a) Yelling and screaming
- b) Swearing/cursing
  - c) Fidgeting, pacing around, or restlessness
- d) Threatening

# Section Two: Defusing Strategies



# First Step—Prevention

#### **Strategic Steps:**

Recognize warning signs

Observe changes in behaviour

Assess overall situation



## What to Do If the Situation Escalates

#### **Initial Steps:**

- Take a deep breath
- ✓ Stay calm
- Listen to the customer
- Reassure them



# Non-verbal Techniques (In-Person)

### Techniques:

- Act professionally
- Use non-threatening body position
- Calm, open posture
- ✓ Reduce direct eye contact
- Allow for personal space
- Avoid sudden movements



# **Communication Techniques**

- Speak in a friendly manner and ask how you can help
- Use the customer's name if possible and introduce yourself
- Use active listening skills and acknowledge what the customer is saying
- Explain your purpose or intention
- Give clear instructions



#### Phone and E-mail De-escalation Techniques

- Always remain calm
- Let the customer vent
- Let them know you are there to help
- Never say "I'm only following the rules"
- Run your email response by your manager



# Plan for Personal Safety

- Follow policies and procedures outlined in emergency plan
- Notify your manager
- Immediately contact emergency personnel if needed



# Section 2 Review



# **Best Practice Scenario**

Josh is a clerk who works at a 24-hour gas station and variety store. He has been on the job for about three months. One night on his shift, he notices a customer at the back of the store who is becoming increasingly agitated. The customer is yelling and cursing to himself as he paces back and forth near one of the aisles. Josh feels like his personal safety is at risk.

#### What should Josh do in this situation?

a) Yell at the customer to keep it down

b) Get the employee handbook & read through the policies

c) Stay silent and sit with good posture

d) Call the police, as outlined in the emergency plan

# **Best Practice Scenario - Answer**

#### The correct answer is D.

Call the police, as outlined in the emergency plan.

# Section Three: Responsibilities of Employers



# Provide a Safe Workplace

#### **Duties of Employers:**

- Ensure workplaces are free of violence
- Employees have all tools they need
- Training and education on defusing hostile customers
- Prepare employees for emergencies



# Working Alone

#### For Employees Who Work Alone:

- Ensure hazards are identified, controlled or eliminated
- Arrange for proper security, locked doors, etc.
- Provide training





#### Provide Ways to Properly Report & Document Incidents

#### Employers are obligated to:

- Ensure proper training on incident reporting and documentation
- Incident reporting tools must be in place at all times





# **Responsibilities of Workers**

#### Workers Must:

- Be aware of policies and procedures related to defusing hostile customers
- Attend required health & safety training
- Report and document all incidents in a timely manner



# **Closing Notes**



# Wrap Up

# Thank you for participating in this training!

We trust you have enjoyed learning more about knowing how to spot hostile or potentially violent customer behaviours, and how to defuse a tense situation.





1. Where might you be unlikely to encounter a hostile customer?

- A. Over email
- B. On vacation
- C. In person
- D. Over the telephone

2. People who work in the retail industry rarely ever encounter an angry customer. True or False?

- A. True
- B. False

Complete the following scale.
Upset \_\_\_\_\_ Hostile Violent

- A. Satisfied
- B. Noncompliant
- C. Angry
- D. Rude

4. Why do customers sometimes become hostile?

- A. They are having a bad day
- B. Frustrated with your service
- C. Experienced a faulty product
- D. All of the above

5. Customers who are irritated or angry will usually show signs of hostility even before they speak to you. True or False?

- A. True
- B. False

6. Which of the following behaviours could be a sign of preliminary hostility?

- A. Wide grin
- B. Asking strange questions
- C. Tensed up muscles
- D. Drinking too much coffee

7. How can you prepare yourself mentally and emotionally in a tense customer service situation?

- A. Say to yourself "I'm better than the customers"
- B. Stay calm and in control
- C. Pace around the room
- D. Recite poetry in your head

8. Which of the following is an example of hostile customer behaviour?

- A. Hugging the clerk
- B. Returning a faulty product and asking for money back
- C. Yelling and screaming profanities
- D. Failing to say "thank you" after a transaction

- 9. If a customer situation starts to become hostile, you should try your best to remain calm and what else?
  - A. Tell them about your current promotions
  - B. Call the police
  - C. Make rapid hand movement
  - D. Listen to the customer

10.You should never stare directly in the eyes of an angry customer. True or False?

- A. True
- B. False

- 11. One of your customers has just vented his frustration regarding the poor service he received. After you're listened patiently to his rant, you then express empathy for his bad experience by letting him know that you understand how he feels. Then, you negotiate some options with him. What type of technique did you use in this situation?
  - A. Non-verbal
  - B. Communication
  - C. Therapeutic
  - D. Escalation

12.If you are confronted with a violent customer during a potential robbery, you should first document the behaviour on an incident report. True or False?

- A. True
- B. False

13.Which of the following is the most effective option for employers to reduce the danger to their employees presented by hostile customer situations?

- A. Offer free karate lessons
- B. Provide a safe workplace
- C. Provide full body armour
- D. Give them a panic button

- 14.How could an employer help to ensure the safety of an employee who works alone at night?
  - A. Make sure all hazards are identified, controlled, or eliminated before work starts
  - B. Leave doors unlocked
  - C. Give them a laptop
  - D. Bring in guard dogs

15.What is not a responsibility of the worker when managing hostile customer situations?

- A. Wear protective clothing
- B. Attend training courses
- C. Document incidents
- D. Understand policies and procedures