This is the second part of a review of how not to respond to hotline callers.

(4) “That’s not my problem.”

In my experience, this sentence is uttered with finality as a way of shutting down a call before the caller has resolved the problem; it’s a way of limiting support to a narrow definition of responsibility and is used primarily by vendor personnel who cannot deal with issues outside the limits of their particular product – perfectly reasonable for them. However, for a corporate technical support line, I think it is better to remember the (probably apocryphal but still entertaining) story about the customer who bought snow tires and returned them to the wrong store, where a clerk refunded his money and was praised by management for building customer satisfaction and loyalty. I’d rather see my tech support staff going out of their way to find a solution to a client’s problems (and I use the word deliberately even for in-house callers) than blow people off to inflate an illusory productivity figure.

(5) “Just format your hard disk and re-install the operating system and call me back if it happens again?!”

What can one say about this blow-off without descending into expletives? To suggest destroying the operating system, all program installation data and all user data as if this were a trivial matter (“just”) boggles the mind. Yes, it may be necessary – but not as a diagnostic procedure.

(6) “Don’t get mad at me – I just work here.”

Sigh. All technical support personnel have to be trained in handling irate callers. The first principle is that an upset caller is usually not upset with the person answering the phone; (s)he is frustrated because a technical problem is stopping him or her from getting work done. So a tense voice, clipped speech, or even moderately raised voice is not a personal attack. Responders should practice techniques for calming people down such as saying, “I can understand how frustrating this is for you, and I’m going to do everything I can to help you fix it. Now, let’s start at the beginning…” And I did mean “practice;” it’s a good idea for technical support staff to practice role-playing with each other by using phones to go through scenarios for handling upset callers. Start with play-acting mildly-irritated callers and escalate from there. And remember that if a caller does become abusive, they should be passed to a supervisor who will explain that no employee may be verbally assaulted by anyone, ever.

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For further reading:

Return to Spender

A Master's degree in the management of information assurance in 18 months of online study from Norwich University – see <http://www3.norwich.edu/msia> for details.

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