

Tom Burgdorf's

*Gymnet Sports Learning Library*

Office Staff

## Difficult Customers

**Success Rate** - How successful are you at turning a difficult customer into a loyal, positive thinking customer supportive of the gym? The office staff is the front lines in the battle (challenge) of dealing with the less than happy customers. Reminder: even the best programs in the country have a few customers who can appear to be difficult. It is just the way it is when you deal with hundreds of different people each week. Often it has nothing to do with what we have done.

**Short Term Challenges** - Even a normally great customer can be difficult at times based on the circumstances at the gym and also outside the gym. Bottom line, a difficult situation that arises at the gym has to be diffused as quickly as possible. Enter you. Your job is to quickly understand the situation and make a determination on how to calm things down. Most customers are looking for someone to listen to their concerns. (You) Miscommunication, failure to make call backs, price increases and new gym policies can create sudden customer questions and concerns. Get the customer to understand that there is a solution. Calm them down, listen to them and educate them. Show them your interest in their situation. It may be a minor issue to you but a bigger issue to them. Make sure that they know you are there to help them.

**Long Term Challenges** - Then there are the customers who are chronically difficult. Now you have the challenge of changing their way of acting and communicating at the gym. This will take longer. Changing them will involve more communication from you with lots of positives about the gym. Probably every time they come to the gym. It is a shame that we have to devote extra time to difficult customers but it is just the way it is. We try to educate them about their importance and +s at the gym. Hopefully this will start them thinking about more positives than negatives, therefore changing their attitude before each visit. This is a continuous process for a period of time.

Hopefully you will see some changes after a few weeks of the additional attention. Be positive with them. Be enthusiastic with them. Create a great relationship. You are trying to save them from the "bad finish" of them being so chronically negative that they are asked to leave or they leave on their own.

**There Are Limits** - A mistake some gyms make is to keep a chronically negative customer, who is unwilling to change, too long. We all know these negative customers can affect others. They can create negative situations in the parents waiting area. They can also cause others to turn negative. If they leave on their own we have seen them take other customers with them. Hurting the gym.

The gym has rules and policies. No one is above these policies. Give the negative customers a chance to change, explain the concerns that the gym has with their negativity and look for change. If you see positive change, great. If you don't see a willingness to change a deadline needs to be set for the positive changes. Then it is up to the difficult parent, through her/his behaviors, to prove that they can be supportive and therefore stay in the program. The bosses in the program ultimately decide if the customer is an asset or a liability to the program.

Some customers are not savable. If they don't fit into your program, send them a brochure from your competition down the street and see if they can fit in there.

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