

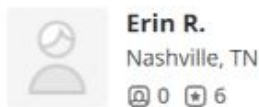


A Letter From the Editors

Say Sorry and Mean It | Empathy in Negative Review Responses

Picture this: All week, you were looking forward to trying out a new restaurant. You finally get there – right on time for your reservation – but you still have to wait an hour to be seated. It's only natural to be disappointed, especially if you didn't feel there was a concerted effort from the team to make things better. Which leads us to ...

The dreaded one-star review:



★☆☆☆☆ 6/2/2021

Wow. What can I say about our experience? Not only did we wait over an hour past our reservation time with simply a 'we're working on it', the table they sat us at didn't fit our entire party. Again, we made a reservation. We ordered multiple appetizers and sides to share and multiple never came out, they came out at different times with inconsistent temperatures. When we finally ordered entrees, three of us never got our food. After about 15 minutes of waiting for the server to finally come back, she just said 'oh, do you still want it?' My answer was no. On top of that, drinks took FOREVER. None of the food blew me away, mostly because most of what I ordered never arrived or arrived incorrect. I get ever place has an off night or makes a mistake, but here the hits just kept on coming.

Plenty of valid concerns here, but where do we start?

Apologize, Empathize, Protect: These are the three pillars of our review-response strategy. Today, we'll just focus on one of them: *Empathize*.

What is empathy? And why is it so important?

Empathy is the ability to share and understand the emotions of others. It allows us to connect with other people by taking their perspective, sharing their emotions, and feeling compassion for one another. Empathy is also a crucial aspect of our review-response strategy, allowing us to understand and address how the consumer must have felt – even if we're going to challenge the stated motive from the consumer as to why it happened.

Now, back to our one-star review:

1) First thing's first: Identify the core complaint. With lengthier reviews like this one, it's easy to get bogged down in all the details. When we're dealing with multiple complaints, we need to ask ourselves: Is there anything here that, had it been fixed, would have made for an overall neutral/positive experience? In the context of this review, a few service-related mistakes could have been forgivable, so it's clear that the root of their frustration began with the hour-long wait time.

2) Next, we'll need to put ourselves in the reviewer's shoes. How do we do that? Focus on your similarities rather than your differences. Maybe you wouldn't have reacted to a circumstance in exactly the same way, but can you relate to how they *felt*? Don't think of it as a one-star review you're reading – think of it as listening to a story from a frustrated friend. Here, the reviewer likely felt that they weren't being valued as a guest. Their reservation time wasn't honored, and they weren't offered much in the way of an apology or an attempt to make it up to them. The party was unhappy when they sat down, causing them to lack patience for the other minor hiccups that followed.

3) Finally, it's time to write our response. Instead of simply reciting our mission statement or speaking about how *we* feel, always focus on the reviewer's experience first and lean on "you"-centric language to make them feel heard:

NOT EMPATHETIC: *We're disappointed we didn't wow you.*

NOT EMPATHETIC: *We strive to deliver excellent service every time.*

EMPATHETIC: *We completely understand that when you make a reservation, you expect it to be honored.*

Now, let's finish out the response:


We completely understand that when you make a reservation, you expect it to be honored, Erin. The last thing we want is to leave our guests waiting, so we sincerely apologize if the delay put a damper on your evening. We had hoped to make things up to you once you were seated, but it sounds like we need to touch base with the team to ensure that our service is more consistent. You should always be well attended to even on a busy night. If you find yourself planning a special dinner out in the future, we'd love the chance to show you the exceptional dining experience you deserve.

See how we led with empathy, then continued to weave it through the rest of the response? Empathy doesn't have to be condensed to just one line – it's something that can and should be consistently expressed in everything we say to a reviewer. As you read through this example response, note the other empathetic statements we've included, such as:

- ... *the delay put a damper on your evening.*

- *You should always be well attended to even on a busy night.*
 - *... the exceptional dining experience you deserve.*
-

Let's try another one:



StevePamela Ahlvers
Local Guide · 30 reviews · 1 photo

★★★★★ 2 months ago

Critical: Quality, Responsiveness

I had submitted a request for an estimate online and received a call back in a day or two, however, when I got the call back and was trying to schedule, they would not schedule an appointment unless the two of us were there. They offered appts until 6 PM and on Saturdays. Unfortunately, we work past 6 on weekdays and our next 3 Saturdays are booked. What kind of company gives up work (finishing a basement and adding 2 decks)?

1) What's their core complaint? Not enough scheduling flexibility.

2) How did that make them feel? They felt like their business wasn't wanted. They're eager to get started on their project but struggling to find a contractor who can accommodate their busy schedule.

3) How do we reply? By making it about them:

NOT EMPATHETIC: *We're sorry we weren't able to fit you into our schedule.*

NOT EMPATHETIC: *Our team is busier than ever these days, so accommodating everyone's schedule can sometimes be a challenge.*

EMPATHETIC: *We know how tough it can be to balance a new home-improvement project with your busy schedules, which is why we always try our best to be accommodating and offer weekend hours for scheduling estimates.*

Now, to finish it out:

Steve and Pamela, we know how tough it can be to balance a new home-improvement project with your busy schedules, which is why we always try our best to be accommodating and offer weekend hours for scheduling estimates. We do have some limitations, though, and we apologize if our availability didn't align with your needs. While we would have loved to help you out ourselves, we're nevertheless wishing you all the best with finishing out that basement and building your new decks.

Okay, one last example:



Tara McCormack

1 review

★★★★★ 2 months ago

My daughter dropped her phone beneath the jumping floors. The manager refused to look for the phone until after closing. Despite the fact that we'd watch them do this for another 15 minutes before in a different area. They called at closing and claimed they'd looked as hard as they could and didn't find anything. Find My iPhone says it is still there. The lady who called me said we could wait ANOTHER 2 weeks for them to clean the foam pit and maybe recover it there. Basically this company's attitude is "that sounds like a you problem". They do not care about anything other than the price they collect at the door. Also if they're only cleaning the foam pieces once a month, as the manager claims, they've thrown that special COVID cleaning policy they claim on their website out the window.

- 1) Core complaint: The staff doesn't seem to be looking very hard for the lost phone.
- 2) How they feel: Like with many negative reviews, they feel undervalued and that the staff doesn't care about them beyond collecting their money at the door.
- 3) How we reply: Validate their frustrations about the missing phone:

NOT EMPATHETIC: *Staffing shortages can be a challenge, and we ask that our guests be patient with us.*

NOT EMPATHETIC: *We aim to provide a five-star experience to every family that visits us.*

EMPATHETIC: *Losing a phone is always stressful, so we're sorry if our staff could've done more to help.*

Finally, let's finish it out:

Losing a phone is always stressful, Tara, so we're sorry if our staff could've done more to help. There should be no such thing as a "you" problem under our roof. Your concerns are our concerns, and we certainly didn't mean to make you feel as though we weren't interested in finding your missing property. We can assure you we're continuing to search hard for your daughter's phone, and if we're able to recover it, you'll be the first to know.

Moral of the story here: When we lead with acknowledging the reviewer's experience, we're more likely to come across as sincere, understanding, and empathetic. More often than not, what prompts someone to write a negative review is the fact that they didn't feel heard or understood in the moment. We, as writers, can help fix that. By showing that we understand, and more importantly, *care about* their frustrations, we're gaining a little bit of that trust back on behalf of the business – meaning the reviewer is more likely to return!

Challenge

As you work through Boomerang this week, craft an empathetic response that you're especially proud of and share it in your team channel.



ANNIE CRANFORD | EDITOR I

Keeping Austin weird since 1995, Annie is happy to be settled back in her hometown after spending a few years in Nashville chasing her songwriting dreams. She's a tree-hugging, bleeding-heart vegan, but she really tries to be chill about it. When she's not being a crunchy dog mom or banging on her parents' old piano, you can usually find her tripping over nothing, bruising herself on furniture corners, and misplacing her keys.

Main Street Hub