





Customer Service Skills

Training Manual

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Module Five: Complaint Handling

Training Outline

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Be thankful for customers who complain, you still have the opportunity to make them happy.

Unknown



Workshop Objectives

There is one sure thing in every business – Customers' complaints.

At the end of this module, you should be able to:

- Define complaint
- Know the sources of complaints
- Handle customer complaints

Customers' queries come in basically three 3 ways: Enquiries, Requests and/or Complaints. Of the three, complaint has the greatest potential for customer loyalty or loss. A vast majority of customer service providers feel negatively about customer complaints. However, complaints should be viewed as opportunities. When a customer complains, s/he is letting you know that something is not right with your product or service. In most cases, customer complaints are actually opportunities for you to make things right and keep the customer coming back!



What are Complaints?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a particular situation.

How customer complaints are handled reflects on you and your organization in terms of:

- Value placed on the customer – This reveals that you place the customer at the top and you are actually saying "Customer is the King"
- Image of the Organization – An effective complaints handling process improves the brand image of your organization
- Value & Image of Products & Services – It shows the capability of your company in launching and sustaining products and services that suit the different customer needs.



Sources of Complaints

Identifying the source of a problem is the first step in addressing the problem. Customer complaints may arise from one or more of the following reasons:

- A product or service is 'faulty' and does not function correctly
- A mismatch between expectations from the product and its performance
- New Product launch/technology from competition resulting in dissatisfaction with current product
- Wrong commitments or lack of service
- Customer awareness of favorable organizational policies or procedures not disclosed to them
- Substandard product performance through breakdown of either a part or the entire product.



Handling Customer Complaints - EVOLVE

Complaints are actually goldmines of information. They are also, and perhaps more importantly, an opportunity for an organization to satisfy a dissatisfied customer by fixing a product or service breakdown and therefore growing and evolving as an organization to restore the goodwill of the customer.

Making use of these goldmines of information received as complaints, you can bring about significant growth both as an individual and as an organization. To do this, you will use the methodology EVOLVE.

- **E** - Look for Early Warning Signals
- **V** - Value the Customer's concerns
- **O** - Offer Solutions and Alternatives
- **L** - Lead the Way
- **V** – Value Add
- **E** – End on a positive note

Look for EARLY WARNING SIGNALS

Listen Attentively - It is of primary importance when dealing with an unsatisfied or complaining customer to listen attentively to the complaint, gripe, frustration or grievance. When referring to listening, it is much more than listening to the customer talk. Good listening skills applies to listening to what the other person is saying and picking out the important and relevant information. For example, if a customer is dissatisfied about the quality of a product, he or she will also tend to complain about the salesman, the delivery person

and everyone else that was involved in the purchase. Were these other people part of the problem? Possibly. However, the primary problem remains the product quality.

A key rule to listening is to not interrupt the customer while they are talking. Letting a person talk accomplishes two very important things. First, it lets the customer vent their frustration and feelings. This venting tends to reduce feelings of anger and allows you a greater chance of resolving the issue. Second, letting the customer talk gives you an opportunity to pick up little bits of information that may never come out during standard probing. Just one bit of information may give you a clue as to the real problem that exists.

Empathize and Apologize whenever required - Empathy plays an important role in handling customers' complaints. When a customer meets you with a complaint s/he wants you to care about the complaint and to attempt to understand it. S/he do not want to get the feeling that their complaint is of little concern to you. Let the customer know that you understand their feelings and communicate this sincerely. Apologizing to your customer whenever required is the knack of a strong service personnel. Understand that you need the customer more than s/he needs you or your business therefore, whenever a customer experiences any issue that causes a complaint a sincere apology is imminent.

You may empathize and apologize in the following ways:

"We are so sorry for the mistake/problem and we realize the impact this must have had on your business/family"

"I understand the situation and how angry you are with the quality of our service"

Value the Customer's concerns

Acknowledge the customer's concern and confirm the need behind the concern by asking relevant questions and generally probing politely. Sound genuine and use short and simple sentences in probing in order that the customer understands better what is being asked and is able to provide answers.

Offer Solutions and Alternatives

In addressing a complaint, knowledge of your company's products, services, policies and procedures and resolution channels are important. This knowledge will help in knowing how to assist resolve customers' complaint. Also, it is advisable to give the customer the option of more than one solution if applicable. Giving customers alternatives makes them part of the resolution process and it tends to create a more positive environment for resolving an issue in a WIN-WIN fashion.

Lead the Way

Taking charge of the resolution of a customer's complaint is critical in every complaint handling procedure particularly for issues that have been escalated. First you will need to communicate the timeline it will take for the complaint to be resolved. Second, ensuring it is resolved within the timeline communicated is your duty. Sometimes complaint resolution may not be dependent on you. Regardless, getting the timeframe to resolve the issue from the resolving team and communicating with the customer shows initiative and will avoid another complaint.

Add Value

“There are no traffic jams along the extra mile” — Roger Staubach.

Exceptional service delivery is not an easy task. Meeting customers’ needs is only the first step in providing great customer service. If you want to make a lasting impression on customers, you need to go the extra mile. Giving customers more than they expect will not only keep them coming back, but it will also inspire them to tell their friends about the great service they received. Opportunities abound within every complaint handling encounter for you to add value to the customer.

End On a Positive Note

Complaints will always come to you whether you like it or not. Your ability to view every service encounter in a positive light is the start of an effective complaints handling process. A customer may not always get what s/he wants nonetheless, leaving a service encounter with the knowledge that all avenues have been explored to handle the complaint gives the customer a feeling of satisfaction.



Module Five Exercise

- What makes complaints goldmines of information?
- List other possible sources of complaints not mentioned in the module.



Module Five Review Questions

1. A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction with a situation
 - a) True
 - b) False
2. How customer complaints are handled reflects on you and your organization in terms of
 - a) Value placed on the customer
 - b) Image of the Organization
 - c) Value and Image of Products & Services

d) All of the above

3. One of the following is not a source of complaint

- a) A product or service is faulty and does not function correctly
- b) Wrong commitments or lack of service
- c) Product/service efficiency and organizational responsiveness
- d) Substandard product performance through breakdown of either a part or the entire product

4. Turning a complaint around requires you do which of the following?

- a) Look for early warning signals
- b) Value the customer's concerns
- c) Offer Solutions and alternatives
- d) All of the above

5. Of all customer queries, which has the most potential for customer loyalty or loss

- a) Requests
- b) Complaints
- c) Enquiries
- d) All of the above

