

Customer Complaint Handling

As “Business Wizard Solutions” defines, a complaint is:

“An expression of dissatisfaction whether justified or not.”

Importance

Any organization that provides a product and/or service will get a complaint. Complaints are a part of doing business. What matters is how the organization effectively deals with complaints. Ineffectively resolving complaints will most likely cost an organization more money. Complaints are feedback valuable to an organization as they enable an organization to see where they need to improve.

If an organization can give a satisfactory solution to the customer, not only does it please the customer, the customer sees that as a gesture of your commitment to them and they would have more confidence in the organization. The resulting effect could mean the gaining of a loyal customer.

The best and worst way for any business to be more known is by word-of-mouth. As much as the organization will have customers telling positive experiences to others, there are those who are just as willing to tell others their bad experiences. Customers are more likely to complain to others than to provide complimentary reviews of any business. To any business this is the worst kind of advertising they want as like gossip, complaints can have a ‘wildfire’ effect on a business’ reputation.

Presentation

Body Language: Body language in handling customers is very important for its psychological effect. How one presents themselves to the customer is essential as that is what the customer “sees”. There are helpful suggestions on how to act when the customer is complaining to you. The crossing of arms is frowned upon as the person is projecting a defensive stance. When the customer is complaining to you, never turn away from them. Make sure your body is completely facing the customer and eye contact is maintained at all times. These are some examples of body language which seems minor but the customer does pick up on these stances. The customer sees that you are being friendly and are taking them seriously. Thus, the customer is more likely to continue to discuss their problem with you in a calmer manner.

Vocalisation: Customer service involves a lot of talking with the customer. One must take care in what and how they talk to the customer. Customers not only see, they can hear. A customer (or even you) can misinterpret the situation from a few misunderstood words. A lot of customers are infuriated by the word “policy” and “I’m only following procedure” as they will view you as a non-person already saying ‘no you cannot help them’ already. Try different ways of telling the customer it is against company policy. Your tone of voice is also an indicator of how you are receptive to helping the customer. Do not sound monotonous and talk in a friendly manner.

Physical and vocal presentation to the customer is necessary in that you are not reinforcing the idea of the customer viewing and treating you like a robot. Keep in mind that it is also a reflection of the company’s image (as you are seen as a representative of the company).

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"WHO DO I COMPLAIN TO ABOUT YOU ?"

The Complainers

Dermot Fitzpatrick, owner of Fitz Solutions Inc., wrote an article on the types of complainers businesses encounter which he classifies as:

"Aggressive complainers are most difficult to please and are often more concerned with displaying their emotion than actually achieving a solution. Aggressive customers will often shout, jump to conclusions, and can make unreasonable demands or make threats. Aggressive complainers can be intimidating but should be handled in a calm manner unless the employee feels threatened in which case calling for help may be necessary.

Passive complainers are the most lethal to a businesses' success, as they will complain to everyone but the actual business. Since the business is left unaware of their error they cannot correct it and the only thing a passive complainer succeeds in doing is depriving the company of potential business.

Constructive complainers are most beneficial to a business since they address their problem to the business in a calm rational manner. Constructive complainers allow a company to see and understand a problem, which allows them to then repair it. Constructive complainers tend to receive beneficial solutions to their problems and the business also benefits from knowing the error of their ways. "

It is good to be aware that not all complainers are the same, and unfortunately, some complain for illegitimate reasons. Not everyone can be satisfied but businesses try to please as many customers as they can. Whichever type of complainer that customer may be all complaints must be dealt with as customers are businesses' source of organizational survival.

Best Practices

The following are some guidelines of handling customer complaints:

Where: Customers, in many cases, want the means in which they can make their complaints. Some organizations do not offer venues where customers can make their complaints which further

frustrates them. Organizations should have easily accessible ways customers can complain such as face-to-face, via telephone, through written form and via internet. Thank to the internet and sharing sites such as Youtube, customers easily praise/bash organizations to a worldwide audience. Excellent examples are PC World (Forums.pcworld.co.nz/showthread.php?t=59769) and Cnet.com (Forums.cnet.com/5208-4_102-0.html?threadID=768). The internet provides many avenues where customers can complain such as on blogs, video sharing sites and forums. Organizations should be aware and use these avenues to address any customer conflicts.

Patience: Oftentimes one is faced to deal to with angry, and even very hostile, customers. Customers can be intimidating, rude and even threatening. The key to dealing with customers is to exercise extreme patience. Remain calm and do not argue. It is easy to be provoked and you want to yell back. This would only aggravate the customer further and result in negative consequences for you.

Attention: Oftentimes, most customers just want to be heard and just want their problems resolved. Be attentive and listen carefully, paraphrase back to the customer what they said. Do not in any case ever interrupt the customer. This is a common error that many make. One wants to show the customer that they are concerned and their patronage is valued.

I, Robot: Even though customers direct their anger towards you it is because you are an employee of organization they feel is unhelpful and unfeeling. Talk to them in a friendly manner and do not use a monotonous tone. Do not say "Yes?", greet customers properly. Also, do not say phrases such as "I only work here" or "I'm only following orders". Under any circumstances the word "policy" must not be used. Any of these actions further infuriates customers and you are further perceived as a non-human object. When customers view you as a robot, you will be treated like one.

Resolution: Complaints should be resolved in a timely manner to the customers' satisfaction. Sometimes there are complaints that are not readily resolved and should then be directed to upper management. Alas, there are the odd complaints which have no amicable resolution. Organizations strive to please all customers but customers are people, *not all* of them will be satisfied. Complaints are handled to the best of the organization's abilities.

Thank you: Customers are to be thanked for bringing complaints to organizations' attention. Organizations can use these complaints to see where they are operating the most and least effective. Organizations continually use complaints as feedback in which they continue to improve on their operations.

Apologize: It is amazing that the majority of organizations do not apologize to their customers. Customers feel that they are not valued and will take their business elsewhere. Apologizing is a simple gesture where customers see that the organization is sincere and is more likely to continue to patron that organization.

Guiding Principles

Customer complaints vary in hostility and each situation is different, there is no one solution to resolving these situations. Complaints are feedback whereby organizations to improve themselves even further. Management support is essential in handling complaints. Employees must tell management of any complaints and their results. Management must ensure the importance of complaints is recognized at all levels in the organization. Employees properly trained in complaint handling are likely to conduct themselves in a more confident and friendly manner which will be reflected to the customers. The result is

that customers will have a good impression of said organization and will continue to give their business to that organization. On the other hand, employees improperly trained will not be happy and are likely to develop a mentality like this example:



Employees not happy working for an organization = customers not being treated = dissatisfied customers
→ resulting in poor company image in the customers' mind and the subsequent loss of their business.

Organizations strive to resolve all customer complaints as they value customers' patronage. They want all customers to be satisfied as it results in continued & future business from customers. However, the statement that "The customer is always right" needs to be re-evaluated. Are the customers always right? Customers and employees are humans and both sides can make mistakes from time to time. In customer complaint handling, it is not about which party was right or wrong, it is about resolving the misinterpretation to the mutual satisfaction of both parties.

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