TLDR at the bottom and I apologize if this story is sappy. This happened yesterday and I need to get it out.

I've been in customer service for over 20 years. I survived the Teenie Beanie Babies craze, Furbies, 1st gen Pokemon cards, worked retail after 9/11 and the 2009 financial crisis so I've seen and heard my fair share of sob stories. I don't easily flinch. Yesterday, I broke down with a client for the first time in my life.

I work customer service from home for a telecom company. I've been working from home for several weeks now. We have special options for those affected by the current pandemic and we offer them if the guests so much as mention they got laid off or have been affected financially.

First client of the day I had a woman in who was asking about a billing text alert about calling abroad. She was calling a relative in Italy who was an emergency relief doctor and she was concerned about the international charges. You could tell she was on the verge of tears by the way she was phrasing things, and her account factors (tenure, credit/payment history) showed an excellent client that never asked for anything so I was very confident this was a legit sob story.

She was the only relative calling this doctor and was their only source of comfort since no other relatives would call and the whole country is on lockdown. Like others, she too, was on lockdown but was laid off and awaiting unemployment from her state.

Her tone began to escalate, clearly she was on the cusp of a complete meltdown. In these circumstances, my training and experience has me "solve the customer first" by offering empathy, reliability, and get them in a place to where we can move forward.

At this point I was nearly exhausted of all the empathy I had as I have spent the last two weeks relating to clients, telling them I'm in a similar position, and trying to offer a superior experience and not a scripted one. It wears on you, eats at you, till you're either broken down or a complete cynic. For me, it was the former. There are other various extenuating circumstances in my life exasperating my stress, one of which I'll address in a moment.

I know this is nothing compared to what healthcare, fast food, truck drivers, and other grossly under appreciated workers are experiencing but we undergo our own version of hell in customer service.

However, I pride myself on never giving anything less than a superior experience for my guests and I decided to bring up the one anecdote I have yet to share; my Dad. Right now, my Dad is undergoing round 3 of chemo and, due to the pandemic, the cancer center he's in is completely locked down so I have not seen him since I first heard he was sick (he's stubborn like that) nor will I be able to see him for while. It's possible I won't be able to see him again and that weighs heavily on me as we've just started to make amends over the past and really bond over a hobby we both share.

I relayed this to my client, assuring her that I understand, that we're all suffering from this, and that she's not alone in her struggle. I then explained how we would take care of the calls for her as it's part of our COVID-19 options to clients and I showed her how to use them online. At this point she began sobbing and, since such emotions are contagious, I followed suit like the blubbering idiot I am. I'd reached the terminal end of my resistance and it the flood gates came open. I've never shared a sob with a guest before but there was a real catharsis to it, a sense of humanity regained in this crazy world.

I think we both needed it if I'm being honest. Being in isolation, our options to express ourselves with others especially those we care about, are incredibly limited, so we bottle them up till they overflow. Yeah, it felt like a pressure valve being released.

The client expressed genuine gratitude for my sharing of my experience and helping out once we composed ourselves. I then suggested some binge watching ideas (Picard, The Good Place, The Mandalorian, Perfect Harmony) and we parted ways.

I used what little PTO I had left to take the rest of the day off once I relayed what happened to my boss. I needed to compose myself and process. I'm very blessed to work for a company that allows me the work from home and leave options. I also have an amazing boss who knows my whole situation and has been nothing but supportive.

I know this is a super sappy tale compared to others on this subreddit but my big takeaway is that we're all suffering individually due to the pandemic but we're also all in this together. I've seen truly amazing acts of kindness, compassion, and love these past few weeks as well as the greedy and selfish. I will endeavor to focus on the positive and help where I can. If my line of service helps one more person make it another day, then that's what I will work towards and then keep going.

I am awaiting word from the 3rd biopsy from my Dad to see if he's going to win or lose this fight. He wished that his children and family not broadcast it over social media so we're not allowed to talk about publicly. At least here it's a bit anonymous and I've been needing to talk about it for a while.

Stay strong, my brothers and sisters in the call centers. We're in this together! Thank you for reading.

TLDR: COVID-19 affected client and I sobbed together, more of the story is be excellent to each other and we're in this together.