

THE CUSTOMER AND HO'OPONOPONO



The Challenge

"You are the application vendor so this is your problem."

"This case has been open for a very long time, and we have not had any movement on it. We are frustrated by the inaction."

"Why do we need to create so many indexes? Why are they not being shipped with the product? This is ridiculous!"

These are just a few examples of the irate customers I have worked with over the years, and their frustration and anger is often palpable. While we may not all be vendors, we all have customers—end user customers, business partners, colleagues, and so on. And just like me, you may have had a hard time finding a good solution quickly, before the tension escalates.

The techniques described below may be useful for tricky customer situations and other interpersonal situations. Once you learn this new approach, you'll be surprised at how quickly you can move the conversation to friendlier footing.

A new way to approach the challenge

So, how does one handle these types of situations? How does one calm someone down enough to

get the details of the problem and move past the anger? The secret is that people in these situations simply need to be heard. They want you to start by listening. Often, they've felt shut down by people they've called for help and so, they expect you to act the same way.

The problem is that we are all subject to something called an "[amygdala hijack](#)." Part of our primitive brain is triggered to respond in kind to an attack. But once you know that this can happen, you can identify it and opt for another approach.

So, what works better?

First, step back from your usual response when you're attacked. Remember that your default response is likely to be anger or defensiveness. Instead, take a breath and acknowledge the other party's "pain" in a calm voice.

The next step is to apologize, if applicable, without using a "but ..." (which is a justification and not really an apology). A genuine apology is disarming; people don't expect it.

When this occurs for me in a work situation, I follow that up by reiterating that we at BMC and the customer are a team and we will find the solution to the problem even if it means that additional expertise from research and development (R&D) may need to be consulted. I own the problem and assure them that I will gather the necessary resources to solve it for them.

I always end the meeting with, "Thank you for your patience and understanding. I promise you that we shall resolve this as soon as possible."

This has worked for me each time. Once tempers have cooled, it becomes possible to do real work.

I came up with the above methodology from an ancient Hawaiian prayer called "ho'oponopono," which is often translated into English as:

- "I am sorry
- Please forgive me
- Thank you
- I love you"

When applied to our customers, colleagues, friends, and family, it becomes:

- We are sorry (that you are in a tough spot)
- Please forgive us (for taking so long to resolve it)
- Thank you (for your patience and understanding)

Try it. It works, whether you are dealing with clients in a professional environment or when interacting with others in your personal life.