

Articles

Angry Upset Players: What do you do?

by Steve Karoul

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How do you diffuse conflict when a player becomes upset or angry? It sounds like a simple question but the answer can often be quite complicated. It also does not matter whether the player is a table game player or a slot customer. Conflict is conflict. My office is located on the casino floor at Foxwoods Casino which is the world biggest casino with approximately 380 table games, 6,700 slot machines, 1,500 hotel rooms and 11,000 employees. We average 30,000 to 70,000 customers per day coming through our doors. Therefore, I have a lot of "opportunity" to deal with upset customers. I say "opportunity" because this allows us a chance to save or salvage an upset player that may go away angry and go to our competition on his or her next trip. Often times this is a "face to face" experience but sometimes it is over the telephone. Never-the-less, an angry upset player is usually going to be confrontational and come at you with an "us versus them" attitude. Therefore if you recognize this upfront and are prepared for it you still have a chance of salvaging the customer.

1. Let's review the problem. Normally, I always like to listen to the player first and give them a reasonable opportunity to vent their frustration or anger. I usually start with a simple phrase such as "Let's review the problem". I then sit back and "listen" very carefully giving the customer ample opportunity to vent or describe exactly what he or she perceives the issues to be. By asking the player to review the problem, you are actually forcing them to think, not just vent. This by itself can often help smooth things considerably. In addition, by listening carefully you are also letting the customer know that you genuinely care and are interested in hearing their version of what happened. This also allows you some valuable time while listening to hopefully figure out a reasonable solution to their problem.

2. Let's get together to talk about this. Second, if the complaint is via telephone, you have two options. First, if the problem is straight forward, you can resolve it by telephone quickly. However, if it is not so straight forward and the player is very upset and yelling or venting at you over the telephone, I normally suggest that we get together and meet face to face to discuss the problem. This again gives you some valuable cooling down time versus trying to rationalize with an angry upset customer over the telephone. Your conversation has a much better chance of being far more controlled and productive once you get together similar to the situation in number one above.

3. Let's have someone else listen to your problem. Sometimes the confrontation between an angry upset player and yourself may remind you of two rams butting heads but going nowhere. It can happen especially if the player is unreasonable with their demands. Unfortunately, many players that lose money in the casino honestly think that they should be entitled to more than what they actually receive. If the customer is a valuable customer and you want to try to save the player, you may need to call in a third party. This will probably be another casino executive. Have them listen to the upset customer but make sure that your informal arbiter knows that he or she should approach the situation as objectively as possible which may cue both you and your upset customer to do the same. Normally a reasonable solution can be found. If not, be prepared to lose the customer at least for the short term.

4. Let's see what we can do to resolve this. After you carefully listen to the upset customer, it is very important that you re-affirm your desire to work out a satisfactory solution to the problem. In addition, you can now work toward actually trying to identify what went wrong and begin to take reasonable steps to correct the problem so that other players will not endure the same.

5. Let's hear how you think we should solve this. I caution you to be very careful in selecting this strategy due to the fact that casino customers who lose money may in fact believe that they are entitled to unreasonable claims or wishes. If you even think that you know what the customer wants and you feel that it is unreasonable, do not use this approach. However, if a resolution to the problem isn't immediately obvious, then you can buy some time by tossing the issue into the player's lap which may help them to better understand that you really are trying to help them and in turn, they may suggest a reasonable solution. Conversely, I have found that many players often suggest unreasonable solutions but at least I then know what their expectations are. You then need more time to discuss options. I have personally found that if I

recognize them and their problem but also explain that I do not own the casino and therefore what they are asking of me is not within my authority or possible that we can then move towards a more reasonable solution to satisfy them. Remember, rewards have to fit in with the "lifetime value" of the player.

6. Let's talk about ways this won't happen again. This is usually the final touch for completely diffusing the conflict. Once more, this demonstrates to the customer that you really do care not only about their recommendations or ideas but that you demonstrate an ongoing commitment to customer care. Not only have you discreetly worked toward a reasonable solution to the problem but you also want to try to make sure that the same problem does not occur again. Also, if the player offers ideas or suggestions that seem reasonable and cost effective, then you should try to implement them as soon as possible.

7. Let's use "let's" as much as possible. Obviously, you will not say this out loud, but note that the prior six ideas all begin with "let's" (let us). No matter how upset the player is or no matter which approach you decide to take to try to resolve the conflict, always try to be as "inclusive" as possible in every solution that you offer. For one thing, this will immediately diffuse the "us versus them" landmine present in most conflict. It will also let the customer know that you consider a common understanding to be an important outcome of the discussion. If you can achieve this, you can most likely resolve the conflict and salvage the customer. Good luck.

[Steve Karoul is an innovator and a recognised authority in the areas of International Casino Marketing and Casino Junket Operations. Steve has lived in South Africa, Istanbul, Hong Kong, Bangkok and the Philippines and has also conducted casino related business in well over 80 different countries around the world. Steve is a leading casino marketing consultant. Steve may be reached at Tel. (1-860) 536-1828, Fax 536-1898 or by E-mail at: skaroul@comcast.net. www.euroasiacasino.com

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