

THANKS FOR TRYING TO RUIN MY DAY!

by Roz Warren

If you work with the public, you're stressed. Unreasonable customers. Demanding bosses. Reduced staffing. I love my job, but the workload is tough and getting tougher. What can we do to keep our spirits up?

Play Customer Appreciation! It's simple. Assign a point value to each annoying thing that happens during a typical work day. When something takes place that stresses you out, you don't scream, quit, or deck the offending customer. You earn valuable points! The first person to reach 100 points gets to slap the next member of the public who gives her attitude, as her co-workers cheer.

No, she doesn't. That's only in the version of the game for folks who've just won the lottery. But what about this -- if you win, you can put your feet up in the staff lounge, pull out your cell and waste twenty minutes gabbing.

Each workplace can draw up its own Aggravation List. In the suburban library where I work, for instance, we'd get points each time a patron goes ballistic about paying a twenty cent fine, or screams at us to check her movies out faster because it's a hot day and the ice cream in the trunk of her Lexis is melting.

The more annoying the incident, the more points. A mom chats blithely on her cell as her toddler heads into the elevator alone, causing you to drop everything to go on a Rescue Mission? Five points! A man with no library card and no ID gets up in your grille because you refuse to let him check out a dozen DVDs? Ten points! And when a patron sneaks an overdue book back onto the shelf,

then pretends to “find” it and insists that he returned it last week, don't call him a lying snake! Smile, waive his fine, and award yourself bonus points.

Soon you'll be pushing each other out of the way to help your most difficult customers. The guy who sneers at everything you say? You'll be thrilled to see him. The woman who never says “please” or “thank you?” You'll treasure each encounter. The teenager who calls you a witch because you ask her to remove her ear buds so you don't have to compete with Taylor Swift when you're trying to talk to her? You'll want to give her a big hug.

The only risk you'll run that you'll be tempted to provoke your nicer customers into behaving like jerks, just to up your score.

“I'm returning this book late, but I'm happy to pay the fine because I love the library,” a patron might say to me.

“Are you sure you don't want to scream about it?” I'll plead. “I have 95 points. All I need is 5 more. Go ahead -- vent!”

Customer Appreciation will get you through those moments when you encounter something so unquestionably rude or bizarre that it's hard to believe it's actually happening. A woman approached the circulation desk at the library where I work last week and said, “My car has a flat tire.”

“Would you like to use our phone to call Triple A?” I asked.

“Can't someone HERE change my tire?” she asked.

I didn't say. “This is a public library, not a garage.” Or comment that when I spent a large chunk of my paycheck on the Eileen Fisher dress I was wearing, “auto mechanic” wasn't exactly the look I was going for.

I just smiled and handed her the phone. If I'd been playing Customer Appreciation, that little encounter would have been a twenty-pointer -- at least!

Sounds like fun, you say. But you're afraid you'd never be able to amass 100 points by the end of a shift?

Are you sure you work with the public?

