Safe Work Procedures For Dealing With Irate Customers

Workers that deal directly with clients and customers could be at risk of workplace violence, especially when those customers become angry and upset. That's why your company should implement Safe Work Procedures to help workers handle this situation, especially if they work in hospitals, airports, train stations, and other high-stress settings. Here's a template based on a format used by a Manitoba government agency.

Safe Work Procedures for Dealing with Irate Customers

The purpose of this Safe Work Procedure is to provide guidance to employees on how to deal with angry and irate customers to defuse the potential risks of violence.

   1. **Stay Calm**

Getting yelled at by a customer can be extremely upsetting. It's imperative to keep your cool and not get flustered. Do NOT yell back or argue with them. Instead, try to diffuse the situation as quickly as possible by focusing on the customer's concerns and complaints rather than their loud voice and angry tone.

   2. **Let Angry Customers Vent**

Give angry customers the opportunity to state what's on their

mind without trying to stop or interrupt them. Listen carefully to what the customer is saying and, if necessary, ask questions so you can identify and focus on fixing the real problem.

3. **Apologize for the Inconvenience**

Irate customers may be wrong or right. At this point in the conversation, it doesn't matter. The immediate objective is not to dispense justice but to defuse a potentially dangerous situation and keep it from escalating by calming the customer down. The best way to do that is to take an apologetic tone by saying words to the following effect: "I can tell that you are upset. I'm sorry you have to deal with this. Let me see what I can do to help."

4. **Clarify the Problem**

After the customer explains the problem, briefly restate it to indicate and confirm your understanding of the situation. For example, say, "Let me make sure I understand what you're saying. You remember reserving two aisle seats but have been assigned window seats instead. Is this correct?"

5. **Don't Point Fingers or Blame Others**

When a customer describes a problem, your first reaction may be to defend yourself and blame another employee or department. But blame shifting will only upset the customer more while also making the company look bad. Most angry customers don't care who caused the problem; they just want a solution. So, assure the customer that you understand this and will do whatever you can to find a workable solution.

6. **Resolve the Conflict Immediately**

If possible, address a conflict when it arises to douse ill feelings before they develop. The longer you allow the conflict to remain unresolved, the more likely it is to fester.

7. **Watch Your Tone of Voice**

It's not just what you say to customers but how you say it. So, be very mindful of your tone of voice and speak in a way that will come across as positive, understanding and interested, rather than angry, condescending, aloof, or robotic. Take deep breaths, smile and avoid speaking in a monotone.

8. **Use Positive Language**

When speaking to irate customers, stress what you can do rather than what you can't do. **Example:** Instead of saying, "We don't accept checks," say, "We gladly accept cash or credit card."

9. **Be Proactive**

Don't wait to take action. Customers are anxious to resolve issues. So, look for positive solutions to challenging situations.

10. **Agree on a Solution**

Clearly explain your solution and get the customer's express agreement. If there's more than one potential solution, explain each option and let customers choose the option they like best.