



eBook

How to excel at handling customer complaints





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When handled effectively, complaints can present us with powerful opportunities to build strong relationships and customer loyalty while also improving our service.

Being equipped with the resilience, motivation and resources to step up to handle any feedback or complaint equips your service teams with confidence and capability that underpin customer service excellence.

When we are equipped with all the right tools to help us, having the opportunity to turn a negative into a positive that enhances our reputation, helps us to retain customers and improve loyalty can be extremely satisfying and rewarding.

- Measured, structured thinking and a positive mindset

Providing excellent levels of service in any complaint situation requires a positive mindset and measured, structured thinking. Instilling a consistent and disciplined approach to handling complaints and feedback will empower your teams with the confidence and capability required to deal with them satisfactorily, and to even showcase their impressive, highly valued customer service skills.

- Empower your people to see the value in all feedback and complaints

To be most effective, it's beneficial if your teams can be empowered to view complaints as valuable, even positive issues to be dealt with rather than something to fear or shy away from, regardless of how the customer brings the matter to your attention. Remember that the customers themselves can have negative attitudes about complaints at the outset for several reasons; they may be embarrassed or lack confidence to raise them, they could be upset or angry about what they view as wasted time, effort or expense or could have been ignored or had a bad experience in other similar situations in the past.

Some people may complain calmly, telling us that the service provided did not meet their expectations and hoping to provide constructive feedback to improve the service. Conversely, when they are dissatisfied with a company's level of service or product quality, some people can become surprisingly animated and passionate. Some customers don't articulate their complaint; instead, they simply take their business elsewhere. Others may be shy about complaining, be apologetic about raising an issue or can only do so if they have worked themselves up to a high level of anger and frustration. Some may be afraid that nothing will be done unless they make a big fuss in order to gain attention.

If there is cause to give feedback, dissatisfied customers can exhibit a wide range of emotions and motivations, some of which may result in subtle feedback rather than outright complaints. It is critical that each customer is treated with respect, and this happens when we are open, alert, and listening. How customer service teams respond from the start can transform a negative into a significant positive and an opportunity to strengthen our customer relationships.

As the avenues for giving and receiving feedback and complaints widen with social media, having a team really well equipped to handle any type of feedback, however it emerges, is a significant service differentiator.

MGI has drawn some key aspects from our unique and comprehensive Mindset, Language & Actions Toolkit into a useful 6-Step guide for handling complaints which is particularly helpful for customer service teams:

Step 1 – Listen carefully

It's essential to listen fully and carefully to feedback or complaints without interrupting, regardless of the emotions and any exaggerations the customer might display. Be careful to listen and not be tempted to defend or argue. This can help to defuse the customer's emotions and give you time to remember your role is to acknowledge the importance of any feedback and work hard to find a resolution. However the customer chooses to express their dissatisfaction, you can understand their position and control your own response.

Step 2 – Show appreciation and certainty...and apologise if appropriate

Next, express your gratitude to the customer for bringing this to your attention, reassure them that you will find a solution or a way forward. It is important to at least express empathy that the situation has arisen. Customers are much more willing to participate positively in finding a solution to the situation with you once they realise someone appreciates the impact that a situation is having on them.

At this point it is important to consider apologising to the customer in an appropriate way if an apology is needed. In some cases, this is very important and could be the first thing said, in other cases it is not necessary or appropriate and focusing on action and to move things forward is the best way to move towards a positive outcome.

Step 3 – Question carefully to find out what the customer wants

It is important to collaborate with a customer who is giving feedback or making a complaint to find out what would be a good way forward for them. Asking the customer what is really important to them about this situation can help to flush out what resolution would help. In some cases, it will be obvious what needs to be done and you will be able to say to the customer that you will take that action immediately and therefore quickly resolve the situation. In other situations, it may be that you need to find out more and check what is possible before the final resolution is achieved. In these cases, letting the customer know you will check what is possible and come back to them is a good way forward.

Step 4 – Explain what you ‘can do’

Being clear and specific about what you can do to help resolve the situation is important. If what the customer wants is something you can do, demonstrate absolute commitment and that you are accepting ownership and responsibility, and take the necessary action right away. If you are unable to complete the task requested by the customer, you should proceed to the next step. In some situations, you may not be able to do exactly what the customer is asking of you and so have to give disappointing news. In these situations, expressing empathy about the impact of the situation, being clear on what is not possible and then collaborating with the customer on an alternative way forward is a good three step approach.

Step 5 – Discuss options and agree on action

In a solution-focused manner, you should discuss the alternative courses of action and present them to the customer in terms of benefits or drawbacks for each option. For example, one option may be less expensive to the customer but take more time, and vice versa. Once the options have been thoroughly discussed, you and your customer should agree on a specific course of action that includes clear time frames and points of responsibility. Ensure that the customer understands who will do what and by when, where and how; this gives the customer confidence that something will be done. Then take immediate action. If there are any delays or deviations from the agreed plan, it's crucial to keep your customer updated and to agree any new plan that might arise.

Step 6 – Follow up to ensure complete customer satisfaction

Following the resolution of the complaint, make every effort to contact the customer to ensure that the solution was satisfactory to them. Take this opportunity to thank them for their continued business, and to express your gratitude for their feedback and the opportunity it has provided your organisation to correct the situation and, if applicable, learn and improve the service.

The approach taken and capability shown in responding to feedback and complaints demonstrates the ethos of an organisation. It's important to remember that consistency is key, as is a measured, well-structured, and sincere response that restores the customer's faith and confidence in you and the organisation. Customer service teams that are equipped with a solid skill set and the necessary resources for success will welcome complaints and feedback with confidence and capability, allowing them to build strong, long-term customer relationships, loyalty and retention, as well as improved reputations for themselves and the organisation.

Ensuring that your customer service teams are equipped with everything they need to excel at handling all feedback and complaints is easily achievable with MGI's Mindset, Language & Actions Toolkit.

To find out more about how our training can help you to achieve customer service aspirations through our Mindset, Language & Actions Toolkit, or to book a chat with us, you can:

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