

When a Customer Complains

QUICK GUIDE

This Quick Guide provides some basic guidelines on how to handle a customer complaint.

WHEN A CUSTOMER COMPLAINS

The first step for any organisation is to have a documented customer complaint procedure in place. While the procedure itself can be quite simple, the benefits it will provide will be felt throughout the organisation. A systematic account of each complaint, along with the response and reaction, is essential to improving overall customer relations and customer retention.

For customers - a careful and consistent tracking of complaints and procedures shows a level of professionalism and conveys to clients that their complaints are taken seriously.

For employees - it provides a road map, a set of standard operating procedures, and demonstrates management support for those on the front lines. It also empowers staff to handle situations more confidently, efficiently and effectively.

For management - it identifies potential weaknesses and, more importantly, opportunities for improvement.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

The general guidelines for any customer complaint procedure are as follows:

- **Make it easy for customers to be heard.** Whether this is done online, over the telephone or in person, make sure that your customers can easily voice their complaint—without having to wait.
- **Listen carefully** to what the customer is expressing and give them (and their complaint) your undivided attention. Don't interrupt them (if the complaint is being given in person); don't presume you understand their complaint (based on prior experience) before they've had a chance to fully explain their problem; and don't re-interpret their complaint based on what you *think* their problem is. Do not simply scan written communications—read every word of the letter to understand the issues from their perspective.

Once they have expressed themselves, follow up by asking if there is anything else that needs to be addressed.

- **Agree with the customer** that a problem is real and relevant—don't dismiss or disagree, and never argue.
- Extend a **perfect business apology**.
- **Resolve the issue.** Ensure that your staff is empowered with the tools required to resolve the matter. Define clear guidelines for compensation/restitution as appropriate.
- Once the issue is resolved, **ask again** whether there is anything else that needs to be discussed.
- **Thank the customer** for bringing the matter to your attention, and for improving the quality of a product or service.

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PROCESS FLOWCHART EXAMPLE

