

When Employees Show Care: The Effects of Customer Emotional Expressions on Service Recovery

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Abstract

Anger and sadness are both typical negative emotions experienced and expressed by customers in service failure situations. When customers display these two different discrete emotions, which one benefits more from the recovery of service employees? The current research examines this question and investigates the process of how customers' emotional expressions impact on frontline service employees' emotional responses and subsequent recovery behaviors through two studies. The findings show that when complaining customers display sadness compared to anger, service employees develop more compassion, and further perform more voluntary recovery behaviors where they can implement their compassionate feelings (i.e., extra-role recovery and compensation allocation). However, service employees give equal importance to sad and angry customers when they perform in-role recovery behaviors characterized by strict job descriptions. The mediating effects of employees' consequent anger and compassion toward emotional customers on their recovery behaviors are confirmed. More importantly, their compassion toward customers, as the mechanism, plays a greater role on extra-role recovery than on in-role recovery, demonstrating that voluntary helping behaviors are exactly where the compassion unfolds. The study deepens our understanding of the process in which service employees take the service recovery in emotional encounters, and provides practical implications for managers and customers in complaint situations as well.

Keywords: *emotion; recovery; compassion*

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