



Customer Service Notes for *Words and Phrases to Avoid*

There is no doubt that communicating well with participants is a key component of stellar customer service. When communicating with participants, there are certain words and phrases that should be avoided. We have noted some of them below.

“Why didn’t you” – Starting a sentence with this can make a participant defensive, as it has a negative tone to it. Instead, use less negative language such as “If that happens again, you can try to...”

“No” – When a WIC employee responds with a “No,” that can come across as being unhelpful. You can get your same point across by eliminating “No” and starting your statement without it.

“We can’t” – While there are things asked of you that you truly cannot do, how you convey that makes a difference. Rather than potentially coming off as inflexible by beginning your statement with “We can’t,” instead follow the adage of telling people what you can do, not just what you can’t. For example, if a participant wants an appointment at a time when you are closed, you can respond with, “While our office is closed then, what we can do is give you the last appointment that day.”

“You have to” – Using this phrase can make you come across as dictatorial and inflexible. While what you are asking the participant to do may be fine, it is better to use different wording. Substituting “need” for “have” would be one option. Even better would be using language such as, “If we can ask you to bring in that paperwork next time,” instead of “You have to bring in that paperwork next time.”

“The problem is” – Using this phrase at the beginning of your statement comes across negatively. That’s not to suggest that what you are stating is not a problem. However, look for alternatives such as using the word “challenge.” Or you can re-phrase your statement to something like, “If we don’t have the weight of your son, we won’t be able to compare it in subsequent visits.”

“That was your mistake” – Even if the participant has made a mistake, there is no need to use this phrase. You can still make your point by using language such as, “Because we did not have your cell phone number, we were unable to reach you.” This would presume that the participant should have provided you with their cell phone number.

Avoid the above words and phrases to enhance your communication with participants!

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you think about your statement before you say it?
2. Do you generally use positive language with participants?