

April 2021

Positive communication strategies to help staff handle emotive and challenging calls

It's true, you can hear a smile down the phone



Frustration and confusion are common triggers that often manifest as anger or even threatening behaviour on a phone call. And with increased tension provoked by COVID-19 restrictions over the past year, the number of people experiencing emotionally challenging calls has escalated.

As a result of COVID-19, more call handling by businesses has also had to be done from home. So not only have staff experienced higher numbers of conflict-charged calls over this period, but they have had to handle them in their own domestic environments where it can feel more intrusive, more personal and without a support network to hand.

This can result in your staff's mental wellbeing being compromised and the possibility that your customers do not receive an experience in line with your brand values.

So what are some of the best strategies to help your staff deal with challenging and emotive calls?

Here are Maybo's great call handling tips that can help to manage and reduce conflict:

Positive interaction

From the moment you pick up the phone, it is important to make a good impression and kick off the call with an optimistic and upbeat start.

It is true that people can hear a smile down the phone and so think about whether your tone of voice and demeanour is coming across as positive and helpful, or whether you are coming across with a monotone voice and the disposition of someone that doesn't sound like they genuinely care.

If you record your calls, it can provide a quick and easy way of finding out how you come across.

It is also good practice to personalise your interactions by identifying your name, the company you work for and asking how the person that you are speaking to would like to be addressed.

Having good manners demonstrates respect and sets the tone for the call by leading through example. Your friendly, positive approach will also help to build rapport with the caller and put them at ease.

It is also important that you give the caller time to express their feelings and vent any frustrations, whilst listening carefully to what they have to say.

This shows you care and can help to build trust, as well as letting them feel as though their views are being heard.

Even if you disagree it is important to be open and convey empathy for their feelings and frustrations, whilst remaining neutral and interjecting with helpful redirection when appropriate.



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Being mindful

Confusion can be a key source of frustration for callers. It is often caused due to the caller lacking an understanding of processes or coming to a different interpretation or assumption, due to unclear communication or language barriers.

As callers cannot see us when we are on the phone, the words we use and the tone we use to say them, is critical to ensuring their understanding and minimising chances of confusion or conflict from occurring.

Take time to develop the caller's understanding, match the pace of your caller, without using jargon or speaking too quickly. Conflict engages the emotional brain and stops people from thinking logically so we need to ensure our words, tone and pace help to manage the situation by remaining composed.

This means that it is important that you remain professional and try not to take any negative behaviours too personally.

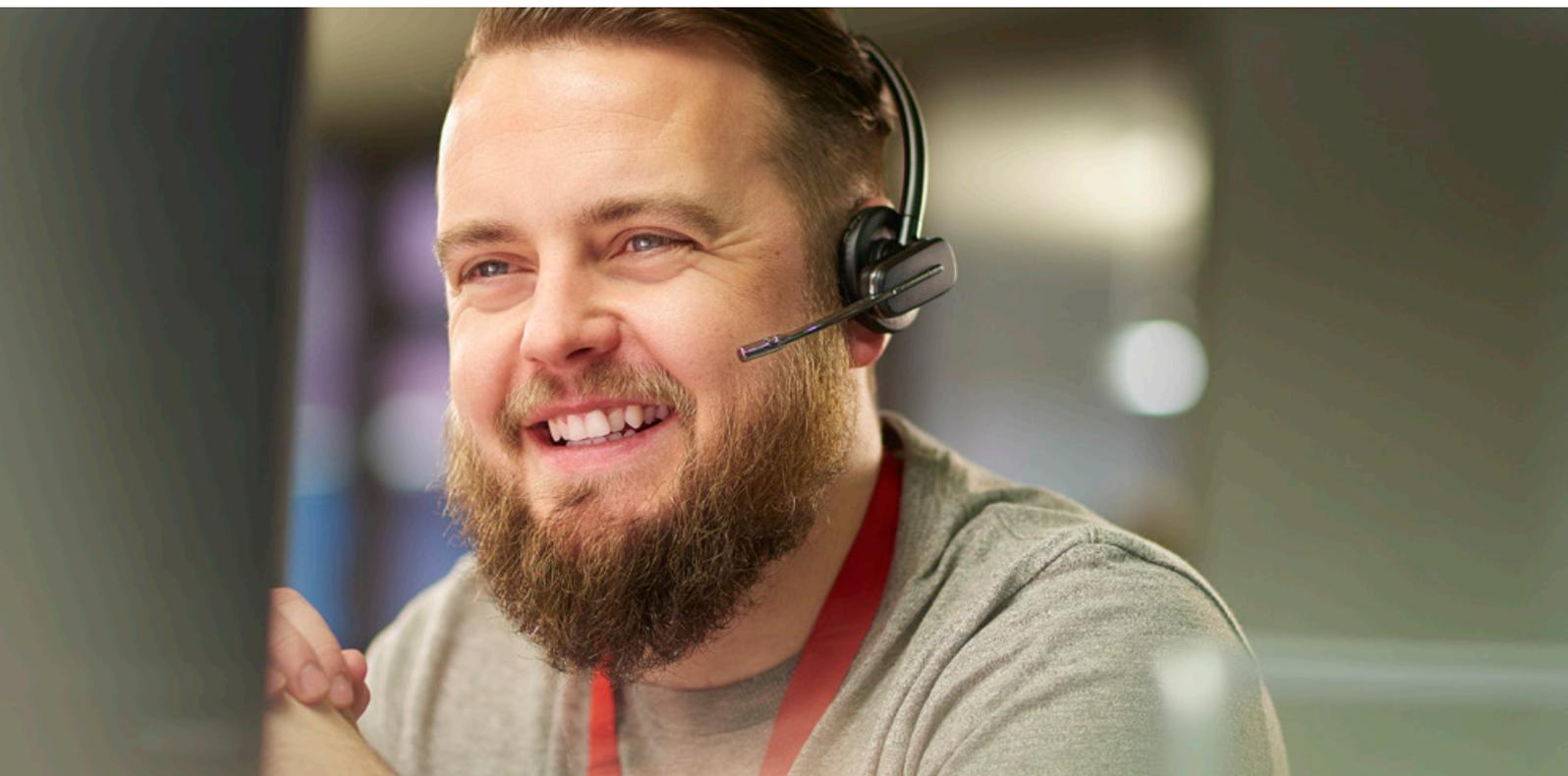
Learn to recognise your own triggers and when you are experiencing empathy fatigue. Taking breaks is as important to protect your own wellbeing as it is to minimise the chances of a call resulting in a negative outcome.



Speak with confidence

It is also important to speak with confidence, without using filler words like “umm” or “err” as that will make you sound doubtful and unsure in your responses. This could sow seeds of doubt in the caller's mind as to whether you are giving them the right advice or have adequate levels of authority to be able to resolve their issues, which could add to their frustration.

Preparation is also extremely important and pays off in abundance when faced with a frustrated, time poor customer. Be equipped for the types of questions that you are likely to get asked and ensure you have appropriate answers at the ready.



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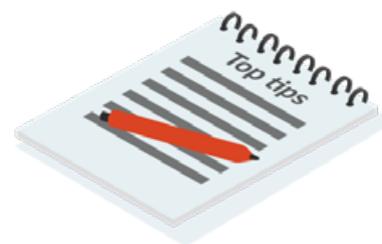
Clarify understanding

If you don't have all of the answers or are unsure of the customer's wants and needs, ask questions to clarify and check your understanding. The industry term for this is known as "reflective listening", which means that you seek to understand the caller's problem, enquiry and/or feelings and repeat it back to them in order to confirm that your interpretation is a true representation of their words.

The approach demonstrates that you are listening and empathising with the customer's concerns and ensures the problem can be resolved as swiftly as possible. This can also be aided by summarising any key points covered in the call and any actions that need to be taken in order to resolve the issue at the end of the call concisely.

Make sure that you always have a pen and paper to hand, as making notes and referring back to comments the caller has said will demonstrate that you care and want to help.

It is also important that you quickly get in the habit of taking customer's contact details at the start of a call, as this will ensure that the enquiry can be followed up swiftly with the correct answers if you are unable to provide them at the time. Equally, should a technical error occur it means that you can get back in contact with the customer, without adding to their frustrations.



Make sure that you always answer accurately and have an action plan in place for the steps you will take if you are faced with a question that you don't know. It is better to be upfront, honest and polite but stating that you "would hate to give them inaccurate information", than to provide inaccurate advice which will lead to further negative repercussions.

Putting people on hold should also always be a last resort and it is important to think about your options - should you transfer the call? What is the duty of care to your fellow colleagues? Is there an option to call back or terminate an abusive, threatening call? Our virtual training courses help answer tricky questions.

Our course leaders provide practical opportunities for skill development where you can ask questions, draw upon your own experiences and delve into the detail of telephone-based communication strategies.

The Call Handling Zoom course covers a wide range of topics which include recognising the stages of escalation in behaviour, triggers and emotional states, inhibitors, staying calm and controlling the call, managing abuse and post incident considerations. [Contact us](#) for more information.

Get in touch

If you would like to discuss how we can help you please get in touch with one of our experts today



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