

5 Customer Service Phrases to Banish

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We've all been there. At the exact moment we could have said just the right thing, we instead — open mouth and insert foot. This can be especially problematic when the person you're speaking to is your customer.

Dianna Booher, CEO of Booher Consultants and author of the upcoming book "Creating Personal Presence: Look, Talk, Think, And Act Like a Leader" (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, October 2011), tells us five things you should never say to your customer.

"I'm sorry for any inconvenience this may have caused you." — General, vague apologies sound insincere. This wording actually insults customers. The phrase "for any inconvenience" minimizes the customer's problem, and the phrase "may have caused" suggests that the issue might not have been a problem after all.

"Next"— This word seems to be a favorite for front-line staff at airlines, hotels, banks and retail stores, where agents greet customers routinely with, "Next!" The message customers hear is: "We 'process' people through here. You're just a number, not a real person that we care about."

"You'll have to...or You'll need to do..." — Such statements end with something the customer is being directed to do before the company will complete a transaction—such as complete this form, get in another line, call back later when Joe's in. Customers don't like to be told what they have to do in order to do business with you. Granted, the company may have a process, but there's a better way your [customer service people](#) can communicate that process.

"Please disregard this notice if payment has already been made." — This statement comes routinely tacked onto "reminders" for quarterly semi- or annual payments coming due and "late payment" notices. The first part of the letter warns (or scolds) the customer sternly about missing a payment—and then the last sentence says, "Or never mind if our records happen to be wrong or this notice arrives late." If you have made payment, you're irritated to get the notice. If you haven't made payment, your reaction is, "No big deal — their records aren't accurate anyway."

"If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to call." — This catch-all closing translates, "I haven't bothered to think what your

questions might be, but give us a call — I dare you to get through the menu options." The generic sentence suggests the communication is not important enough for a closing tailored to the topic at hand.

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