

only actively listen, but you will enjoy the opportunity to grow and become better. **CS**

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HANDLING COMPLAINTS: A CHECKLIST

Consider the following checklist as a starting point for dealing with irate customers. Obviously, your company may have specific questions or concerns that you should include. Allow these thoughts to operate as a springboard dive into your next irate customer moment.

- With whom have they spoken?
- What remedies have failed?
- Is the problem real or imagined?
- Is it related to a personality conflict with the representative with whom they have been working?
- What are their expectations?
- Are the expectations something you can address?
- Are their expectations reasonable?
- How many people have they spoken with at your company?
- Has everyone given them sound advice or bad advice?
- Is the disappointment with your company and you?
- Have they allowed their anger with the industry to fester?
- Have they been given sound advice but the problem rests with their inability to understand and listen?
- What can I learn from the situation to improve my bottom line?

3. Identify the true nature of the complaint and the complainant.

People complain for many reasons. Dissatisfaction with a product or service is obvious, but some complaints are born and nurtured in environments outside of your control. Taking control of these types of complaints require you to listen and explore with questions the circumstances leading the customer to your door.

Some people are simply disappointed with your entire industry. Lawyers and mechanics will identify with this. It is necessary to set yourself apart from the herd and let the speaker know that you care.

Some complaints are born from a lack of clear expectations. Explore their concerns and guide them back to a more realistic path.

The most difficult of all complainants is the person who, due to their own shortcomings, has an inability to understand that the reason your products or service is failing is because of their own inability to follow instructions or guidance. It is essential that you speak to these people as you would to a friend.

There is no need to use industry jargon or million-dollar words. Make sure that your vocabulary and speech is simple enough that they can follow your directions to the letter. But don't come across as condescending. This can be avoided by remaining social and human as you address your customer.

4. Focus on areas in which you and your company can improve.

Learn. Even the most irrational or self-absorbed customers can teach you valuable tools to improve service. As you listen, pigeonhole some of their thoughts and complaints into the recesses of your mind. By looking for areas of improvement in each and every conversation, you will not

Their repeated rehearsal of the story should be your first indication that all they need is understanding and reassurance. They want someone to listen; step up and be that person.

2. Do not defend until you have heard the attack.

Step back, and allow the speaker to talk. As you listen, do not formulate your responses, but follow the speaker with an eye towards understanding the nature of their accusations and allegations. The ability to effectively challenge someone's argument hinges upon your understanding of their argument, not on the merits of your own.

Taking control of a situation requires you to pay attention to what is being said so that you may use all you've heard to map out your proposed solution. Adopting the other person's arguments in your solution will make it much more difficult for a person to logically rebuff your offer of resolution.

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IRATE CUSTOMERS

FOUR RULES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Dave is sitting in his office reviewing monthly reports as he listens to routine bustling of his staff. Suddenly, he hears a single voice amidst the regular noise. It is Mary, his sales manager, attempting to get a word in as she deals with a rather stubborn and authoritative customer. The call is placed on hold and is transferred into Dave's office. Mary announces "Mr. Money is on the phone; he is angry and is demanding your help."

As Dave reaches for his phone, he knows that how he handles the next few seconds will determine whether Mr. Money will raise or lower the bottom line on the next monthly report.

In the time it takes to reach for the phone and say "Hello," you must have the focus and knowledge necessary to take control and lead the caller back into your corner.

Preparedness comes by having the structure in mind that will allow your persuasive and reassuring abilities to control the situation. Maybe it was your staff, your management team or a salesperson, but the buck stops with you.

As you listen to the complaint, pay attention to how the caller became disgruntled, and match their words to the organizational structure and discipline that you have in place. Many times the caller has reached your desk because someone in the chain of command failed to listen and address his or her concerns.

Let's begin with the approach; how you manage the window between the ring and the answer will define the experience as educational, confrontational or successful.

In the seconds before answering the call or meeting, keep in mind that the best way to initiate control is to

take the high ground — not just the high road of virtue and doing the right thing, but the high ground as a vantage point to observe the situation as a whole. Prepare to remove yourself from the fray and look at the big picture. The best means of accomplishing this is to remember four rules.

1. Do not speak until you have truly listened. The opposite of speaking is not listening — it is waiting to speak. Listening is a separate task, and in fact is an art.

The easiest irate customer to deal with is the one that just wants to be heard. Everyone has dealt with someone who expressed every detail of their complaint to every person in their organization. They have begun to tell their story to the parking lot attendant as they parked their car, and each person they encountered en route to the manager's office.