Anyone who’s ever worked in a customer-interfacing position knows there’s a fine line between being particular about a product or service and being downright belligerent. A displeased customer is already a challenge when it comes to something as simple and affordable as coffee. When it comes to home construction, however, the stakes are at their highest.

A new home or renovation could be one of the biggest investments your clients will make in their lives, and they have every right to be particular. But it can be difficult to keep your cool and communicate well when a client is undermining you, arguing with you, or making impossible demands.

Home Improvement Leads offers tips for treading carefully with displeased clients so that your relationships, and ultimately your business, can flourish.

Get to the Root of the Problem

No matter how much an angry client may get under your skin, empathy can go a long way in helping you solve the issue. Listen and try to identify the true problem—chances are, it’s not just about disliking the cabinet color after seeing it in person. Obviously, financial worries are going to be common, but look beyond that to identify which type of angry client they are:
**The client who has trouble relinquishing control.** Sometimes people who have home improvement skills and experience think they know how everything should be done. This leads them to criticize your every move. Others are in a tight financial situation and can’t let you handle the details because they fear the costs will spike if they look away for just a second.

*What to do:* It’s important to establish (or reestablish) boundaries and trust. If you haven’t already, provide them with testimonials from pleased clients. Assure them that you possess all the requisite training, knowledge, and licenses, and that there will be no major cost changes that you don’t run by them first.

**The client who doesn’t understand the process.** A home construction project contains so many moving parts. You have project managers, subcontractors, manufacturers, vendors, and deliverers. You also have weather, permits, financial limitations, and a tight timeline. Your client may get angry when they don’t see your crew continuing with work that they actually can’t continue because someone for whom you’re not at all responsible dropped the ball. Clients who don’t understand the process also may try to convince you to come down on the price even if you’ve explained that it’s not possible.

*What to do:* Very kindly explain to the homeowner why the process is complicated. Explain that you partner with and hire people and companies that you trust, but that it’s common for one person in this very intricate process to drop the ball. Explain that you have costs, just like they do, and that you need to be able to cover those costs and pay your workers for quality work at the end of the day, which is why the price can’t come down. Lay everything out without being condescending.

**The client who just wants to be heard.** Contractors and project managers are busy people. You don’t spend all of your time coaxing a client into feeling great about every step of the project because you’re, well, busy trying to make that client happy with quality work done in a timely manner. But sometimes homeowners will get frustrated with sparse communication and feel that you’re unwilling to listen to their concerns. Or perhaps they’re being undermined by their spouse or partner at every turn and feel that no one is considering their feelings. Either way, this client just needs you to hear them out.

*What to do:* Make sure that you’re available to hear out their concerns, but assure them that everything is running smoothly and that you’ll let them know if something comes up. If one
person is being undermined by another, try to be intentional in your communication with the one who tends to be left out of the decisions. Don’t try to solve anyone’s relationship issues, but do respect the other person’s desire to be in the know about what’s going on in their own home.

 Own up to Your Mistakes

Sometimes the problem isn’t deep-rooted, emotional, or complex. Sometimes contractors make mistakes. Take responsibility for yours and use it as an opportunity to impress your client with
your character. The way you handle a problem is much more memorable than the problem itself.

**Prevent These Issues from the Start**

You can’t entirely avoid angry customers in this business, but you can decrease your likelihood of encountering them. Make sure all of your employees are trained in customer service and can help dissolve tension instead of just shrugging their shoulders and pointing to you. Be clear about the process and costs from the start and offer your credentials up front. Try to be as available as possible, and when you’re unavailable, apologize.

Above all, sympathize with the reason clients are particular about the workmanship and products: this is their home, and they’ve probably been saving up and dreaming about this for years. Wouldn’t you want someone to do the best job they could possibly do?