Dear Dr. Watson,

I’m a fairly new customer service rep, so I’m not sure what to do when I make a mistake with customers. What do you advise when employees or companies do make mistakes?

Maria

Dear Maria,

Thanks for your question. Please remember that everyone makes mistakes from time to time. It’s only human and normal. What is a problem is not taking responsibility for making the mistake or trying to cover it up. History teaches us what can happen when someone, even a U.S. president, tries to cover up mistakes. The following list details the three steps you should take when you make a mistake with a customer:

1. **Admit your mistakes.** The best thing to do when you make a mistake is to admit it to the customer. Customers will forgive an honest mistake, but will not forgive an attempt to hide it from them. Let the customer know exactly what mistake was made and what you will do to correct the situation. The customer will appreciate your honesty and willingness to admit your mistakes. They will also have greater confidence in you— that you will do what is ultimately best for them regardless of how it might affect you personally.

2. **Be willing to share in the blame.** You can call it the “blame game” or anything else that might describe what happens when something goes wrong in business. It seems that there has to be someone to blame for the problem. Even though this might not be the most productive thing to do when trying to resolve a problem, it is still unfortunately a common, everyday occurrence in business.

   Employees also engage in this activity as well. They might look for what they believe to be the source of problems to explain to their own managers or bosses what might have gone wrong. Sometimes the finger might be pointed at their suppliers. If you find yourself in this position, you need to be willing to share in the blame if you were part of the cause of the problem. Even customers realize that suppliers are human and might make a mistake once in awhile. Being open and honest about your mistake and accepting responsibility for your actions will make your customers much more forgiving.

3. **Apologize.** Saying “I’m sorry” can be two of the hardest words to say in the English language. However, they can also be two of the most important words as well, particularly when dealing with a customer.

   If you have done something that might not be pleasing to the customer, you should apologize and find out what you can do to correct the situation. Saying “I’m sorry” might just be the best thing you can ever say to your customer.