



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

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Customer Conflicts and You

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Take the Higher Road

A common situation you may encounter is a rider who disobeys rules, whether the rules pertain to food and beverage consumption, smoking, noise, or other nuisances. In a situation like this, it is important to address the problem early. Then, choose one of the three common ways to address the situation:

- Validate the situation—let your customer know that you heard what she or he said. Validating feelings can help make your customer feel understood and can help win him or her over.
- Give choices and consequences—list the choices available to your customer, such as, for example, continuing smoking on the street or putting the cigarette out and taking a seat. The customer gets to make the choice, which puts him or her in a position of power and can diffuse the conflict.
- Agree—by siding with your customer and telling him or her that you don't agree with the rules either but are still required to follow them, you may surprise your customer and diffuse the situation. Your customer may forget he/she was angry!

It is rare to find a transit driver who hasn't encountered a difficult (and in some cases, damaging) situation with a passenger. Conflict resolution is a tool for you—a process that allows you to work out differences with your passengers before a situation escalates to a more difficult or dangerous encounter.

There are a variety of ways to deal with a situation: avoidance, confrontation, and problem solving. Conflict

resolution addresses a situation through problem-solving techniques, including assessing your own behavior, identifying current and potential problem situations, and implementing specific conflict management skills to address these situations. Taken together, these techniques provide an effective way to communicate with passengers to avoid conflict and create a positive transit experience for everyone on board.

Self-assessment tools

According to the National Transit Institute's guide *Customer, Conflicts and You: A Transit Operator's Guide to Problem-Solving*, communication is an essential component in the transit industry, especially in how you convey your attitude and thinking toward your customers.

First, greeting your customers is one of the most important things you can do as a driver. It allows you to set the tone on your bus. You can start with a smile, a simple nod of your head, or saying hello. However, it is important to try to greet all customers the same way and to speak in a clear, friendly tone.

Second, it is important to have an open, receptive body posture when welcoming riders onto the transit vehicle. You will appear interested in helping them. Further, it can give you a chance to see who is coming on board and if they may need any assistance.

Third, it is important to have eye contact with your customers as they board. It lets you acknowledge your customers, lets them know you are watching what's happening on your bus, and helps you to spot any clues that might let you know of a situation to watch out for. However, you should avoid staring at your customers so as to avoid provoking a negative reaction.

Potential problem situations

In addition to assessing your own demeanor, it is also important to identify potential problem situations before they develop. First, there are situational problems that can occur when a bus is at passenger capacity. For example, customers with packages can take up more space and anger others; customers who are sick can cause general concern; and some customers can become suspicious when they are around people they don't know. In addition, when the bus nears capacity, it is typically during a busy time of day. Some passengers may be in a hurry and get angry when the bus is in traffic.

Some problems can occur at any time. For example, certain customers may make others feel uneasy. Whether a person is acting erratic, seems to have a personal problem, or is in situation that is out of their control (such as having a crying baby on board), other customers will likely feel bothered. In addition, unsupervised teenagers or children who may be riding can pose a potential problem since these passengers tend to follow rules less often.

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not. It is very important to not stereotype. A problem can be caused by anyone. Further, clues to problem situations can sometimes be misinterpreted. The bottom line is to stay alert and be aware of your riders, treating them with respect regardless of how they look to you. By identifying potential trouble—such as a mentally unstable passenger, someone who doesn't observe the rules, or large groups of teenagers—you will be able to act if something develops into a problem.

Conflict management skills

What you say and how you say it can affect what happens on your vehicle. In normal circumstances, a conflict between you and a passenger can be handled by either politely ending the conversation, pausing either before or after you speak, or by using humor to diffuse the situation. Each technique should be considered based on the situation at hand. Further, humor should be used only if you are comfortable doing so and can reasonably ensure that the customer

will get the joke.

In situations when you are dealing with someone with a mental disorder or someone who might be a substance abuser, it is important to either give a directive, set limits, or give choices and their consequences. Ultimately, it is important to recognize these situations and use the following communication skills:

- Don't embarrass or humiliate your customer,
- Speak clearly and calmly,
- Use repetition,
- Don't intimidate the person,
- Don't be surprised if they overreact, and
- Treat every passenger with the same respect you treat your other customers.

In every circumstance, it is important to not be confrontational. Instead, in arguments, you should validate the customer's concern, give choices and consequences for certain actions, and even agree with what is being said if it will help diffuse a situation from occurring. Although you cannot control others, you can have an impact on them and reduce the risk that a problem will escalate.

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Source

- *Customers, Conflicts and You: A Transit Operator's Guide to Problem-Solving*. 2000. Guide and movie. National Transit Institute.