

Customer Support by Erica
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My daughter Erica was visiting this week and I told her that sometimes I get stumped on what to write for the journal each month. She came up with what I think was a great idea – what actually happens when you call a Customer Support line and how to make those calls more effective for you to get the help that you need. I spent most of my career working on software to log the critical parts of a customer call for service and she reviews and manages people who actually take those calls at an AT&T call center. Here's Erica's take on Customer Service and how to get better results!

You know that message when you call customer service that says the call “may be monitored or recorded for quality assurance”? My job is to listen to those calls and give feedback to customer service agents and their management about areas to improve and where they excel. So yes, someone really does listen!

Calling in to customer service or tech support is never how you want to spend your day, but there are a few things that you can do to help make sure the person you're talking to gives you the best service they can. So here are a few tips to make your next call go as smoothly as possible.

1 – Don't skip the automated voice or you will need to be prepared to be transferred. No one likes to navigate all the options the automated system gives you, and the voice recognition can be frustrating, but giving it as much information as you can rather than just skipping it can make your call shorter and better. It will get you to a department you need, or where there is an account matching information you provide, and it will often (but not always) auto-load that information for the person who answers your call. If you do skip it, be patient with the person who answers and understand that they may have to transfer you – be clear about what department you need or what services you have, so as to waste as little time and save as much bother as possible.

2 – Know your information, and give what is asked. You may want to go straight into telling your agent what the problem is, or vent about how long it has been happening, but there are a few things the agent must do before they can really help, the most important of which is to find your account. If the person is asking only for your name or security question, then they probably have your account loaded up thanks to you taking time with the Interactive Voice Recognition system (IVR) or the robot as we call it, but they need to confirm it's right before they can start making changes or troubleshooting. If they ask for your account number, let them know if you don't have it, and ask what other information they can use to find you. If you have phone or email services with the company you're calling, that's what they would normally use to contact you; that's probably the information they need.

3 – Be patient and try not to ramble. You may hear long periods of silence, or the phrase “I am just running some tests” which is a favorite in the tech support calls. It can be hard to wait this out, if you are the customer, when you’re mad that it’s the 2nd time your internet has gone out today. But this time is when your support agent is checking your account, letting their system check for damage in the area or other reported problems, and when they are figuring out what steps to do next. If silence goes on for longer than a minute, feel free to ask for an update, but if you are talking the entire time it will be harder for the agent to concentrate on their job.

4 – Leave honest feedback, good or bad. You might be offered a supervisor or ask to speak to one, or you might get a survey email or text after your call. This data is crucial for the company to figure out if there are patterns of good or bad service, and figure out how to give you more of what you like. Ratings of your satisfaction with the result, the wait time, and the service are good points of reference for the company and service as a whole. If you have the option for a short-answer or a free response, that is the best place to give your specific thoughts about the agent you worked with rather than the company as a whole, that section usually goes to the agent’s supervisor and is a big part of how they are evaluated.