15 customer service no-nos

By [Monte Enbysk](http://www.microsoft.com/smallbusiness/resources/marketing/customer_service_acquisition/15_customer_service_no_nos.mspx#bio1)

Sometimes it seems like rude customer service is the rule rather than the exception. But there's rude — and then there's *rude*.

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When it comes to getting customer service, what's your definition of rude? What unprofessional behavior irritates you the most when, as a consumer, you are interacting by phone with another company?

Sometimes, customer service that is perceived as rude is not intentional and often is the result of absent-mindedness or carelessness on behalf of an employee. Either way, bad customer service can translate into lower sales and lost business, says Nancy Friedman, president and founder of the Telephone Doctor, a St. Louis-based customer service training company.

Based on its own surveys, the Telephone Doctor has compiled the 15 biggest sins of customer service employees today. They are listed below, along with Telephone Doctor's guidelines (in parentheses) on how to do it right.

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If your company's customer service managers and front-line employees are guilty of any of these, it's time for some action. Otherwise, you may have an image problem that could sabotage your effort to produce and market great products.

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| 1. | Your employees are having a bad day, and their foul mood carries over in conversations with customers. (Everyone has bad days, but customer service employees need to keep theirs to themselves.) |
| 2. | Your employees hang up on angry customers. (Ironclad rule: Never hang up on a customer.) |
| 3. | Your company doesn't return phone calls or voice-mail messages, despite listing your phone number on your Web site and/or in ads and directories. (Call customers back as soon as you can, or have calls returned on your behalf.) |
| 4. | Your employees put callers on hold without asking them first, as a courtesy. (Ask customers politely if you can put them on hold; very few will complain or say "No way!") |
| 5. | Your employees put callers on a speaker phone without asking them first if it is OK. (Again: Ask first, as a courtesy.) |
| 6. | Your employees eat, drink or chew gum while talking with customers on the phone. (A telephone mouthpiece is like a microphone; noises can easily be picked up. Employees need to eat their meals away from the phone. And save that stick of gum for break time.) |
| 7. | You have call-waiting on your business lines, and your employees frequently interrupt existing calls to take new calls. (One interruption in a call might be excusable; beyond that, you are crossing the "rude" threshold. Do your best to be prepared with enough staff for peak calling times.) |
| 8. | Your employees refuse or forget to use the words "please," "thank you" or "you're welcome." (Please use these words generously, thank you.) |
| 9. | Your employees hold side conversations with friends or each other while talking to customers on the phone, or they make personal calls on cell phones in your call center. (Don't do either of these.) |
| 10. | Your employees seem incapable of offering more than one-word answers. (One-word answers come across as rude and uncaring.) |
| 11. | Your employees do provide more than one-word answers, but a lot of the words are grounded in company or industry jargon that many customers don't understand. (If you sell tech products, for example, don't casually drop in abbreviations such as APIs, ISVs, SMTP or TCP/IP.) |
| 12. | Your employees request that customers call them back when the employees aren't so busy. (Customers should never be told to call back. Request the customer's number instead.) |
| 13. | Your employees rush through calls, forcing customers off the phone at the earliest opportunity. (Be a little more discreet. Politely suggest that you've got the information you need and you must move on to other calls.) |
| 14. | Your employees obnoxiously bellow "What's this in reference to?" effectively humbling customers and belittling their requests. (Screening techniques can be used with a little more warmth and finesse. If a caller has mistakenly come your way, do your best to point him or her in the right direction.) |
| 15. | Your employees freely admit to customers that they hate their jobs. (This simply makes the entire company look bad. And don't think such a moment of candor or lapse in judgment won't get back to the boss.) |

In defense of customer service workers, customers can be rude too. And customer service jobs can often be thankless, with little motivation or incentive to do the job right.

But the problem here is that life for customer service employees may not be fair. Customers can be rude and get away with it. Employees cannot — if they want to help their companies to succeed and keep their jobs as well.