

# How to deal with difficult customers

With the ongoing restrictions and social distancing measures, it's more important than ever for your staff to know how to deal with tricky situations that might arise with your customers

**H**ave you had customers who won't respect social distancing (especially after a few drinks)? Or maybe you've been faced with those who don't want to leave at 10pm? Pete Fullard, CEO of online learning experts Upskill People, says every situation, no matter how tense, can be diffused with the right techniques. Here are his six essential tips.

## 1 IDENTIFY

Every situation needs to be assessed differently. Think of a traffic light system. Green presents no great danger; it's often just banter or a little bit of cheek. Amber represents a situation that could escalate but started from a point where the person is clearly irritated. Red poses a clear and immediate danger.



## 2

## STAY CALM

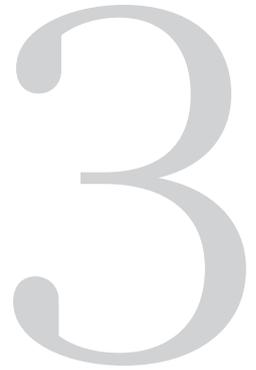
Breathe. Resist your natural urge to 'solve it' or take control of the situation from a position of authority. Even a small amount of assertive behaviour towards an irate customer can inflame the situation when you really need to take the heat out of it. So, stand in a relaxed stance, and look friendly.





## LISTEN

It's all about empathy. You have to be a really good listener. Let the customer vent, get things off their chest and believe they're being taken seriously (even if they're clearly under the influence of drink or drugs).



## AGREE

While your response will depend on what you can actually do about the situation, it's always best to find a common ground. Speaking calmly and slowly, repeating back what you think you've heard and agreeing your course of action with a timescale should reduce an amber down to a green very quickly.



## USE 'I'

Try this: 'I understand... from what I can gather... can I just ask you something...' Using 'I' phrases helps to build a rapport with the tricky customer. It also helps you to subtly take ownership of the situation. The more you do this, the more they're likely to run out of steam, and back down. Communicating well is really important in this type of situation.



## GET EXTRA HELP

When faced with a red situation, you need a different approach. These people have clearly come in with intent and rational conversation probably won't work. Don't make eye contact. Back away without turning your back on them and get help. Look for clenched fists, nervousness, tapping fingers or feet, or a reluctance to look you in the eye for telltale signs that you need to get help with the situation.



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