

Dealing with Customer Complaints

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Misunderstandings and mistakes happen in every business. At some point, everyone in business has to deal with an upset customer. The challenge is to handle the situation in a way that leaves the customer satisfied and thinking you work for a great company.



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When it comes down to it, most customers don't even bother to complain. They simply buy from your competitor. Research suggests that up to 80 percent of customers who leave you were "satisfied" with you. Obviously, customer satisfaction is not enough to keep customers coming back. Businesses must positively delight their customers if they want to earn their long-term loyalty and business.

Working in a service business, I deal with some customers who are quicker to complain than others. I have to remind myself that without these customers, there IS no business. They ultimately pay the bills and keep the business rolling. How you deal with their complaint is extremely important. After all, you don't want them to take their business elsewhere.

Handling customer complaints doesn't have to be a battle. With the right tools and responses, you can use complaints to help build your business. Follow these tips for effectively dealing with their challenges.

Listen. As soon as someone starts to complain we think of how we will respond to the

accusation before we are done listening. Too often we already have the response ready to fight back. Try instead to take a second, breathe and carefully listen to what the customer has to say. Let them finish and don't get defensive. They are not attacking you personally; they have a problem and are frustrated.

Pause. Don't say anything for five long seconds after the customer has stopped talking. Take another breath, then move on with educating them. Never defend or justify. People don't care if you were shorthanded or if you're having a bad day. They only care that they get their problem resolved. No excuses, just solutions.

Ask. Ask questions in a caring and concerned manner. The more information you can get from the customer, the better you will understand their perspective. I've learned it's easier to ask questions than to jump to conclusions.

Repeat. You should always keep a cool head and be specific so there is no miscommunication. Get the facts straight and show the customer that you're listening. Repeat back to them their complaint in a clear, slow and professional manner.

Apologize. Always apologize, even if you did nothing wrong. Don't blame another person or department. From the customer's perspective, he or she has a legitimate complaint, and they expect an apology. It could be as simple as "I'm sorry about that." A sincere apology will usually diffuse a lot of frustration that the customer has.

Make it right. Solve the prob-

lem, or find someone who can solve it — quickly! If a complaint is valid and demands action, then move fast to correct it. Make an effort to resolve the problem. Urgency is the key. You must show the customer that you intend to take steps to correct the problem immediately.

Satisfy. Find out from the customer what would be an acceptable solution. Whether or not the customer knows what a good solution would be, I've found it's best to propose one or more solutions to alleviate their pain. Stress the point that your company is eager to work out any problems and focuses on customer satisfaction.

Thank. At the beginning, at the end, in the middle, it doesn't matter. Thank the customer for calling. A happy customer will tell two or three friends, but an unhappy customer will tell at least ten friends about their experience and it always multiplies through word of mouth.

Learn. Keep records of your complaints. This will allow you to analyze what went wrong and to make changes to help avoid problems in the future.

There is no getting around customer complaints, regardless of the industry. However, by employing these steps and taking the time to review the issue with the customer, you can turn challenges into something constructive.



About The Author

Sharon Dillard is the award winning CEO of Get A Grip Inc., a national kitchen and bathroom resurfacing franchise company based in Albuquerque.

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