

Acute Training Solutions

Customer Care - Customer Complaint Handling

Dealing with a customer complaining about our service or products needs to be handled empathetically, with a strong communication structure, in order to stay in control of the conversation and to achieve a successful outcome. A customer complaint well handled can win you a lifelong customer, who remains loyal to your organisation.

Complainants displaying difficult behaviour can be as challenging for the recipient to manage as the complaint itself. Take a look at our tips for dealing with difficult behaviour to help appease these difficult situations.

Here are some practical tips for effectively dealing with customer complaints:

Actively listen and makes notes

Concentrate solely on what the customer is telling you, making notes of the key facts and their concerns so that you have a record of the conversation to refer to in the future.

Don't interrupt the customer, stay calm and in control (appreciating that you are representing your organisation and they are not having a go at you personally). In a supportive but concerned tone of voice you can demonstrate you are actively listening and empathetic to the customer with a few small statements such as "right", "oh dear", "I'm sorry to hear that", "that must have been disappointing", as well as paraphrasing what they have told you.

Acknowledge the customer's concerns and thank them

At the appropriate time during the conversation, when there is a natural pause for example, recognise the level of distress this may have caused them. Thank the customer for bringing this matter to your attention, to demonstrate that you are concerned and want to put the matter right or resolve the situation.

Apologise for the impact or the inconvenience caused

You may also need to empathise with the complainant concerning the failure to deliver the level of service expected, where appropriate. By saying 'sorry' you are again demonstrating to the customer that you are genuinely sorry that this has happened to them and showing that you wish to put things right.

Ask questions and summarise your understanding

Remember to seek permission from a customer who is very angry, to ask questions, so that you can collect all of the facts needed to understand what has happened and to identify how best to resolve the situation.

Ask a combination of open (what, how, who, why, where and when) as well as closed questions (for example, "did you?", "is he?"); to confirm the key facts and glean the information you need. Summarise your understanding back to the customer to ensure you are clear of the facts and to give the opportunity to the customer to share any further facts they may have omitted.

Agree and explain the actions you will take as a result of their complaint

Ensure that you only commit to the steps you have the authority to take. Explain what you will personally undertake to resolve the complaint, including when you will get back to them.

Remember to be realistic about timescales – do not over promise. It is always better to under promise and over deliver, rather than the other way round. Take ownership of the complaint, but should you need to involve a colleague, explain to the customer who will be in contact with them, their name and job role.

Ask for feedback on the next steps

Check that the customer is happy with the suggested actions you have committed to. Where appropriate, ask the customer if there is anything further that they think you could do at this stage to help them.

Action the agreed next steps and follow up

Review actions in line with your organisation's procedures. You should then:

- Record the complaint
- Ensure that all actions have been taken and no details missed
- Send a "thank you" letter or email to the customer confirming that everything has been done as promised
- Inform your team leader or manager who may wish to offer compensation, or complimentary additional services or products, by way of an apology to the customer or...
- Put measures in place to recognise the customer in a special way, next time they use your company's products or services.

Assess preventative measures

Review procedures with your team leader or manager to ensure future mistakes are not made and you learn from each complaint to enhance your customer service experience. For helping team leaders and managers develop their problem solving skills you may find our tips on developing your creativity helpful.

