

# Turning the conversation around: 9 ways to leave them smiling when they come in screaming

7 MIN READ



*Sammy Screamer* just entered your venue and cannot contain their feelings about your policies, an experience they are having, or a mistake that occurred. You and your team just want to hide behind a door instead of facing that volatile conversation.

Does your team have the tools and strategic plan for when this situation occurs? We encourage you to utilize the following strategies to turn those screams into smiles:

## 1. Use a polite approach

1.

*Holly Hostile* is spewing profanities all over the lobby. Approach Holly with a polite demeanor. Your body language and facial expressions should reflect openness and warmth. You can do this by holding your palms slightly forward, instead of arms crossed or hands in fists. Now add an expression between a soft smile and relaxed interest. Avoid smirking or grinning from ear to ear as it will translate to contempt. Avoid frowning or furrowing your brow as it will reflect as antagonistic. Just relax and greet them as a new friend.

Use a polite introduction: “Hi, my name is [] and I’m the Director of Ticketing. Your name is?” This statement reminds *Holly Hostile* that there is a polite and pleasant way of approaching people. It also clearly demonstrates your authority and ability to reach a beneficial resolution. By asking their name, you will slightly change the topic, putting you in the lead. The name humanizes both of you. This will also allow you to use their name in the conversation, rather than miss or ma’am.

Now that you’ve shown them an example of being polite, return to the matter at hand by asking, “How may I help you?” This phrase clearly states that the goal in the interaction is to help. At times, this reminder of how to speak politely can be all that is necessary to change the conversation around!

## 2. Actively listen

2.

So often, we believe that we’ve heard all the complaints. We already know what the issue is and it’s definitely not our fault. This is frequently how we feel when another person comes in with what we believe is the same old gripe.

The truth is, they are individuals and may have a completely unique situation. At the very least, the gripe is new to them. Listen to their answer to “How may I help you?” Listening will unlock clues to their particular issue (or confusion) and enable you to clarify or resolve the conflict more quickly. Answer with affirmations: “Yes”, “I hear you”, “Can you tell me more?”, “You experienced XYZ, and would like us to XYZ”.

Demonstrate to them that you’ve heard what they want by repeating their request. Continue to use a polite tone, showing that you consider their desires to be worth listening to.

### **3. Ask clarifying questions**

3.

When the customer seems stuck on the same statement they started the interaction with, you’re probably not getting to the crux of the situation. This repetition could lead to further escalation due to frustration. At this roadblock take a moment to rephrase your understanding of their desires and to politely ask clarifying questions.

If you find yourself repeating the same answers or comments without a move toward understanding, there’s probably a barrier in terminology. Try switching up the words you are using to non-industry words. Sometimes even switching “I hear what you are saying” to “I see where you are going” can create a connection by using their language style. Listen carefully to the words they’re using and try to mirror them. They’re more likely to consider you a partner in a solution when you speak the same language.

### **4. Tell them what they can do – not what they did wrong**

4.

When an upset person has the blame pointed at them, they will only become more angry. That is not the direction you want to go.

For example:

Don’t say – “You cannot have a ticket exchange as you did not return the ticket to the box office.”

Do say – “We ask that requests for exchanges include the return of the ticket to the box office. Once the ticket is received, we would be happy to make that exchange.”

Notice how the first statement almost feels like you are poking the customer in the chest with each use of the word “you”? Just by changing the pronouns to be inclusive, the customer will feel it is a team effort instead of a burden.

### **5. Don’t join them**

5.

When *Matthew Malcontent* spews venom at you, don’t join in the flood of combat. You’re the one with the power in this situation, so use it to rise above.

Similar to the role of a lifeguard, you need to stay out of the water or you will drown with them. A good way to keep yourself on dry land is to remember that, in most cases, the intensity of their response has nothing to do with you personally. The current topic may be about your services, policies or product, but the emotion is an outpouring of their internal environment and experiences. They may be tired because they drove a long way, hungry because they haven’t dined yet, fearful that their significant other will judge them for their error, or even be inebriated.

If you join them in this emotional turmoil, you will not reach a positive solution. Throw them a lifeline and remain grounded as you guide them back to a calm conversation.

## **6. Offer a simple solution**

6.

Now that you've brought the discourse back to a polite discussion, you'll both be able to better achieve your collective goal: finding a positive solution to the problem.

Maybe it was just a misunderstanding that escalated unnecessarily. Remind them that you are here to help and you will take care of them. Forgotten ticket? No problem, we can send it to you again. Don't like our policy? We hear you and we will take your statement into consideration.

A thoughtful response that includes empathy and education will calm most fiery situations.

## **7. Consider going beyond expectations**

7.

Now that the "screamer" has allowed for a solution, consider bringing joy into their world by showing them you truly want their experience to be exceptional. Walk them to their new seat while telling them an inside secret about the show. Send them an email following up on their experience – consider asking them back at a discounted rate or just thanking them for their feedback.

Make sure to also record the situation in their customer account so that other members of your organization are aware. An integrated [CRM](#) tool will allow you to add customer notes, alongside their donation and ticket purchase history, so that you can get the full profile of a patron.

## **8. Solve the pain point**

8.

Consider the pain point from the customer's point of view and discuss it with the team. It may be that this is a recurring issue that bears considering and actions to avoid repeat unrest. If the decision is made to maintain the policy that caused the disturbance, make sure to equip all involved with the tools necessary to address the same issue in the future.

## **9. Take a moment to recover**

9.

Congratulate yourself on a job well done. Take a deep breath and smile because you did well. You may not perfectly resolve every negative interaction, but practice and a positive attitude will put you on the path to more smiles!

Have another tip for us? Send it our way at [marketing@audienceview.com](mailto:marketing@audienceview.com)!

AudienceView conducted a survey of more than 3,300 members of the TheaterMania community to better understand how this on-going health crisis is impacting their appetite for the arts and spending behavior. Generated from the survey results, we created a report that will assist arts organizations of all sizes in their efforts to generate revenue, engage with their community and prepare for the reopening of theaters. [Click here](#) to download the full report.

If you're an existing AudienceView event ticketing software client, your product's learning portal includes an online refresher course as well as hundreds of articles to help you with socially distanced seating, pre and

post show emails and more. You can also watch your inbox for special offers and programs from AudienceView to help you re-open effectively.