Worksheet

Handling Customer's Complaints

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Golden Rules of Complaint Handling

If you try to handle complaints without a plan or structure you are taking a huge risk. Handling complaints with a structured plan is a much better idea! Having a system means that you can control the situation and lead it towards an
outcome which is favorable to you. In the next section of the workbook we are going to look at a system for handling complaints which does exactly that. It is easy to remember and works for many workplace situations and scenarios. It is also flexible enough to be adapted to suit your role or ideal job and the types of complaint you may come across.

The four step plan is called the LAST complaint plan.
Listen
Apologize
Solution
Thank Them
It is called the last complaint plan because the letters LAST are an acronym for the steps
you must go through in order to handle and control the complaint.
Let us now take a look at each step in more detail.

L-Listen
When a customer is dissatisfied their immediate need is for someone to listen to their complaint. Sometimes just getting it off their chest can have a big effect on removing the anger and frustration they may have. When listening to a customer's complaint it is important not to interrupt. Make notes on the detail of the complaint and give them visual or verbal cues that you are paying attention. It is really important that you empathise with their point of view.

You need to imagine you are experiencing the issue from the customer's point of view. By
doing this it allows you to:
• Connect with your customer
• Establish rapport
• Creates a sense of teamwork between the two of you
Once the customer realises that you are on their side, they are more willing to work with
you to fix the problem.
Additionally, not all customer complaints are valid. Yes, you need to take all customer feedback seriously, but only by listening and carefully understanding the detail of the complaint, can you establish how serious the complaint is and importantly, decide on the appropriate action needed to resolve it

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A-Apologize

OK, so you've listened to the full story, and you've got a broad understanding of the customers complaint. The next thing you must always do is apologise. Even if you do not agree with the customer you must apologise. Regardless of the situation, you need to apologise so that the customer understands you are sorry they have been made to feel the way they do. Sometimes a simple apology could be all it takes to resolve a customer's complaint. An apology is a great weapon for dealing with a particularly irate customer. The words "I'm sorry" will having a calming impact.
Ensure that your apology is:

- Genuine and;
- Spoken confidently.

If you are face to face with the customer try to maintain eye contact and in all situations you should give the apology enough emphasis so it's clearly heard.
A quick word of caution...

Apologies can be tricky in some instances.
In scenarios with possible legal implications it is important you do not directly apologise for anything which may imply liability. Apologise in these scenarios and the customer may feel that you have agreed wholly with their side of things. This may lead to a situation where you have to over compensate the customer.The change can be subtle, but even if you do not think the customer complaint is valid you still need to apologise whilst being mindful not to give the impression you agree with them unless you are sure you can control their expectations.

S-Solutions

Your target must always be to resolve the customer complaint and to do this you will need to offer a solution. Ideally you want to offer a solution which is a win win scenario. This is achieved by turning the complaint into an opportunity and striving for a positive outcome. If you offer the right solution then you should be able to leave the customer satisfied. Quite often the dissatisfaction the customer feels is not from the original problem, but from the way that their complaint has been handled.
So by handling a complaint in the correct way, you turn the negative customer experience into a positive situation where the customer is delighted and continues to be a repeat customer and an advocate of your brand and services.It's not a good idea to presume that the solution you think of, is always going to be the right one. You must make every effort to gauge the customers' expectations. A simple way to do this is to ask the customer for suggestions of what they believe would be a good solution. What would they expect you to do to put the situation right and make them happy. This has to be communicated carefully to avoid sounding like you're helpless to offer a solution. You also need to know what your level of authorisation is and your available escalation options.

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When a situation takes you beyond your perceived authority you need to escalate to a Manager. When escalation is required or if you simply just need some time for further investigation you should let the customer know that you have "Taken ownership" of the problem. Give the customer the impression that you will deal with the complaint as if it was your own and that you will act as their point of contact until the complaint is resolved. Be sure to give them a clear idea of what the next steps will be and what they should expect.
For example, when are they likely to hear from you or how you will contact them?
Finally, it's very important that you always meet the expectations you established with
the custome.

T-Thank Them

You should not underestimate the power of gratitude. The modern business world, with its wheels spinning at speed, can sometimes forget the importance of old time courtesies. But saying "thank you" can be a competitive advantage. On the successful resolution of the customer complaint, you should thank the customer for bringing the issue to your attention. This will reassure the customer that the same issue is less likely to happen again. By doing this you will:

- Build brand confidence.
- The customer will very likely continue to use your services in the future and;
- Even more importantly recommend you to others.

By thanking them you are also influencing how they feel about the situation as they now feel as though they have been helpful and that you genuinely cared about their satisfaction. All of this will play a part in the lasting impression they have of you and your company. Thanking the customer should not be the end of the story.
You should use this experience to make a lasting change to the businesses processes and procedures to prevent this from happening again. Think of it as a post complaint review. Why was the customer unhappy and what can you do to prevent another customer having the same negative customer experience?
It is a good idea to share your experience with colleagues and other departments. At the end of the day it is in your best interest to reduce the number of complaints received.

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The Challenge

Take some time to think about the last customer complaint you received or witnessed and write it down a summary

(E.g. Mrs Musyah was disappointed with the product quality)

Now write down how you first responded. Not how you dealt with the issue. Focus purely on the first few words you used to acknowledge the complaint. Write it down:

(E.g. " I'm sorry you feel that way Mrs Musyah")

There are certain phrases and key words you should use at this first stage, tick the boxes
you felt you covered with your response:

- **Did you acknowledge them by name?**
- **Did you take ownership of the issue by stating your name?**
- **Did you empathise with the customer with a phrase like "that must be disappointing"**
- **Did you paraphrase the issue back to the customer?**

Now using your new knowledge, have a go at writing a great first response to a typical customer complaint you deal with? If you write it down and read it out it will become second nature when in a live customer environment:

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(E.g. "I'm sorry Mrs Musyah- that must have been very disappointing. My name is... and I'm going to fix for you. Let me just recap what you told me to make sure I captured all the detail")

Getting an apology right can be difficult. Circle the phrases you use when dealing with customer complaints:

" I'm sorry that you feel that way

" I'm sorry that you think I'm not being clear"

'I'm sorry I caused this frustration

"I'm sorry for the trouble"

Imagine you work at Joe's dinner and a customer is unhappy with how long it has taken for the food to arrive.

How would you deal with this scenario?
"We ordered our food over an hour ago, this is simply unacceptable"

Circle the response you think offers the best solution:

"I'm sorry for your wait- I'll go and tell the chef right away and get your order prioritised and we won't charge you for the meal"

"I'm very sorry you've had to wait so long, it is totally unacceptable. How can I fix this for you?"

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Why do you feel this is the right response? Write it down:

(E.g. "I'm sorry Mrs Musyah- that must have been very disappointing. My name is... and I'm going to fix for you. Let me just recap what you told me to make sure I captured all the detail")

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You need to start think of a customer complaint as a gift. Take some time to think about how you will thank the nest customer that complaints to you. Make sure you included the key phrases below when you write it out:

1. **Thank the customer by name.**
2. **Take ownership**
3. **How will the customer know it won't happen again?**
4. **Explain you will share the issue with the team.**
5. **Why is the feedback important to you?**
6. **Did you ask if they need any further help?**

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Action Plan

Key Skills (What are the key skills you have learnt during this course?)

What will you do differently in the workplace?

What obstacles might get in the way of you achieving this?

What or who may help you overcome these barriers?

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