AT THE COMPLETION OF THIS MODULE, PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO:

- Deal with emotional and practical aspects of complaints
- Apply methods to reduce our stress when resolving complaints
- Implement a consistent process to resolve complaints
- Reduce the number and type of complaints we receive

OVERVIEW

Unfortunately, complaints are a necessary part of doing business. Until a perfect product, organization, or company is invented, we are going to have to deal with negative issues from our customers. It is inevitable that problems will arise, and just as certain that some people who complain will be hard to please.

In this module, we will explore the variety of causes of complaints, identify ways to neutralize negative attitudes, and follow a process that deals with both the emotional and logical elements of complaints. We will create approaches to maintain a positive attitude ourselves, even when dealing with difficult people and difficult issues.

Complaints don’t have to be negative experiences all the time. We will work together to create win-win relationships with customers. We will examine root causes of the complaints we receive and create ways to reduce or eliminate them. Finally, we will discover that effectively resolving complaints is actually a way to reduce stress, build relationships, and improve customer loyalty and retention.

“Be happy for the troubles in your job. Those troubles are likely the reason your job exists.”

—Steve Dudeck
Common Complaints

Creating a comprehensive list of the complaints we receive gives us an opportunity to see common patterns, examine root causes, and find long-term solutions.

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 

Customer Language

Write down five common complaints, using the words of your customers:

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5.  

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Why Customers Complain

What are some of the reasons customers complain?

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Emotional vs. Practical Issues

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Customer Continuum

Here is a range of the kinds of customers we might deal with in a typical day. Recognizing these behavior types helps us deal with people more effectively.

CUSTOMER CONTINUUM

- Hostile
- Resistant
- Discontent
- Ambivalent
- Favorable
- Supportive
- Champion
Dealing with Customer Emotions

Gain Willing Cooperation

Win People to Your Way of Thinking

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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The only way to get the best of an argument is to avoid it.</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Show respect for the other person’s opinion. Never say, “you’re wrong.”</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>If you are wrong, admit it quickly and emphatically.</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>Begin in a friendly way.</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Get the other person saying “yes, yes” immediately.</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Let the other person do a great deal of the talking.</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Let the other person feel the idea is his or hers.</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>Try honestly to see things from the other person’s point of view.</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Be sympathetic with the other person’s ideas and desires.</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Appeal to the nobler motives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Dramatize your ideas.</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Throw down a challenge.</td>
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What are some ways we respond to complaints?
Dealing with Our Emotions

Principles from How to Stop Worrying and Start Living

1. Live in “day-tight compartments.”
2. Get all the facts.
3. Weigh all the facts—then come to a decision.
4. Once a decision is reached, act!
5. Write out and answer the following questions:
   a. What is the problem?
   b. What are the causes of the problem?
   c. What are the possible solutions?
   d. What is the best possible solution?
6. Don’t fuss about trifles.
7. Use the law of averages to outlaw your worries.
8. Cooperate with the inevitable.
9. Decide just how much anxiety a thing may be worth and refuse to give it more.
10. Expect ingratitude.
11. Create happiness for others.
12. Remember that unjust criticism is often a disguised compliment.
13. Analyze your own mistakes and criticize yourself.
14. Put enthusiasm into your work.
Practical Issues

Price

Quality

Delivery

Other

Notes

Complaint Resolution  7
Guidelines for Resolving Complaints

• Don’t take it personally.
• Listen empathetically.
• Use the customer’s name.
• Show respect for their point of view.
• Take ownership of the problem.
• Avoid citing corporate guidelines or policies.
• Create an opportunity to be a hero.
• Treat the diseases, not the symptoms.

Notes

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Complaint Resolution Process

Having a process to resolve complaints helps assure that we deal with the emotional and practical aspects of the issue.

1. **Greet**
   Always answer the phone or greet people in person as though you are happy to hear from them. Begin in a friendly way. This is easy to say, but can be difficult to do. We need to be able to “live in day-tight compartments” and separate previous negative experiences from this customer contact.

2. **Listen**
   We often get the same kinds of complaints, so it becomes challenging to really listen to people. Give them an opportunity to vent some of their frustration. Be empathetic. Listen for facts and feelings. Resist the temptation to start responding too quickly. Show signs of active listening, like brief interjections or clarifying questions.
Questions
Ask questions to clarify the concern. Again, we need to resist responding until we understand people and their issues.

a. Elementary questions capture the basic facts of the problem. This gives us an opportunity to take some of the emotion out of the complaint.
b. Elaborative questions gather more details. This gives the customer a chance to expand on their issues and feelings. These questions should be relatively short, to encourage the customer to talk more.
c. Evaluative questions help us gain an understanding of the severity of the issue, in the mind of the customer. This is also where we evaluate what will satisfy the customer.

Empathize
Find a point of agreement with the person. This does not necessarily mean that we agree with the complaint. This is where we show the customer that we heard and understood their concern, and we recognize that it is important to them. Apply the Gain Cooperation principles.

Address the Issue
Now that the emotional issues have been addressed, do everything in your power to resolve the practical aspects of the complaint. Take responsibility for the actions of your organization. This is your opportunity to turn a lemon into lemonade. People who have their problems successfully resolved tend to continue to do business with us.

Test Questions
Ask questions to test how well you have resolved the emotional and practical sides of the complaint. Give the customer another opportunity to talk. Be a good listener.

Offer Additional Help
Ask what else you can do for this customer. This allows an opportunity to turn the conversation away from the complaint, which makes it easier to end on a positive note.

Follow Through
Often, complaints cannot be resolved completely on the first point of contact. If you need to get back to the customer, do so quickly and thoroughly. Even if the complaint has been resolved, create a reason to contact the customer again. For example, find a way to give added value. Also, look for ways to solve the root causes of problems within your organization.
Resolving Complaints: Worksheet

Choose a customer who gave you a recent or significant complaint. You will be taking the position of your customer for this exercise. This will help us see the issues from the eyes of our customers. Write some of the details below.

Customer name:

Complaint:

Response

1. Greet:

2. Listen:

3. Questions:
4. Empathize:

5. Address the issue:

6. Test questions:

7. Offer additional help:

8. Follow through:
Summary

The two most useful ideas I gained:
1. ________________________________
2. ________________________________

Application opportunities:

________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

Specific actions I will take:

________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

Organizational impact:

________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

Complaint Resolution  13