

# Managing Difficult Customers and Complaints

## SALES AND SERVICE MASTERCLASS

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Produced by Training Point  
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## Program summary

Drawing upon recent behavioural science research, three sales and service experts provide insight into how sales people can most productively manage difficult customers and complaints. Psychologist Peter Quarry leads the panel, comprising Andrew Stuart, co-founder of real estate giant Hocking Stuart, retail sales manager Gayarthri Buur-Jensen, and Michael Schiffner, managing director of Collective Intelligence sales training consultancy. Each of these professionals have wide ranging experience in dealing with complaints at all levels, from simple product returns to major real estate deals being threatened with catastrophe. Excellent practical advice is offered that will assist sales people across all fields, helping them to work through the solutions in logical stages. The experts also show how to effectively resolve conflict, whilst preserving and reinforcing a positive relationship with the customer.

## For general discussion

### 1. Customers often have legitimate reasons for making complaints.

Discuss as a group and come up with a list of legitimate reasons for complaint that people have encountered.

### 2. It's okay to apologise

Michael Schiffner says that too many salespeople believe the myth that 'giving an apology does not create legal liability or moral fault.'

Have you been affected by this myth?

Does knowing that it isn't true make you more willing to offer an apology to a customer if required?

## Worksheet 1

### 1. How to handle dissatisfied customers

In the program, the panelists advise which of the following? Circle Yes or No.

a) argue with the customer to protect the company's image	Yes	No
b) dispute their claim to see if they persist	Yes	No
c) probe with questions to determine why they are upset	Yes	No
d) acknowledge the complaint	Yes	No
e) apologise if required	Yes	No
f) confirm and clarify next steps to be taken	Yes	No
g) quickly sum up the situation and act on your assumptions	Yes	No
h) consider yourself released from any further obligations to the customer	Yes	No
i) remedy the situation, especially if it's your (or the company's) fault	Yes	No
j) let the customer vent their negative feelings without interruption	Yes	No
k) try to have the solution proposed by the customer, so they own it	Yes	No

### 2. What are some physical techniques you could use to calm an agitated customer down?

Discuss with a partner and make a list of appropriate methods.

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### 3. Writing a procedure

Write a short list of priorities to consider when dealing with an agitated customer, based on what you have learned from the program.

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## Worksheet 2

### 1. Role play

You will need a partner to participate in this activity.

Imagine you are a sales person being confronted by an angry customer (your partner). Demonstrate your mastery of each of the following points from the program about handling dissatisfied customers.

- empathise and apologise
- acknowledge complaint
- listen attentively
- agree with the customer about how to move forward
- clearly explain what will happen next
- promise to get back to them as soon as possible
- be helpful and address the concern
- avoid being drawn into an argument
- try to defuse the customer's negative energy
- avoid using the word 'but'
- don't take it personally or get personal in your comments
- remain professional in the way you speak

### 2. Reverse roles

Now, reverse roles. Treat your partner to an angry outburst, as if you are a dissatisfied customer, and try to unsettle them or force them to do what you want using threatening verbal and body language.

Did your partner's use of the techniques help to defuse the situation?

How easy was it for your partner to maintain a professional demeanour in those circumstances?

Discuss your findings with the whole group.

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## Worksheet 3

### Planning resolutions

You will need to work with a partner to complete this activity.

- a) Have your partner write a scenario of complaint or conflict with a customer. Then, swap worksheets and do the same on theirs.
- b) Now, both partners should discuss and write down proposed resolutions.
- c) Together, list the advantages and disadvantages of the solution for the company and the customer.

#### SCENARIO 1

#### PROPOSED SOLUTION

#### ADVANTAGES FOR YOUR COMPANY

#### DISADVANTAGES FOR YOUR COMPANY

#### ADVANTAGES FOR THE CUSTOMER

#### DISADVANTAGES FOR THE CUSTOMER

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## **Responding to the program**

### **Share your experience**

Share one or two experiences members of the group have had with heated conflicts between themselves (as the sales person) and a customer.

How was each situation resolved?

### **For further discussion**

How far would you be prepared to go to keep a customer happy?

Where should limits be drawn?

## Answers

### For general discussion

1. Customers often have legitimate reasons for making complaints.

Answers will vary. May include faulty product, unsatisfactory service, product or service under-delivered, promises by staff broken; transaction errors; invasion of privacy issues; delivery problems and other matters.

2. It's okay to apologise

Answers will vary.

### Worksheet 1

1. How to handle dissatisfied customers

- a) No
- b) No
- c) Yes
- d) Yes
- e) Yes
- f) Yes
- g) No
- h) No
- i) Yes
- j) Yes
- k) Yes

2. What are some physical techniques you could use to calm an agitated customer down?

Answers will vary. May include standing back from customer, lowering your tone of voice, speaking slowly and quietly, smiling, maintaining an open stance.

3. Writing a procedure

Answers will vary.

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## Worksheet 2

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|------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Role play     | No answers required. |
| 2. Reverse roles | No answers required. |

## Worksheet 3

Planning resolutions

Answers will vary.