

Customer Complaints and Types of Customers¹

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Introduction

In this article we discuss customer complaints and types of customers. Similar articles by these authors discuss superior customer performance. The handling of customer complaints is an important component of providing superior customer performance. Three important aspects of the complaint process involve acknowledging customer complaints, identifying customer complaints, and handling customer complaints (Albrecht 1995).

Acknowledging Complaints

It is important to realize that organizations that are customer-focused acknowledge customer complaints in a positive manner. What specific activities does your organization utilize to provide customers with easy opportunities to register their dissatisfaction? Are these activities sufficient? Remember, research indicates that for every complaint expressed there are over 25 unregistered complaints. Many dissatisfied customers just quietly take their business elsewhere. Therefore, organizations that are truly committed to delivering superior customer performance work hard at providing their customers opportunities to complain. What opportunities exist for your organization to acknowledge customer complaints in a positive manner? No organization is so perfect in the delivery of superior customer performance that significant levels of dissatisfaction (the source of complaints) do not exist. No news from customers regarding your performance is not necessarily good news.



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Identifying Complaints

At least five types of customers and their complaints can be identified. Each type is motivated by different beliefs, attitudes, and needs. Consider the following definitions of the types of complainers, how one might respond to them, and the danger of not handling complaints effectively.

The Meek Customer. Generally will not complain.

Response: Actively solicit comments and complaints, and act appropriately to resolve complaints.

Danger: Customer may quietly leave, never to return again.

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The Aggressive Customer. Opposite of the Meek Customer. Readily complains, often loudly and at length.

Response: Listen respectfully and actively, agree that a problem exists, and indicate what will be done to resolve it and when.

Danger: Being aggressive in return. The Aggressive Customer does not respond well to excuses or reasons why the product or service was unsatisfactory.

The High-Roller Customer. Expects the absolute best and is willing to pay for it. Likely to complain in a reasonable manner, unless a hybrid of the Aggressive Customer. Is interested in results and how you handle the customer service problem.

Response: Listen respectfully and actively, question carefully to fully determine cause, and correct the situation.

Danger: Like the Aggressive Customer, the High-Roller Customer is not interested in excuses.

The Rip-Off Customer. The goal is not to get the complaint satisfied but rather to win by getting something the customer is not entitled to receive. A constant, repetitive “not good enough” response to efforts to satisfy this customer is a sure indicator of a rip-off artist.

Response: Remain unfailingly objective. Use accurate quantified data to backup your response. Be sure the adjustment is in keeping with what the organization would normally do under the circumstances. Consider asking “What can I do to make things right?” after the first “not good enough” response.

The Chronic Complainer Customer. Is never satisfied; there is always something wrong. These customers mission is to complain. Yet, they are your customer, and as frustrating as these customers can be, they cannot be dismissed.

Response: Extraordinary patience is required. One must listen respectfully and never express frustration. A sympathetic ear, a sincere apology, and an honest effort to correct the situation are likely to be the most productive response. Unlike the Rip-Off Customer, most Chronic Complainer Customers will accept and appreciate your efforts to make things right. This customer wants an apology and appreciates it when you listen. Chronic Complainers are often repeat customers (in spite of their constant complaining) and will tell others about your positive response to their complaints.

Handling Complaints

All good managers listen to customer complaints. Only when a complaint has been expressed can the appropriate corrective action be taken. It is estimated that for every customer complaint received, there are at least 25 complaints that are never expressed. What are the implications of this statistic? Furthermore, a customer with a complaint is likely to tell others about his complaint. Every organization needs an effective procedure for resolving customer complaints.

Customer Complaint Procedure

Consider the following seven-step customer complaint procedure for handling customer complaints in your organization:

1. Provide customers with the opportunity to complain.
2. Give customers your full and undivided attention.
3. Listen respectfully.
4. Agree that a problem exists; never disagree or argue.
5. Apologize.
6. Resolve the complaint.
7. Thank the customer for bringing the complaint to your attention.

Determine how well your organization does in handling complaints effectively. Use your answers to determine where you need to improve your customer complaint procedure.

Conclusions

All customer service personnel need to be trained in handling customer complaints effectively and being empowered to respond in a positive manner. We hope you found this article useful. Your comments and suggestions are always welcome.

Reference

Albrecht, K. 1995. *At America's Service: How Your Company Can Join the Customer Service Revolution*. New York: Grand Central Publishing