

Coping with Difficult Customer Moments

Reduce stressful interactions by planning ahead.

Dealing with difficult customers can be one of the most stressful parts of any job. While positive interactions can be rewarding, challenging ones often lead to frustration and anxiety. Thankfully, proven strategies can help you manage stressful customer interactions with greater ease and confidence.

Part 1: Coping strategies

STOP and breathe

When stress rises, we tend to breathe shallowly and quickly, which can increase anxiety. Pay attention to your breath and slow it down. As you do, try to “STOP” (Stop, Take a Step Back, Observe, and Proceed Mindfully) instead of immediately reacting.

Identify your “anchors”

When we're distressed, racing thoughts can take over. Touching a physical object can help calm these thoughts and “anchor” us in the present moment. Anchors are objects or surfaces we can touch, grip, stroke, squeeze, or press. What objects or surfaces could you use to anchor yourself during a difficult customer interaction? Consider readily available items like a pen, lanyard, keychain, jewelry, or an article of clothing.

✓ Create a mantra

A mantra is a word or short phrase we can silently repeat to ourselves during difficult moments to stay focused and feel encouraged. You can use a mantra as often as needed, and even use multiple mantras. Here are a few examples:



✓ Create a coping plan

Preparing a plan for handling challenging customers can help you manage your emotions in the moment. Reflect on the following questions and how they might help you navigate a stressful situation.

1. What qualities (grace, patience, strength, calm, or humor) do you need most during a difficult interaction?
2. Choose one quality to focus on during these moments.
3. Write a short statement (one word to one sentence) that helps you embody this quality. For example, if you want to feel more calm, try saying, "I can stay calm through this."
4. Review other strategies and identify which combinations will be most helpful in a stressful situation.
5. Practice these coping strategies regularly so they become easier to use when needed.
6. Consider writing or posting these strategies somewhere visible, like setting a phone reminder or using sticky notes at home.

Part 2:

Tracking your practice

Tracking your use of coping skills can help you identify which strategies work best. Consider logging your use of these techniques to better understand their effectiveness.

- Note your distress level, before the coping strategy, from 1 to 5. (1 = least distressed, 5 = most distressed)
- What coping strategy did you practice? (Breathing, anchoring, “STOP” skill, mantra, other)
- Note your distress level, after the coping strategy, from 1 to 5. (1 = least distressed, 5 = most distressed)
- Include comments on this strategy. What might you do differently next time?



Get personalized support

Handling customer interactions can be challenging, even in the best conditions. If you need support, Lyra’s mental health professionals are here to help with tailored advice and coping strategies specifically designed for your role.

Book a Lyra session today at care.lyrahealth.com to gain the tools and confidence for navigating these situations.