

The right way to complain

How often have you heard stories of customers shouting at the top of their voice in a store or when calling into a call centre when complaining? How often have you just lost it yourself when you received poor service and you got upset to a point where your blood pressure increased significantly?

 By [Howard Badler](#) 30 Aug 2007

There is a way of getting what you want or resolving your query without getting upset. In my book titled *Quality Customer Care*, I have a chapter, *Customers have a right to complain*, in which I discuss tactics how to effectively report poor service and escalate the query if it is not resolved in an acceptable timeframe. Below is the complaints index that you should use whenever you wish to complain about something.

The Complaint Index

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Communicate the problem

You have identified an issue on which you would like to complain. You have all the relevant facts on hand and you begin the process of contacting or informing the company in question that you have a complaint. Whether you contact them telephonically or choose to visit the company personally, you must give the provider all the relevant details of your issue or issues at hand.

I will use a call centre as the communication channel for this example. You phone the call centre and a call centre agent answers the call. You must express your complaint in a calm and fashionable manner. There is no need for you as the customer to be rude or abusive. All too often a client screams at the call centre agent from the moment they answer the phone.

This is totally unnecessary and unwarranted. I often heard certain call centre agents say that the preferred dealing with older clients, especially those who have retired. My first thought was why older clients and not all clients equally?

They told me that older clients had a tendency to be more friendly and polite towards them, irrespective of the nature of their query. Throughout my time in the call centre, I would often try to educate call centre consultants to listen to what the client was saying and under no circumstances fight or argue with the caller. The call centre agent who gives an irate client a

sense of comfort that they really care should calm them down.

As I have mentioned in various chapters of this book, a call centre agent must have strong skills empathy and understanding when dealing with clients telephonically. My first sentence to any call centre agent that joined our company was the classic phrase: "Put yourself in the client's shoes and try to understand what they are going through". It is a statement that I still strongly believe in and promote all the time.

Listen to what the client is saying and show a sense of understanding whether it be through your tone of voice or by utilising phrases such as, "I understand what you are going through". If you have been through the same thing or if not, you could use a phrase such as "I can only imagine what you are going through".

As the client, you must maintain a high level of calm. Why have the additional stress of getting upset over trivial issues. Remain calm at all times.

Offer all the relevant facts

You are now at a point where you have communicated your complaint to a call centre agent or supervisor. Ensure that you give them all the relevant facts, in detail, and accurately, which in turn will make the whole process a lot quicker and smoother.

Advise the consultant that you will escalate the complaint if you do not receive an adequate resolution to your query. Then the consultant knows that if the complaint is not dealt with effectively, it will be escalated to a manager.

Advise the consultant that it is nothing personal against them. The fact that you are giving them the opportunity to resolve your query as opposed to escalating it at this point shows that you have faith that they can resolve your complaint.

Management must be informed

A complaint should be brought to the attention of a manager in all instances, irrespective of whether or not it is resolved at the ground level. It is the responsibility of the call centre agent to inform their direct superior of any complaints that are received.

Prompt a response/feedback

If a consultant requires additional time to investigate the complaint, especially if it is a difficult or complicated query, then they should give you an indication as to when you will receive feedback on the matter. Most companies set a 48-hour turnaround time on all issues. Come to an agreement on the time and date that you can expect a call back. Communication between the client and the consultant is vitally important and this is where most companies fail today.

Log all interactions

Clients do not receive feedback and consultants do not return calls, so make sure you record the date and time that you spoke to the consultant and, more importantly, request their name for future reference.

Often a consultant does not load a remark on the computer system when dealing with a client. The client calls back a few days later and wants to know what is happening about the resolution to their query. The client cannot remember the time of the call or to whom they spoke.

Now, because the client did not write down the name of the person that they spoke to, as well as the date and time, the whole query starts all over again. If you want to limit wasted time and duplication of work, make notes on the consultant to whom you spoke, as well as the time and date that the initial call took place. That way a call centre manager can pull a call from the voice recording system – if they are recorded, that is – to verify what the consultant said and deal with any disciplinary action that might be required against the consultant for not performing their task accordingly. So remember to record the name of the person you spoke to every time you call into a company.

Acceptance of complaint

You must also have the assurance from the person that you have spoken to that they accept what you have said and will commit to giving you feedback in an acceptable timeframe. Acceptance also means that the company in question has made a mistake and the manager must personally ensure that measures are put in place to avoid this problem from re-occurring with another client.

Training should also be taken into consideration as the error might have occurred because training was not given to the employee. As a client, you have the right to request a letter of apology in the event of it being an error on the company's side.

Incompetence

Incompetence is something we as customers have learnt to accept. Incompetence can be due to poor training or as a result of the employee's lack of interest. In most instances, incompetence is because of the employee not having the necessary skills to perform their function effectively.

Incompetence is a serious issue and companies should take complaints prompted by incompetence very seriously. Incompetence is an ingredient of the entire escalation process. If you deal with someone who is incompetent, it is vitally important that you follow the elevated query process and report this incident to a higher management source.

Incompetence is something that we need to tackle and eliminate. The time has come for you as a customer to do something about incompetent employees. By reporting it, hopefully the employee will get access to training, which will help with their development in the long run.

Notification in writing as to resolution of complaint

Once your query or complaint has been resolved to your satisfaction, you must request that the company put it in writing. This is especially so if you had a situation where a company was accusing you of doing something wrong or not paying an account. You must keep a record that you as the client were not in the wrong in the event of the issue re-occurring.

As discussed above, you must obtain written proof that the company has accepted their fault and that they are going to do everything in their power to stop this from happening again. As I have mentioned throughout my book, you as a client have the right to complain if you do not receive :

product or service that is fit for use.

Trust

Trust is something that takes a long time to establish and literally minutes to break. Acceptance and correction of an error is something that must not sit in the back of your mind waiting for the next thing to go wrong. Accept that the company made an error and move on. Trust the company to learn from their mistakes and if that trust is threatened in any way, then complain until you are happy. The onus lies on the company to restore the element of trust. Trust is a two-way street.

You as the customer have the right to complain. Use the steps mentioned in the complaint index assist you in lodging a complaint. Complain about significant issues and try to avoid complaining about petty issues. Ensure that you get feedback on your complaint in an acceptable timeframe. Unless you complain, how will a company know that there is a problem with their either product service?

The time has come for you to understand that the company does not exist without you and one person can surely make a difference. Remember to be calm and relaxed when lodging a complaint. There is no point getting upset about something that the right person can resolve. Use all the means available to you if the company does not respond to your complaint effectively.

The media these days like to expose corrupt companies or companies that do not respond to complaints or any other form of communication. You work hard for your money and why should you not enjoy it. You are entitled to be treated with respect and dignity – and if you are not satisfied, lodge a complaint.

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