

## 5

## 'I'm very sorry about that.'

## STARTER

What is your attitude to complaints?

Put a cross on the scale to represent how much you agree (5 = I agree 100%) or disagree (0 = I disagree 100%).



1 I never apologize for a mistake someone else makes.

agree       disagree

2 You should always accept responsibility for a problem if a customer makes a complaint.

     

3 I don't like complaining. Normally I accept bad service without saying anything.

     

4 If someone calls me with a complaint, I try to listen carefully.

     

5 I always try to find a colleague who can solve the problem if I can't do it myself.

     

6 Some people just enjoy complaining. I don't think you have to take every complaint seriously.

     

7 Customer complaints can help us improve our service.

     

Discuss your answers with a partner.



## 1 Listen to four short extracts from phone calls. In which call does the person called:

a deal with the problem immediately?  c connect the caller to the person responsible?   
 b tell the caller to call another number?  d promise to call the caller back?

## In which extract do you hear the following phrases?

A Let me put you through to our accounts department.   
 B You seem to have forgotten the attachment.   
 C Unfortunately I can't put you through directly, but let me give you the number.   
 D Can I check that and call you back?   
 E I'll send you the file right away.   
 F You actually need to speak to our technical support hotline.   
 G There appears to be a mistake on the invoice you sent us.   
 H Some of the components don't seem to work.

## 2 Listen to the conversation and take notes. What is the problem and how will Reva deal with it?



After the call, Reva writes an email to his boss about the problem. Use your notes (and listen again if necessary) to complete the email.

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Table Window Help

Send Options... HTML

**From:** Reva Burgos **To:** Paula Kilroy  
**CC:** **Subject:** Delivery problem

Hi Paula,

Just to let you know, I got a call from Abby Dickson from Sykes Electronics today. She told me that there was a problem with the latest \_\_\_\_\_<sup>1</sup> we sent them. Apparently, some of the \_\_\_\_\_<sup>2</sup> we sent them contained the wrong \_\_\_\_\_<sup>3</sup> model. (They ordered the \_\_\_\_\_<sup>4</sup> sensor, but we sent the \_\_\_\_\_<sup>5</sup> model instead.)

I told Abby I would send her the correct units by \_\_\_\_\_<sup>6</sup> delivery with \_\_\_\_\_<sup>7</sup> Logistics. The logistics company will \_\_\_\_\_<sup>8</sup> the other units up when they deliver the correct units.

Best wishes,  
Reva

## 3 Listen again and complete the sentences.

- 1 There \_\_\_\_\_ to be a small problem with your latest consignment.
- 2 Oh dear, I'm \_\_\_\_\_ to hear that.
- 3 What's the problem \_\_\_\_\_?
- 4 I'll \_\_\_\_\_ on to this problem immediately.
- 5 Well, \_\_\_\_\_ is what I'm going to do.
- 6 Thanks for \_\_\_\_\_ that out, Reva.
- 7 Again, I'm really sorry about the \_\_\_\_\_.
- 8 I'll \_\_\_\_\_ make sure it doesn't happen again.

Now decide which of the sentences above you can use to do the following. Sometimes more than one answer is possible.

describe a problem \_\_\_\_\_ apologize \_\_\_\_\_  
clarify what the problem is \_\_\_\_\_ say how you will solve the problem \_\_\_\_\_

**LIVE**WORKSHEETS

## COMPLAINING

We usually explain the context before we explain our complaint in detail.

*I'm calling / I have a question about the invoice you sent us.*

In addition to *I'm afraid* and *unfortunately*, we often use verbs like *seem* and *appear* to describe the problem. These verbs make the complaint sound less aggressive and allow the possibility that we might be wrong.

*I'm afraid there's a slight problem with the goods you sent us.*

*Unfortunately it seems we haven't received the shipment.*

*It seems you forgot the attachment OR You seem to have forgotten the attachment.*

*There appears to be a small problem with your latest consignment.*

### 4 Rewrite the sentences to make them more polite. Use the words in brackets.

- 1 The parts you sent us don't work. (seem) *The parts you sent us don't seem to work.*
- 2 You delivered the consignment to the wrong address. (unfortunately)
- 3 The total on the bill is wrong. (appears)
- 4 We have a problem with the equipment you sold us. (afraid/slight)
- 5 You sent us the wrong model. (seem)
- 6 You gave us the incorrect information. (unfortunately)

## APOLOGIZING

There are different phrases you can use to apologize, for example:

*I'm sorry about ...*

*I'd like to apologize for ... (more formal)*

*Please accept my / our apologies for ... (very formal)*

You can use words like *really*, *very*, and *extremely* or the expression *I have to say* to make an apology stronger.

*I'm very / extremely sorry about this.*

*I have to say I'm really very sorry about this.*

If the mistake really is your (or your company's) fault, you can admit this by saying:

*That's entirely our fault.*

*There must have been a mix-up.*

## SOLVING THE PROBLEM

Customers also appreciate it if you take responsibility for solving the problem. Here we often use the *will* future when we promise to do something (often spontaneously).

*I'll get on to that problem immediately.*

*I'll make sure it gets sorted out straight away.*

*I'll personally make sure it doesn't happen again.*

If you do not want to make such a firm promise, you can use *should* instead.

*You should have them first thing tomorrow morning.*

*You should have it by Friday at the latest.*

## 5 Complete the two phone calls with words and phrases from the box.

sorry again about the mix-up • I'll make sure that gets sorted out •  
it seems you sent us • there appears to be a mistake •  
please accept my apologies • I'm really sorry about • could you tell me

1 *Etta* I'm calling about the business cards you did for us. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ with the address.

*Tania* Oh no. I'm very sorry to hear that. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>2</sup> what the  
mistake is exactly?

*Etta* Well, you've printed the company address as one word, but it's actually two words.

*Tania* \_\_\_\_\_<sup>3</sup> for the mistake. That's entirely our fault.  
\_\_\_\_\_<sup>4</sup> straight away and we'll send you new  
cards as soon as we can.

*Etta* That sounds good. Thanks for your help.  
.....

2 *Eric* This is Eric Kessler from Fatima Networks. I'm calling about the software release you sent us  
yesterday.

*Basil* Uh huh. Is everything OK with it?

*Eric* Actually, no. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>5</sup> the old version. The disk has  
version 2.2 on it, not 2.3.

*Basil* Oh dear. \_\_\_\_\_<sup>6</sup> that. I'll send you a new disk straight  
away. You should get it first thing tomorrow.

*Eric* That sounds good, thanks. I'll probably call you again when it arrives.

*Basil* Do that. And \_\_\_\_\_<sup>7</sup>.

*Eric* No problem.

**Which conversation is more formal, and which is more informal?**

## 6 Complete the sentences with 'll and verbs from the box.

deliver • give • have • make sure • send

- 1 I'll send \_\_\_\_\_ you the document straight away.
- 2 Don't worry. You \_\_\_\_\_ the goods by lunchtime tomorrow.
- 3 I \_\_\_\_\_ personally \_\_\_\_\_ it doesn't happen again.
- 4 We \_\_\_\_\_ you ten units free, by way of compensation.
- 5 The package is on its way. They \_\_\_\_\_ it by 5 p.m. today.

7 Work with a partner. Follow the steps below to practise a dialogue.

A

Say you have a problem.

Explain the problem.

Thank your partner.

B

Ask what the problem is.

Admit responsibility and apologize.

Say what you will do to solve the problem.

Apologize again and say goodbye.



8 Listen to a call to a technical support hotline and make notes to complete the form.

Nexus Retail Systems | Technical Support

Call record

1 Name of caller

2 Company

3 Description of problem

4 Action taken



9 Listen to the call again and complete the sentences.

- 1 Are you the \_\_\_\_\_ person to talk to?
- 2 Could you explain the problem in more \_\_\_\_\_?
- 3 I'm going to need some more \_\_\_\_\_ to solve the problem.
- 4 In that \_\_\_\_\_, it must be the ink cartridge.
- 5 If you have any \_\_\_\_\_ just give me a \_\_\_\_\_.
- 6 My name's Anja Schneider, but you can speak to \_\_\_\_\_ of our operatives here on the hotline.



10 Work with a partner to make two phone calls. Look at the Useful Phrases below before you read your role card in the Partner Files.

PARTNER FILES

Partner A File 7, p. 49

Partner B File 7, p. 51

USEFUL PHRASES

Explaining a problem

There seems/appears to be a problem with ...  
I'm afraid there's a problem with ...  
Unfortunately, you/we ...

Explaining what you will do

This is what I'm going to do.  
I'll send/review/prepare ...  
I'll make sure it doesn't happen again.

Apologizing

I'm (really/very) sorry about that.  
I have to say I'm extremely sorry about this.  
Please accept my apologies.

**LIVWORKSHEETS**

## 11 Put the words in the right order to make sentences with expressions from this unit.

- 1 small a there to with appears invoice problem be he .
- 2 be annoying must really that .
- 3 the thing consignment have tomorrow you should first .
- 4 for that thanks sorting out .
- 5 sure I'll again make it doesn't happen .

### OUTPUT

Read the article from a customer care magazine and answer the questions which follow.

## DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS

Dealing well with complaints shows how important customer care is for your company. It shows that you listen to your customers, that you want to learn from your mistakes, and that you are continually trying to improve your services.

Below are some tips for dealing with complaints.

### ✓ TAKE EACH COMPLAINT SERIOUSLY

If you deal with a complaint in the wrong way, one unhappy customer may tell many more people about your poor service. On the other hand, if you deal with a complaint successfully, that customer will probably do business with you again. Remember that finding new customers is much more expensive than keeping current ones.

### ✓ LISTEN TO YOUR CUSTOMERS AND SHOW THEM YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY ARE FEELING

Listen carefully to your callers and let them get rid of their anger or frustration. Try to see things from their point of view and make sure you show them that you understand their problem.

### ✓ ADMIT THAT A MISTAKE HAS BEEN MADE AND SAY SORRY

If the customer thinks something is a complaint, then it is, even if you think the problem is not important. If your company has really made a mistake, say so and apologize. Even if you think a mistake has not been made, show the customer that you understand the problem. Never tell the customer that the complaint is not important.

### ✓ ACCEPT PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Even if you are not directly responsible for the mistake, it is not important for the customer whose fault it really is. You are the face of your organization and it is your responsibility to solve the problem. If you are not able to do so yourself, find the person who can. Make sure you support the customer until the right person can help.

### ✓ TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION

Customers want their problems solved quickly. Acting fast shows customers that you take them and their problems seriously.

### ✓ OFFER COMPENSATION

If possible, try to compensate customers for a mistake, e.g. by giving a small discount. Often the fact that you are giving some kind of compensation is more important than the compensation itself.

### ✓ THANK THE CUSTOMER FOR MAKING THE COMPLAINT

This may sound illogical, but complaints are the best feedback you can get. They show how you can improve your service and make your customers more satisfied.

### OVER TO YOU

Look back at the telephone calls in this unit. Do the people follow the advice given above?

Does your company handle complaints well? How could it improve its complaints procedure?

Think of a complaint you have made to another company. What was it? Was it dealt with?

**LIVEWORKSHEETS**