

Handling an Angry Caller

There are many events that are making the news, which are putting out information that may not be completely accurate. The sensationalism in the reporting may cause ordinary people to respond in anger to a report and feel the need to do something. It is empowering to be on a telephone and to speak boldly to some unknown person on the other end and in most cases that person would never have the courage to speak like that in person. Very rarely will that caller, when properly handled, act out in a physical way.

There have been a number of calls made to the CWS offices, where our staff will receive the brunt of those angry calls. Below are a few key points to consider when dealing with those types of angry callers.

- Recognize that the caller is angry about a situation and not you.
- Don't take the call personally. Think of yourself as the lightning rod with the unpleasant duty of redirecting that violent energy.
- Before you answer the phone, smile. Have you ever heard someone smiling on the other end of the phone? It is harder to be angry when someone is warm and friendly.
- Listen, really listen to the caller. In most cases you will find that 80% of what they are saying is their feelings and only 20% may be about a specific problem. By listening carefully you will know the difference.
- Sympathize with the caller. That doesn't mean you agree with them and in most cases you know the caller doesn't have accurate facts. You are not going to change their mind while they are angry and attempting to will often escalate the situation.
- Accept responsibility for the call. Say something like, I have heard your comments and understand how you feel. I have noted this and will pass them on.
- Don't transfer the call. In most cases putting someone on hold will increase their anger. If they insist on speaking with a supervisor, politely ask for their name and what would be the best number for a return call. If they push back, politely indicate we value everyone's opinion and would be glad to get the right person to return their call and again request their name and number.
- If the caller uses profanity, interrupt as soon as it is used. Be polite but direct and say something like, I am willing to have a professional conversation but will discontinue this call if you continue to use inappropriate language.
- If the caller makes any threats, note the specific words that are used. In a professional tone say something like, I want to make sure that I heard you correctly, did you say – and repeat what they had said. If they confirm, follow the guidance in the CWS Security Policy on handling various threats.

This sheet can be posted at the front desk, as a reference for the call taker. This is the type of information that would quickly de-escalate an angry caller. Remember to let someone know about the angry call and it is ok to do a de-brief after the call, with your supervisor and other staff members.

Immediately following any negative call, the details of the call should be reported to the Office Director or Security Focal Point (SFP), who will then immediately notify Anthony Tamburello with CWS HQ Security. Thank you all for your continued support.