

Resilience in Customer Service

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In this context, resilience refers to the ability to reliably *move on* and place anything negative that occurred in a previous customer interaction behind you, especially if it was unpleasant, unproductive or heated. The most resilient individuals among us are able to “bounce back” from difficult situations, stay calm under pressure and maintain a positive attitude in the face of adversity.

There's a popular concept in the field of psychology known as '[emotional contagion](#)', which explains how the way *others* feel influences *our* moods. And since most of the time, those reaching out to the customer service team are doing so because they have an issue that has probably put them in a negative mood, it becomes *even more* challenging for staff to stay resilient and positive throughout all their dealings with customers.

In this course, we're going to discuss some tips and strategies for increasing your resilience in the workplace, allowing you to excel in your role, increase customer satisfaction and [significantly reduce your stress levels](#).

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the United States, around a [quarter of all employees](#) view their job as *the* top stressor in their life. But it's not all doom and gloom! The good news is that decades of research have shown us that resilience is built by attitudes and behaviours that can be adopted and cultivated by *anyone*. So, what are the key factors that lead to resilience? According to [Harvard Business Review](#), the main ones 'include optimism; the ability to stay balanced and manage strong or difficult emotions; a sense of safety and a strong social support system.' The takeaway from this is that since there's a concrete, well-established set of behaviours and skills associated with resilience, you, too, *can* learn to be more resilient!

Let's start with the fundamentals: *self-care*. Due to the unavoidable demands of the job - where high energy levels are often required and stressful situations need to be effectively dealt with - it's paramount for customer service employees to

prioritise both their mental and physical health. With this in mind, it's important to note that the two are deeply interconnected. For example, a regular physical exercise habit can actually work wonders for your mental health. In fact, one [study](#) demonstrated that aerobic exercise such as walking, jogging, cycling and swimming reduce anxiety and depression while improving mood, self-esteem and cognitive function. Beyond exercise, it's equally crucial to ensure you're getting enough sleep every night, at least 7 hours for most adults. According to [research](#) carried out by the American Psychological Association, adults who reported lower stress levels slept more hours per night on average compared to those who reported higher stress levels. You should also strive to maintain a healthy diet consisting of whole, natural foods and nutritious sources of protein. Eating a balanced diet is vital to helping our bodies manage the well-documented [physiological changes induced by stress](#). Finally, in addition to these foundational lifestyle enhancements, there is an exceptionally long list of benefits associated with relaxation and mindfulness practices such as deep breathing, yoga or meditation. Meditation, in particular, has been linked by [research](#) to a decrease in blood pressure.

This leads us nicely onto a more detailed discussion of mindfulness and, specifically, how it can help you to foster resilience in the world of customer service. Mindfulness, in its simplest form, involves being *fully present* in the moment and paying attention to your thoughts and emotions completely without judgement. By slowing down and practising this awareness, customer service workers can train themselves to become far more aware of their reactions to challenging customer situations and are better able to regulate their emotions in such instances. This, in turn, encourages them to remain calm and focused whenever they are dealing with difficult customers or unforeseen problems in the workplace. Practising the skill of mindfulness – by following a daily meditation habit, for example – will help you to be fully present, constantly aware of where you are and what you're doing, and not overly reactive or overwhelmed by what's going on around you. This is especially important in a chaotic customer service environment. This mindset can assist call centre workers, too, as it encourages them to remain grounded, calm and *present* in each and every moment instead of getting thrown off by angry or rude customers. One [study](#) conducted by researchers at the University of Quebec found that when call centre workers listened to a 10-minute guided meditation every morning, not only did the workers feel less stressed but the satisfaction of the company's clients increased too.

Next up is Stoicism, an Ancient Greek philosophy which emphasises the importance of rationality, self-control and the acceptance of one's circumstances as the key to achieving inner peace and happiness. Dealing with disrespectful or hostile customers is a difficult skill, especially when it's required on a regular basis and has the potential to be quite draining. However, you should remind yourself that, ultimately, it all comes down to how prepared *you* are because how *other* people act is out of your control. To this end, reading up on Stoic thinking and therefore practising the mental frameworks of 'Stoicism' can do wonders for your resilience in a customer service role. This is because Stoicism can help you to

clearly recognise the things which trigger a negative mood, such that you can learn beforehand how to optimally deal with them in the future.

Let's briefly discuss three popular techniques that relate to this way of thinking and can serve to boost your resilience. First, we have the idea – popularised by international best-selling author Stephen Covey - of '[circles of control](#)' or 'circles of influence', in which you visualise a smaller circle within a larger circle. The smaller circle represents what's in your control, that is, your own thoughts, actions and responses. The larger circle, on the other hand, represents things which we don't have control over: external events and how other people behave. By focusing our attention and energy on what we *can* control, we enable ourselves to become more resilient and optimistic.

Secondly, there's '[negative visualisation](#)'. Imagine a scenario where a customer is angry or upset due to a problem with your company's product or service. By visualising the scenario and the potential challenges that may come with it, you allow yourself to mentally prepare for how you would respond in a calm and empathetic manner. You can also visualise the worst-case scenario, such as losing the customer or receiving negative feedback and think about how you would handle it if it were to happen. This can help you develop a contingency plan and avoid being caught off guard.

Finally, there's '[scenario planning](#)', an approach that was promoted by the legendary coach of the San Francisco 49ers American football team, Bill Walsh. While he used it in order to coach his team, you can also apply it on a personal level to combat the anxiety that arises from going into uncertain situations. Brainstorm all of the various scenarios that may occur in a typical day in your role. Then think of "solutions" that could employ when facing each scenario, for example: "If the customer is angry, then...", "If the customer is rude, then...", "If I don't know the answer to a customer's question, then..." This technique helps to remove unnecessary anxiety from customer service because the next steps you can take are always clear.

In conclusion, unfortunately, upset customers will occasionally take out their frustration on you, and it can be easy to burn out if you let it affect you. In order to achieve a resilient customer service mindset, learn not to take things personally such that you can emotionally distance yourself from rude customers. Look at the situation, not the words. The former you have control over, not what anyone chooses to say to you. Focus on the concrete steps you can take to resolve the situation, busying yourself with taking these actions instead of allowing your mind to crowd with doubts and fears. By emotionally distancing yourself from situations which are out of your control, you create the space for a far more calm, logical reaction while boosting your ability to endure the hardest parts of a customer service role.

If you remember one thing from this session, remember this: you're only able to effectively deal with and improve the things that are within your control. So think about a recent challenging encounter you overcame. What was in your power to fix, and what was outside of your control? By emotionally distancing yourself from the situation and customer, you're giving yourself the golden opportunity to react in a much more calm and logical manner.
