

# SEVEN TIPS TO DEAL WITH UNHAPPY CUSTOMERS

BY BILL HOGG

No one likes to receive a complaint -- but complaints are worth their weight in gold if an organization learns from them and then uses the information to improve the customer experience. Customer complaints can be used to build a better customer experience and turn a dissatisfied customer into a raving fan.

A good response to a customer complaint also ensures you'll receive that particular complaint only once. The company will know how to handle that issue in advance in the future

- **Customer complaints are usually not personal.** When employees understand that the customer's anger is directed toward the company, not the employee, they are better able to deal with the emotions of the customer. If the employee doesn't take a customer's comments personally, it will help them remain calm. Remaining calm will, in turn, help calm the customer more rapidly.
- **Focus on the customer rather than the complaint.** Customer-focus will help the employee empathize or "walk in the shoes" of the customer. It will help them listen more sympathetically to a complaining customer -- which is often all the customer wants. Plus it will help them remain calm and polite while a customer vents his frustrations.
- **Attitude is everything in creating satisfied customers.** Even the most irate customer will usually calm down when dealing with someone who is obviously doing their best to understand the customer's situation. If employees truly listen to a customer complaint, valid or not, the customer will at least feel as if they are being heard. Sometimes that's enough to completely diffuse a negative situation.
- **Empower employees to handle customer complaints themselves.** Obviously, there will be a point when a more senior person must make a decision in dealing with a complaint, but empowering employees to deal with common complaints and issues on their own will go a long way toward creating a more positive customer experience and increasing employee engagement.
- **Verify before taking action.** Make sure that you ask what would make the customer happy and then verify before taking any action. Customers will rarely ask for more than we are prepared to offer, so ask what will make them happy first. Once they have made their suggestions, then verify that if you are able to provide that remedy, the customer will be satisfied. Nothing worse than working to resolve an issue only to find that the customer is still not happy.
- **Move quickly to resolution.** Once a resolution is agreed, move quickly. When an upset customer calls and receives an immediate resolution to their problem, they will be much more likely to return as a customer. In fact, a good recovery builds greater customer loyalty than simply delivering as expected -- so make sure to use this to your advantage. The exact opposite is true, however, if the customer is "given the runaround" by being transferred from employee to manager to higher level executive before their problem is handled.
- **Provide tools.** Give employees options when dealing with difficult customers, or those with an issue the employee can't resolve. For example, if a customer bought an item on clearance, and the store's policy is to never accept returns on clearance items, allow employees to offer the customer a complimentary gift card, an extended warranty on the item, or a similar bonus. While it may not be exactly what the customer asks for, it will show customer appreciation and help them see that the company is going out of its way to satisfy the complaint.

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There will be times when nothing can be done to satisfy an unhappy customer. At that point, the customer service employee must simply defer that customer to a manager or supervisor. But employees who handle customer service complaints quickly, efficiently and professionally will minimize those issues and will give employees a sense of ownership in their jobs and in the company.

*Bill transforms businesses and business leaders to deliver breakthrough results! He works with senior leadership teams to build high performance cultures and focus their organizational goals around the customer — then aligning their priorities, accountability and service delivery model to improve performance, productivity and profits.*

*He equips leaders with the principles, processes and tools to align, motivate and empower an engaged customer-focused culture that fosters and rewards exceptional performance and productivity. As well, he is a dynamic, results-oriented speaker on the importance of a customer-focused culture, either as a guest speaker or acting as a facilitator of a group discussion/workshop.*

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