

De-Escalation Shopper Statements

Racist and Discriminatory Interactions

Overview

All retailers should be committed to providing an environment free of discrimination and harassment—regardless of the source – and one that enforces zero-tolerance for any violations of this. Discrimination or harassment include racist conduct, racial profiling, discrimination, and derogatory or hateful comments, and other discriminatory or harassing misconduct of any kind based on someone's race, color, religion, ethnicity, citizenship, political activity or affiliation, marital status, age, national origin, ancestry, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex or gender, or any other basis protected by law. Discriminatory and harassing conduct can include verbal remarks such as epithets, derogatory comments, or slurs.

The following guide* details scenarios and responses for retail employees and leadership who find themselves in the unfortunate situation of being subjected to racist and/or discriminatory comments, with the goal being to de-escalate and protect employees and shoppers.

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Scenarios

Shopper makes statement to Retail Employee or Brand Partner about their ability to service them due to physical appearance differences.

Situation 1

- **Shopper:** “I doubt you can help me find what I need. Is there anyone who could help me that looks like me?”
- **Retail Employee/Brand Partner Response:** “I understand why you might feel that way. I would love the opportunity to help you and if you aren’t satisfied at any point, I can grab someone else who’s available. Let’s get you what you need.”
- **Shopper Response:** “Ok.”

Situation 2

- **Shopper:** “I doubt you can help me find what I need. Is there anyone who could help me that looks like me?”
- **Retail Employee/Brand Partner Response:** “I understand why you might feel that way. I would love the opportunity to help you and if you aren’t satisfied at any point, I can grab someone else who’s available. Let’s get you what you need.”
- **Shopper Response:** “I really don’t think you can help me/I don’t want your help. I only want to speak with a [insert race, color, and/or ethnicity] employee [and/or use of racial slur].”
- **Shopper/Brand Partner Response:** “If you would please excuse me, I’m going to step away for a minute to get more assistance [from the Store Manager] for you. Someone will be with you shortly.”
- **Leadership Response:**

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- **If racial slur used:** “Hi, I’m [NAME], the manager. My employee/brand partner let me know that you used offensive language while she/he/they was/were trying to help you. I would like to hear from you, what was said.”
 - **Shopper Response:** “I just asked for help from a [insert race, color, and/or ethnicity] employee [and/or use of racial slur].”
 - **Leadership Response:** “We do not tolerate any discriminatory language in our stores, and I would kindly ask that you leave the store.”
 - **If racial slur not used:** “Hi, I’m [NAME], the manager. My employee/brand partner let me know that you requested additional assistance from an employee who is a [insert race, color, and/or ethnicity]. All our employees/brand partners are trained to service all shoppers including myself. I would be happy to help. Is there something particular you are looking for today?”
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Two shoppers are waiting for help. When one shopper is approached by a retail employee/brand partner before the other, the shopper who has not been helped yet starts to yell and demand service first.

Situation 1

- **Shopper:** (Interrupts the retail employee with the other shopper and tries to step between the Retail employee and client) “Excuse me I am in a hurry! Can I just ask a question?”
- **Retail employee/Brand Partner Response:** “Yes, we would be glad to help. Let me see if there’s anyone available to assist you. Otherwise, I will be right with you after I assist my client/customer.”
- **Shopper:** Continues to try to interrupt the other shopper. Sighing loudly each time and says, “Someone better help quick. This is ridiculous.”
- **Retail employee/Brand Partner Response:** “We are looking to see if anyone is available to assist you. Please be respectful of all our shoppers while you’re with us today. Our goal is to help everyone.”

Situation 2

- **Shopper:** (Interrupts the retail employee with the other shopper and tries to step between the retail employee and shopper) “Excuse me I am in a hurry! Can I just ask a question?”
- **Retail employee/Brand Partner Response:** “Yes, we would be glad to help. Let me see if there’s anyone available to assist you. Otherwise, I will be right with you after I assist my client/customer.”
- **Shopper:** “Oh, are you helping her/him first because she’s/he’s black and you don’t want bad press?”

Retail employee/Brand Partner Response: “Our goal is to help all of our clients/customers with anything they need in a timely manner, but I would also ask you to be respectful of all of our clients/customers. I would be happy to assist you as soon as I am finished.”

Shopper: “Sure it is. I want to see a manager now.”

Retail employee/Brand Partner Response: Excuses themselves politely from their client/customer, “If you would please excuse me, I’m going to step away for a minute to get more assistance [from the Store Manager] for you. Someone will be with you shortly.”, finds a member of leadership, and explains the situation.

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- **Leadership Response:** “Hi, I’m [NAME], the manager. I understand that you are frustrated about having to wait, but our employees/brand partners are doing their best to assist all our shoppers in a timely manner. Is there something I can help you find in the meantime?”
- **Shopper:** “Yes, but I think it’s terrible that this store is serving black customers first just to avoid bad press.”
- **Leadership Response:** “Our goal is to make sure all our shoppers are taken care of here and get the service they need. We can get you help as soon as someone is free. If you continue to make disrespectful comments, I’m going to have to ask you to leave. Would you like me to have someone help you in a few minutes?”
- **Shopper:** “Yes.”

Situation 3

- **Shopper:** (Interrupts the retail employee/brand partner with the other shopper and tries to step between the retail employee and shopper) “Excuse me I am in a hurry! Can I just ask a question?”
Retail employee/Brand Partner Response: “Yes, we would be glad to help. Let me see if there’s anyone available to assist you. Otherwise, I will be right with you after I assist my client/customer.”
Shopper: “Oh, are you helping her first because she’s/he’s white. This is racial profiling. I’ve heard about this happening to other black people, I should have known this would happen.”
Retail employee/Brand Partner Response: “I approached this client/customer because I noticed she/he has been waiting longer. Our goal is to help all our clients with anything they need in a timely manner. I would be happy to get another employee who is available to assist you.”
Shopper: “Profiling is not ok, and I know that’s what is really going on here. I want to see a manager now.”
Retail employee/Brand Partner Response: Excuses themselves politely from their client/customer, “If you would please excuse me, I’m going to step away for a minute to get more assistance [from the Store manager] for you. Someone will be with you shortly.”, finds a member of leadership, and explains the situation.
- **Leadership Response:** “Hi, I’m [NAME], the manager. My employee/brand partner shared your concerns with me, and I want to assure you that our priority is to help all our clients/customers and ensure they have an inclusive and welcoming experience in our store. I apologize if you felt differently today. Is there anything I can help you with today?”
- If client/customer continues accusations, gather their contact information and escalate to your District Manager.
- **Leadership Response if the shopper continues accusations:** “If you continue to make disrespectful comments, I’m going to have to ask you to leave.”

Retail employee/brand partner lets leader know that their shopper just asked for someone else to help them.

Situation 1

- **Leadership:** “Hi there. My employee just let me know that you wanted someone else to help you. May I ask why?”

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Shopper: “They helped me last time and I didn’t get the right [insert product] match.”

- **Leadership Response:** “Ok. I understand your concern and we always want clients/customers to get exactly the right product. I would be happy to get another employee to assist you, but you may need to wait [ten] minutes. Is that all right? Otherwise, [original employee] would be happy to help you.”
- **Shopper:** “I’ll wait for someone else.”
- **Leadership Response:** “Ok. I’ll add you to the waitlist and we will be with you shortly.”

Situation 2

- **Leadership:** “Hi there. My employee just let me know that you wanted someone else to help you. May I ask why?”
 - **Shopper:** “I don’t want a (gender) dressed like a (gender) helping me. Don’t you have a normal (gender)?”
 - **Leadership Response:** “All of our employees are trained to help all clients/customers.”
- Shopper:** “I’m sure plenty of people don’t feel comfortable with someone dressed like that helping them. You should know that’s bad for your business.”
- **Leadership Response:** “As I said, all of our employees are trained and capable of helping all our clients/customers. We do not tolerate discriminatory behavior in our stores, and we would be happy to help you if you can respect all our employees.”
 - **Shopper:** “That’s just gross. You shouldn’t have people like that working here.”
 - **Leadership Response:** “We do not tolerate those types of comments about our employees. I’m going to kindly ask that you leave the store. In the future if you can be respectful of our entire team, we would be happy to help you.”
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Two shoppers are having an altercation in the store. One shopper (Client A) is yelling at the other shopper (Client B) saying, “Go back to where you came from” and/or uses a racial slur.

- **Leadership:** Separate clients, ensuring the safety of all. Have another employee help the client that is being yelled at. Leader quickly addresses the client who was yelling to ask them to leave.
 - **Leader Assisting Client A:** “We do not tolerate discriminatory language in our stores. I’m going to kindly ask that you leave the store. In the future if you can be respectful of our team, we would be happy to help you.”
 - **Beauty Advisor Assisting Client B:** “I want to assure you that we do not tolerate that kind of behavior or discriminatory language. It has no place in our stores, and we are asking that client to leave the store immediately. I sincerely apologize if their behavior made you feel uncomfortable or upset. I hope it is clear we stand against racist behavior of any kind. If you would like to continue shopping, I would be happy to assist you with anything you need or are looking for today, but I completely understand if you do not.”
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When telling a shopper about current safety and hygiene protocol they say, “Your people are the ones that brought the disease here anyway.”

Situation 1

- **Retail employee Response:** “I understand that our enhanced safety measures may change your in-store experience, and that this is not an ideal situation, but I would ask that you please be respectful while shopping in our store. We do not tolerate discriminatory comments of any kind. I would be happy to help if you can be respectful.”
- **Shopper:** “Well, I didn’t mean it like that – it’s just annoying that we have to do all this because some people didn’t keep it contained.”
- **Retail employee Response:** “If you are uncomfortable following our safety protocols, our teams are also happy to help you with any shopping needs online or by calling our client/customer service number.”
- **Shopper:** “I’ll wear the mask.”

Situation 2

- **Retail employee/Brand Partner Response:** “I’m going to step away for a minute to get additional assistance for you. Please wait here and someone will be right with you.”
- **Leadership Response:** “Hi, I’m [NAME], the manager. My employee/brand partner let me know that you used offensive language while they were trying to help you.”
- **Shopper:** “Those people brought the disease here and now I have to wear a mask.”
- **Leadership Response:** “We do not tolerate any discriminatory language in our stores. I’m going to kindly ask that you leave the store.”

Situation 3

- **Retail employee/Brand Partner Response:** “I’m going to step away for a minute to get additional assistance for you. Please wait here and someone will be right with you.”
- **Leadership Response:** “Hi, I’m [NAME], the manager. My employee/brand partner let me know that you used offensive language while they were trying to help you.”
- **Shopper:** “What are you talking about? I don’t know what your employee/brand partner told you, but I did not use offensive language.”
- **Leadership Response:** “Please let me know in your words, what you said to our employee/brand partner.”
- **Shopper:** “All I said was that those people are the ones that brought the disease here. What is offensive about that? It’s true.”
- **Leadership Response:** “That is offensive language and we do not tolerate any discriminatory language in our stores. I’m going to kindly ask that you leave the store.”

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Shopper claims they only received assistance from an employee because they were being profiled.

Situation 1

- **Retail employee:** “Can I help you with anything today?”
- **Shopper:** “I just spoke with another employee, why did you come over? You only came over here to help me because I’m [race, color, and/or ethnicity] and you thought I was stealing, didn’t you?”
- **Retail employee Response:** “I didn’t notice that someone was already helping you. We always offer assistance to all of our clients/customers to ensure they find products they love and get what they are looking for.”
- **Shopper:** “This is racial profiling. [insert retailer] does this all the time. Don’t try to pretend now that you were just coming to help.”
- **Retail employee Response:** “I sincerely apologize if I made you feel uncomfortable or unwelcome.” (The client/customers clearly does not want assistance. In this instance, it doesn’t make sense to make the statement to someone over to assist them. The client/customer would likely be even more offended.)
- **Retail employee Response:** Excuses themselves politely from their client/customer, “If you would please excuse me, I’m going to step away for a minute to get more assistance [from the Store Manager] for you. Someone will be with you shortly.”, finds a member of leadership, and explains the situation.
- **Leadership Response:** “Hi, I’m [NAME], the manager. My employee shared your concerns with me and I want to assure you that our priority is to help all of our clients/customers and ensure they have an inclusive and welcoming experience in our store. I apologize if you felt differently. Is there anything I can help you with today?”
- If client/customers continues accusations, gather their contact information, and escalate to your District Manager.
- **Leadership Response if the client continues accusations:** “If you continue to make disrespectful comments, I’m going to have to ask you to leave. Would you like me to have someone assist you in a few minutes?”

These materials provide a framework for response, but users must use their best judgement and training in all situations. Keep in mind the following scenarios represent some of the interactions retail employees, brands, and leadership could face, but it is not an exhaustive list. If de-escalation is not possible, leadership may ask a client/customer to leave the store.

Helpful Tips to De-Escalate

When speaking with clients/customers who have made racist or discriminatory statements, remember:

- Focus on remaining calm.
- Keep the safety of all employees and clients/customers top of mind.
- Do not raise your voice or engage in a debate.
- Take a pause if needed, before responding.
- If you have not witnessed a situation directly, ask questions to gather more information. Take a service-first approach and be mindful of other clients in the store.
- If asking a client/customer to leave the store, keep the conversation short and to the point.