

Resale Meltdown

By Adele Meyer

We've heard all the common stress management techniques—take a warm bath, go for a walk, count to 10 or meditate for half an hour. While they may work well at home, a bubble bath is rarely an option when you are at work. So here are some suggestions that customer service oriented retailers can use to reduce workday stress:



- **Know your options.** Stress is the result of feeling that you aren't in control of the situation. To counter that, know your options for common situations that may occur in your store. Decide which circumstances would warrant a refund. Know what other resale and thrift shops accept so you have a referral for the supplier that you just can't please. Would a discount or gift certificate on a future purchase work in some cases? Once you have some options in place, you'll have more control and less stress.
- **Don't take it personally!** If someone has a problem with an item they purchased or, more likely, one you can't accept, don't make it your personal problem. If the customer is angry or verbally abusive, remember that their emotions are directed at the situation you are associated with, not with you. When the customer leaves, dust yourself off and realize that it wasn't about you... it was business!
- **Network... network... network!** As NARTS members you have a built in support team of industry peers who understand what you face each day. Phone or email a peer... vent a little (or a lot) on the message boards - in addition to support you'll probably even get a little sympathy. If you haven't established a rapport with any of your peers start now... attend a meeting, use Ask A Mentor or become active on the message boards. Start a breakfast club with local resale shop owners... you can vent once a month over pancakes.
- **Empathize with the customer.** Next time a customer gets on your last nerve, instead of anger, try to empathize with them. Look at the situation from their point of view. If that doesn't work you can always try sympathy for the person who has nothing better to do in life than attack you over a minor incident. You can make a choice about the attitude you'll have toward a customer.

- **Just ask!** When you have an irate customer in front of you or on the phone, it can be stressful just trying to figure out they really want. Unhappy customers often know exactly what outcome they'd like to see before they even contact you. Most customers won't make unreasonable demands, but even if you can't satisfy their request you at least have a starting point for working out a compromise. So don't try to second guess them... just ask!
- **Make small talk.** Dealing with difficult customers can skyrocket your stress level because the problem at hand is all you are focusing on. Some friendly banter, while trying to solve the problem, can ease the pressure and may help relax the customer a little... hopefully making them more open to possible solutions.
- **A little praise goes a long way.** Interject a positive comment every once in a while. Let them know that they are a valued customer or supplier. Thank them for bringing the problem to your attention.
- **Use the "Columbo" technique.** Remember Columbo, the TV detective? He always seemed so nonthreatening when he asked questions trying to solve the mystery. Pretend you're Columbo and ask your customer for help in understanding their viewpoint. This technique makes them part of the solution and thereby reduce the stress associated with it.

If all else fails, retreat to a relaxing bubble bath when you get home!

Adele Meyer, NARTS Executive Director, has over three decades of resale experience.