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**13873 – Handle a Range of Customer Complaints in a Contact Centre**

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# Section Three: US 13873 – Handle a Range of Customer Complaints in a Contact Centre



# Learning Outcomes

On completion of this section, you will be able to:

* Identify the Customer’s problem
* Commit to solving the customers complaint
* Arrange correct planning and solution to the customers’ problem.
* Communicate with all stakeholders
* Provide practical business solutions

# 3.1 Understanding why Customers get Upset

If you have a clear understanding of why customers become upset you are better equipped to deal with them.

Every day a Company will get complaints regarding agents who have offended them – they either offend the customer or they fail to meet the customer’s expectations. Once this has happened and the damage has been done, what is the most effective way to deal with the complaint to keep the customer?

The types of behaviours that present the biggest opportunity for managing and exceeding customer expectations when handling their complaints are:

* query ownership
* knowledge
* call control
* empathy
* courtesy and building rapport
* building confidence through rapport, language and effective communication

If agents understand how to respond to customer complaints in an empathetic and professional manner, they are halfway to managing customer expectations.

# 3.2 Identify the Customer’s Problem

Never take a customer complaint lightly. Rather, do your homework and make sure that the customer understands that you genuinely care and that you want to do the right thing. Doing the right thing, however, doesn't always mean giving customers what they want; it means making sure you do your best to get both sides of the story and respond appropriately.

One of the best ways to identify with a customer is to ask yourself, "If this had happened to me, how would I feel? What would I think the right thing to do would be?" If you're truthful with your answers, and you respond accordingly, the odds improve that your customer will also.

## Organisational Complaint Procedure and Systems

Providing service to customers generally involves routine jobs that you do every day, so it is important to add that ‘personal touch’ that makes each customer feel special.

At the same time, customer service requires a high level of consistency in order to gain the trust of customers, which is an essential aspect of delivering excellent customer service.

Sometimes customers ask different questions and request special treatment. You may be able to help them yourself and you certainly need to know who to ask for help if necessary.

Some customers may be dissatisfied with the service and may present a problem. Your job is to recognise that there is a problem and make sure that the appropriate person deals with it.

With all of the above in mind, most companies issue a Standard Operating Procedure for customer service. This means that customers receive the same answer from each member of staff for the same situation or problem.

This has both positive and negative aspects: consistency is the chief positive outcome, but on the negative side, only one answer is given to a problem and customer relations personnel often find it difficult to think outside the normal parameters of the Standard Operating Procedure.

This can cause a variety of problems, especially in terms of customers’ perceptions of your standard of service and level of helpfulness.

In any industry it is necessary to have standardised ways of doing things. Standard Operating Procedures are a set of instructions covering those features of operations that lend themselves to a definite or standardised procedure.

Standard Operating Procedures indicate in detail how a particular task will be carried out. They describe the activities required to respond to “normal” and “abnormal” situations, and may include a troubleshooting checklist, list of personnel to contact, and so on.

“Quite simply, a standard operating procedure specifies in writing what should be done, when, where and by whom”.[[1]](#footnote-1)

#### The benefits of having clearly defined, written Standard Operating Procedures

* SOPs help to assure the quality and consistency of service
* SOPs help to ensure that good practice is achieved at all times
* SOPs help to avoid confusion over who does what (role clarification)
* SOPs provide advice and guidance to part-time staff • SOPs are useful tools for training new members of staff
* SOPs make the audit[[2]](#footnote-2) process easier.

Your company will have its own Standard Operating Procedures when it comes to dealing with customers and their enquiries and complaints.

The following are **generic customer service standards** that inform and influence customer service standards in most organisations:

When you recognise and deal with customer queries, requests and problems you must consistently:

* Deal with queries and requests from customers in a positive and professional way
* Seek information or help from a colleague if you cannot answer your customer’s query or request
* Obtain help from a colleague if you are not able to deal with your customer’s request
* Tell your customer what is happening
* Recognise when something is a problem from the customer’s point of view
* Not say or do anything which may make the problem worse
* Deal with a difficult customer calmly and confidently
* Recognise when to pass a problem on to an appropriate colleague
* Pass the problem on to your colleague with the appropriate information
* Check that the customer knows what is happening
* Check that your colleague is dealing with the situation

Therefore, to be competent at recognising and dealing with customer queries, requests and problems you must know and understand:

* Who in the company is able to give help and information
* The limits of what they are allowed to do
* What professional behaviour is
* How to speak to people who are dissatisfied
* How to deal with difficult people
* What customers normally expect
* How to recognise a problem from what a customer says or does
* What kinds of behaviours/actions would make situations worse
* The organisational procedures you must follow when you deal with problems or complaints

Let’s review the **complaints-handling process** to be followed:

#### Listen

#### Apologise

#### Take notes

#### Restate the problem/situation

#### Ask for suggestions

#### Propose alternatives

**Get agreement**

#### Example

* You **listen** carefully and patiently while the customer vents her anger
* You **apologise** for the inconvenience
* You ask her to describe how she uses the product or service while you listen and **take notes**
* You **restate** the problem (“I see that it does not work”)
* You **suggest** a solution (“I will find out from the suppliers what their returns policy is”)
* You get her **agreement** (“Are you happy with that? Fine, I will call you as soon as I have an answer for you.”)

This is a generic process that will be followed by any staff member of any organisation wanting to ensure customer satisfaction. However, each organisation will also have a very specific **policy** on how specific complaints should be handled. This policy will reflect both customer service standards and legislative requirements.

An organisation should demonstrate a commitment to an effective **complaints-handling policy** that reflects the needs, expectations and rights of complainants and staff alike. The policy will describe the dedicated system which should be in place to address a complainant's concerns.

The **policy document** will reflect a culture within the organisation that recognises the complainant's right to complain and will describe the mechanisms for complaints to be addressed in an efficient, fair and timely manner.

The policy document will also refer to the role of management in providing adequate resources for the satisfactory resolution of complaints, including staff training.

The complaints-handling system will emphasise the need to be fair to the complainant, the organisation and/or the person against whom the complaint is made.

## Escalating a Call

We have established from discussing telephone skills that an agent sometimes has to transfer a call to another department. When an agent has a problem and needs to transfer the call to someone more senior, such as a team leader or contact centre manager, we call this **escalation**.

The escalation procedures are an important part of any contact centre operation. The agent should try and resolve every query they receive and explore all alternatives before escalating the call.

If an agent can resolve the query during the customer’s first call, it is known as **first call resolution**.

The customer expects his/her query to be resolved as quickly as possible rather than being transferred from pillar to post, or waiting longer for the query to be resolved.

The agent will escalate a call to a higher level in the following situations:

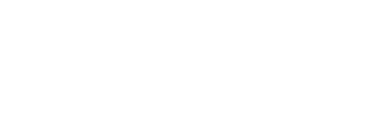
⇒ The agent is unable to resolve a query;

⇒ The agent doesn’t have the authority to deal with the query;

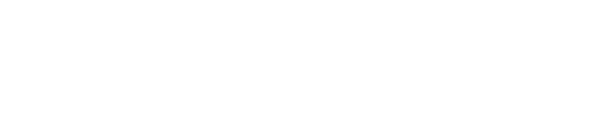
⇒ The agent doesn’t have the skill or knowledge to deal with the query;

⇒ The customer asks to speak with a more senior person; ⇒ The agent doesn’t have authority to make decisions.

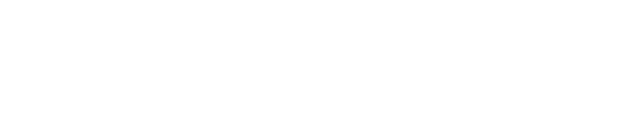
An example of an escalation procedure is as follows:



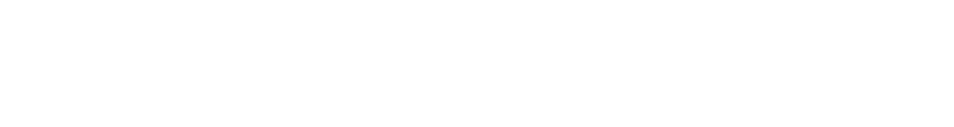
**Agent**



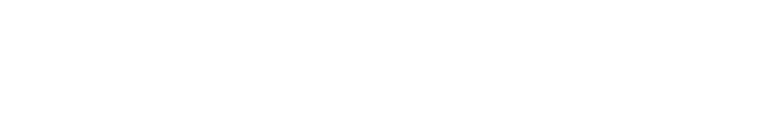
**Senior Agent**



**Team Leader**



**Contact Centre Manager**



**General Manager**

There are many reasons why Customers request for their call to be escalated, but obviously the key is not to get to the point where the customer is asking to speak to a manager or supervisor in the first place.

We assume that before a call has been escalated the agent has done the best that they can within the standards/rules/constraints that have been set for them, but it still does not satisfy the customer.

The key to an unhappy customer can be for a variety of reasons:

The agent has not followed the standards

The agent has made a promise and not kept it

The agent has given incorrect information

The agent is rude

The agent is abrupt

The agent is not speaking clearly

The agent is not listening to the customer

The agent does not allow the customer to describe the situation

The conversation is going nowhere and neither party will give way to a solution

When you **escalate** a Call – ensure the following:

Ensure that you inform the Customer you are putting him on hold whilst you transfer the call to a Supervisor/manager

Inform the Supervisor/Manager the reasons for transferring the call

Don’t put the customer straight through, go back to the Customer and inform the customer who you are putting them through to

Thank the customer – be courteous

You could call the customer back to ensure that the problem was solved.

Should you have been the defaulter as far as attitude is concerned, it would be good customer service once you have discussed with your Supervisor/manager to call the Customer and apologise – that is good customer service

## Identify and Assess the Nature of the Complaint

At times, you will be confronted with decisions that are very easy to make, as the rules are very clear. Your Standard Operating Procedures will leave you in no doubt as to how you should resolve an issue.

However, you will, at times, be confronted with situations where you will

have to use your discretion, because most rules do have an aspect of discretion. The reason for this is that rules are recorded in words. Words reflect concepts and concepts are always open to interpretation.

At these times you will have to apply a logical decision-making process consisting of 5 steps:

1. **Identify** the decision needed: Do you need to refund the customer or do you have to replace the product?
2. **Gather relevant information**: Has the box been opened? What is the supplier’s returns policy?
3. **Develop criteria** for making a good decision: What does the policy say? What are the Standard Operating Procedures?
4. **Develop options**: Refund. Substitute. Apologise, as you cannot do anything.
5. **Choose the best option**: For example, apologise, as you cannot do anything. Explain the constraints to the customer. Try and diffuse the emotion.

## Identify the Origin of the Complaint

Analyse the root cause of the problem to determine what went wrong. Try to step back and look at the situation objectively with the customer. Encourage the approach where you both work on the problem together to agree what should happen next. Keep control obviously, but involve the customer in your thinking and decision-making.

Analyse the problem and provide corrective measures or detailed information in an effort to avoid duplicating the problem with other customers. It may be necessary to obtain some additional information from your customer to accurately analyse the root cause of the problem.

Below are some methods to establish the root cause of a problem:

#### Five Why’s technique

In this technique, the problem solver asks individuals a series of five why-based questions to uncover the real issues of the problem. To be effective and avoid irritating the person being questioned, you should listen attentively to the answers and ask questions based on the responses. The Five Why’s approach can separate complex problems into distinct parts and point to the potential root causes.

**Example:**

Where the question and answers are related, you ask why C happened and the answer is related to another event B and so the same question can be reiterated, i.e.

* WHY did C happen, because B did
* WHY did B happen, because A did
* WHY did A happen, because (etc.…..)

#### Fact Finding Questioning technique

The questions in the following table will help you uncover relevant facts of a problem:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Facts** | **Questions to be asked** |
| Significance of the impact | Are the effects general or specific in nature?  How is this situation affecting employee morale?  Does the problem appear to be simple or complex?  Does it involve a single issue or multiple issues? |
| Problem location | Is the problem local or distant?  Does this involve one location or several?  Is this an isolated event or part of a series of widespread events? |
| Time frame | Is this a recent situation or has it been building up for a long time?  Is the problem constant or intermittent?  Is the problem impending or has it already happened? |

## Take Responsibility for Action to Solve the Problem

Sometimes it may be tempting to distance yourself from the problem by stating that you are not responsible for it, that another person will need to handle it, or that you are just a messenger. Resist that temptation. Expressing that you do not have ownership of the problem or the potential resolution gives the customer a feeling of being neglected and disrespected. If the customer senses that you are powerless, it will create yet another reason to be frustrated and angry.

Even if you do need to work with other staff members, get team leader approval or coordinate some other type of response, inform the customer that you will personally take the matter into your own hands and follow up on the issues. The customer does not know your company, your policies or your procedures. The customer will never be able to navigate the requirements, restrictions or resolution with the same knowledge and experience as you. Reassure the customer that you will use your knowledge and experience to coordinate the best possible resolution, even if you need to get the assistance of other parties to achieve it.

## Document the Problem

Make sure that you document the problem according to your company policies and procedures.

Some general guidelines are:

You will need to include the following information: bullet point.

* Date, bullet point.
* Customer's name and at least one contact number, bullet point.
* Complaint details, bullet point.
* Any action already taken.

And, if appropriate: bullet point.

* The escalation process, bullet point.
* Action plan details, bullet point.
* Customer's response to proposal (if appropriate), bullet point.
* Details of agreed resolution, bullet point.
* Complaint resolution.

Keep your notes for your records and do whatever your organisation's policy requires you to do with it. Every organisation is different.

When documenting stick to the facts. Remain objective as opposed to subjective. Don’t let a difficult customer upset you and influence how you take down the facts and data.

There's always the remote chance that anything you write down could be read in court. Take any "emotion" out of the equation. Focus on the facts only. And remember, the documentation is also to illustrate everything you tried to do to solve the problem. For example, write down any suggestions you made.

"As far as the courts are concerned, if it isn't written down, it's as if it didn't happen." Colleen Kettenhofen[[3]](#footnote-3)

# 3.3 Commit to Solving the Customer Complaint

It does not matter who created the problem or what happened before the customer got to you. Tell the customer that you own the problem and will apply your personal effort to achieve results.

### Take ownership of the complaint

Take ownership of the complaint and be responsible for its resolution.

You should begin by letting the customer know that you will be dealing with the complaint and that you will keep him/her informed of any progress. This gives the customer confidence that s/he will be dealt with directly, and not passed from one person to another. **Example9:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Agent:** | This is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ from ABC. Am I speaking to Mr Greer? |
| **Mr Greer:** | Yes, this is Jacob Greer. |
| **Agent:** | Hello, Mr Greer. My name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and I will be responsible for investigating and resolving your complaint from now on. I will keep you informed throughout the resolution process. |
| **Mr Greer:** | That's great. Does that mean that I won't get passed around from agent to agent any more? |

**Agent:**  Yes Mr Greer, we will try to make the process as smooth as possible. Now, if you have any further queries, you can contact me directly by

## Ensure Customer Satisfaction with the Complaint Process to Date

You may think that a complaint has been resolved once your customer has agreed on a resolution. However, this may not be the case. It is essential to make sure that the customer is satisfied with the way the resolution was both reached and implemented.

Further problems may arise while the agreed action is being carried out, or the customer may just want to express a final opinion. The best way to find out is to make a follow-up call to the customer. This call can also make the difference between a customer returning to your company in the future or going elsewhere.

The information you gain from a follow-up call helps the organisation with the constant improvement of its services.

Before contacting the customer, it is important that you:

* Re-familiarise yourself with the complaint • Re-familiarise yourself with any agreed resolutions
* Consider the types of question you could ask. **For example[[4]](#footnote-4)**

“Mrs Sithole, are you happy with the work that has been carried out for you?”

“Mr Ndaka, how does your ABC system work now?”

“Are you comfortable with being able to programme the system yourself?”

“Has your complaint been resolved to your satisfaction?”

#### Offer further information or assistance

You also need to ask your customer if s/he requires further assistance or information. You should do this whether your customer is satisfied with the resolution of the complaint or not. She may need advice on operating a product, or he may need assistance to prevent problems occurring in the future. Information your customers may require includes: bullet point.

* Instructions on how to use a product
* Product operating information
* Account information (e.g. when refunds will be given)
* What to do if a similar problem occurs again
* Contact numbers for future use.

Sometimes you'll be able to resolve a dissatisfied customer's problem simply by providing extra information.

While you are expected to satisfy the customer's enquiries to the best of your ability, sometimes you may not be able to assist customers directly with their enquiry. In this instance, you should either: bullet point.

* Refer the customer to an appropriate outside organisation that might be able to help.

, bullet point.

* Transfer the customer to another area within the organisation. , bullet point.
* Escalate the call to your team leader.

#### Call Referral

There are three steps to follow when referring a call.

1. Explain why you cannot help.
2. Offer assistance.
3. Close the call.

#### Call transfer

You should transfer a call when you cannot help the customer directly, but know that another area of the company will be able to assist them.

When transferring a call, there are certain communication pathways that you need to follow within the company. You should familiarise yourself with the company structure which you'll find on the **Intranet** under **Staff**.

There are four things that you must do when transferring a call.

1. Explain why you need to transfer.
2. Ask permission to transfer.
3. Introduce the call to the other agent.
4. Close the call.

#### Explain why you need to transfer

You should always explain to the customer why you need to transfer them to someone else.

“I'm sorry, Mrs Riekert. You have come through to the service department. The sales department will be able to help with your enquiry.”

**Ask permission to transfer**

“Would you like me to transfer you to someone in that area who would be able to assist you?”

#### Introduce the call to the other agent

Give the name of the customer to the agent, and a brief description of why they are calling.

“Hi Marjorie. It's Maria from the service department. I have Mrs Roberts on the phone who has an enquiry about water features.”

#### Close the call

Indicate to the customer that you are putting her through to the right area.

“Thank you for waiting, Mrs Riekert. I have Salvado on the line who will be able to help you. Just transferring you now.”

The company’s processes are there to protect both you, the agent, and the customer. If you disregard the processes and policies, you forfeit that protection.

# 3.4 Arrange Correct Planning and Solutions to the Customer’s Problem

Once you have researched the history of a complaint and collected all the relevant data, it is time to start planning a resolution.

Having a plan ensures that you have covered all the issues involved. You may even have more than one option available - the plan lets you see and compare your options when you discuss them with specialist staff and the customer.

You should never contact a customer without having an action plan already developed.

Planning ensures that you offer a solution that is: bullet point.

* In the best interest of the customer bullet point.
* In the best interest of the company.

When dealing with a complaint, it is advisable to have more than one option available to resolve it.

When offering a solution to a customer you should consider the following:

* For each possible option, what are the advantages/disadvantages for:
  1. The customer?
  2. The company?
* Which option is most likely to resolve the complaint?
* Does the chosen option fulfil the company’s obligations by honouring guarantees and/or warranties?
* Does the chosen option adhere to the company’s policies and procedures?
* Does the chosen option meet the customer's expectations?
* What impact will the chosen option have on the customer's relationship with the company?

## Maintain Contact with Stakeholders

Here are some different options to consider:

* A **simple explanation** of how company policy affects the resolution of the complaint.

“I'm sorry but we cannot provide a replacement product until the original has been returned to ABC.”

* An **apology** for the inconvenience caused.

“I would like to apologise for any inconvenience this incident has caused you.”

**Remember that you should not make an apology to the customer about the subject of their complaint, as this would be an admission of legal liability.**

* A **goodwill gesture** such as discount vouchers for future use, or a free product or service. (Remember not to go above your **discretionary limit)**
* **Another product** to replace one that has failed to give satisfaction.
* **Compensation** should only be offered as a last resort. You should escalate all claims for compensation to the Complaints manager.

#### Team leader

When the customer: bullet point.

* Asks to speak to your supervisor or someone in authority, bullet point.
* Has a request that exceeds your **discretionary limit**, bullet point.
* Becomes angry, bullet point.
* Has a request that is too complex for you to deal with, bullet point.
* Has a complaint about a staff member, bullet
* Has a complex complaint

**Complaints manager**

* You should escalate all claims for compensation to the Complaints manager.

#### Specialist staff and colleagues

When you are dealing with a complex complaint, you may find it useful to discuss any issues you have with your colleagues and specialist or expert staff, such as: bullet point.

* Your department (e.g. team leader, manager), bullet point.
* The Service department bullet point.
* The Accounts department bullet point.
* The Marketing department bullet point.
* The Complaints department bullet point.
* Legal experts.

You may want to:

* Find out if the option you've chosen is possible. For example, you might want to check with the Service department that repairs can be carried out within the required time frame.
* Get authorisation for actions that are outside your normal limitations. For example, you may need to lend a customer a product while theirs is being repaired.
* Seek advice about how to present your plan to a difficult customer. Colleagues may be able to suggest ways you can approach the customer.
* Brief colleagues about your proposed plan so that other staff can handle the complaint if you are away, or off sick.
* Keep staff involved up to date with progress.

You may find, when you're discussing the action plan options with colleagues, that they have suggestions that could improve the plan, or provide better options for the customer. You should always include your colleagues and their input when going through the complaints resolution process.

# 3.5 Communicate with All Stakeholders

We have seen that you might need to communicate with various stakeholders throughout the complaints resolution process: • The customer

* Your department (e.g. team leader, manager), bullet point.
* The Service department bullet point.
* The Accounts department bullet point.
* The Marketing department bullet point.
* The Complaints department bullet point.
* Legal experts.

In any workplace it is important to know whom to contact if you have a problem, or need assistance. In a customer contact centre it is vital to know the channels of communication.

All agents spend a lot of time dealing with people. Inevitably you will have some problems that require help to solve. For example, you may: bullet point.

* Have a problem meeting a customer's needs bullet point.
* Have a query about some aspect of the company’s products or services
* Require technical advice to help you present product options.

Knowing whom to ask when you have a problem will help you satisfy your customers in an efficient way.

The company organisational chart shows its staff structure, and will usually help you identify whom to contact.

In a customer contact centre, the majority of communication is verbal. Verbal communication refers to spoken communication and is used to: bullet point.

* Pass information from one person to another within the company bullet point.
* Exchange information over the telephone
* Share information at meetings
* Make or confirm appointments
* Ask questions to help you improve in your role.

As a contact centre agent, good verbal communication skills are one of your most important assets. Increasing your awareness of issues involved in verbal communication will allow you to improve your skills, and your overall workplace performance:

* Your voice tone or pitch should not be too high (as this can sound child-like) or too deep (as this can sound threatening).
* You should vary your speed depending on your circumstances. For example, you should speak more slowly to a group of people than to an individual. If you speak too quickly, your listeners may have trouble understanding you and will probably miss some of the detail. If you speak too slowly, you can sound patronising.
* You should vary the volume of your speech depending on your circumstances. For example, you will need to increase the volume of your speech if: bullet point.
  + You are speaking to customer who is hard of hearing
  + You are using a poor-quality phone line - There is a lot of background noise.

### Notify Internal Parties of the Complaint and its Routing

Having agreed on the solution with the customer, it is vital that you report it in the appropriate ways to the people who need to know.

Your team leader or campaign manager may need to let team members know about what is happening, especially if procedures need to be changed. This can be done using e-mails, notice boards or even training sessions.

Details of a complaint need to be recorded in the required format and place. This means that if the customer calls again and speaks to another agent, the new agent can see what has already happened. It also allows the company to track if a customer makes regular complaints.

### Notify Immediate Superior of the Customer Complaint

It is important to let your team leader know about the customer complaint, especially if there are any recurring problems with products, services or patterns to the complaints that you are getting. This way, you can identify the cause(s) and take action to fix them.

### Communicate with the Customer regarding the Outcome and Progress

Communication throughout the complaints resolution process is critical. You need to explain to the customer what action you are taking and what further information or response might be needed from him.

You need to ensure that both you and the customer agree on and understand what future action needs to be taken. The customer should have no doubts about WHAT must be done, WHEN it should be done, and WHO is to get it started. You should have no doubts about the customer’s understanding of the actions to be taken. If several actions are involved or if these actions cover an extended period, you might want to repeat the basic actions to be taken just before the customer hangs up.

# 3.6 Provide Practical Business Solutions

A speedy and efficient resolution of a customer complaint makes good business sense, as:

* Professional handling of complaints ensures customer satisfaction and therefore customer retention, which impacts on the company’s bottom line.
* The sooner a complaint is resolved, the sooner agents can attend to the next customer. A long, drawn-out process costs in terms of time, money and goodwill.

It’s in the best interests of both the customer and the business itself to find a practical and speedy resolution to a complaint:

* Respond to complaints quickly. Research conducted by a task team set up by former US President, Bill Clinton, found that customers reward companies that quickly solve problems by remaining loyal; in fact, a speedy response can add 25 percent to customer loyalty.
* Make it easy for your customers to complain and your customers will make it easy for you to improve. A dramatic lesson was learned by the teams involved in this study; the best-in-business want their customers to complain. Informed customers know how your services should work. If things are not working, customers are the first to know. Customers who are dissatisfied tell twice as many people about it as those who are happy with your service. The best-in-business use feedback from 0800 calls, letters, and surveys to identify and resolve root causes of dissatisfaction and to change their services to ensure that the customer will be quickly satisfied.
* Resolve complaints on the first contact and (1) save money by eliminating unnecessary additional contacts that escalate costs and (2) build customer confidence. A call back which involves two or more employees just has to cost more than a call that is handled right the first time. Research confirmed that resolving a complaint on the first contact reduced the cost by at least 50 percent.
* Technology utilisation is critical in complaint handling systems. Use your computers to develop a data base of complaints. See if you find a trend. Then fix it!
* Recruit and hire the best for customer service jobs. The customer service and complaint resolution specialist positions established by benchmarking partners tend to be highly sought-after positions. Complaint specialists learn the company so well they get promoted. Some organisations build the customer service position into a formal career ladder for advancement in the company. Front-line employees should be valued for feedback in making decisions.

### Arrange a Partnership to Enhance the Solution of the Customer’s Problem

At times, the resolution of the complaint requires the cooperation of a stakeholder external to the organisation; e.g. suppliers.

To establish a successful partnership with suppliers there need to be common goals and shared values when it comes to keeping customers happy. Problems need to be solved with win-win attitudes. Suppliers must consider themselves a part of the company’s complaints resolution system and take responsibility for their role in it.

There must be a match between what a supplier can (and will) do and what the company

(their customer) needs and expects. This requires a lot of open-ended questioning and investigation. There must be good dialogue and information sharing. It may be necessary to modify equipment and processes to accommodate the needs of the company’s customers.

Obviously, this kind of relationship is radically different from the typical adversary buyerseller ways of the past. It is no longer a buyer searching for the lowest cost and the seller trying to obtain the highest margin. Both parties are now working toward a common objective.

It will also not be possible or desirable to build a partnership with every supplier. Some are too small or have no desire to “go the extra mile”. An organisation also has limited resources to commit to such relationships; therefore, selecting the right partners is a serious decision which should be evaluated carefully.

### Build Relationships by Solving the Customer’s Complaint and Building Sales

In today's competitive market place, businesses that exceed the expected level of service build a following of loyal customers. Market research has proven that loyal customers or repeat customers represent 80% of your business. Put another way, loyalty equals growth and profitability for your business. Also, customers whose problems are resolved to their

satisfaction are significantly more loyal than those never experiencing a problem in the first place.

Customer loyalty is all about relationship building. Loyal customers help grow your business by spending more money over time on your product or service, as well as giving referrals to others.

# Key Points:

Conflict in the workplace can be incredibly destructive to good teamwork.

Managed in the wrong way, real and legitimate differences between people can quickly spiral out of control, resulting in situations where co-operation breaks down and the team's mission is threatened. This is particularly the case where the wrong approaches to conflict resolution are used.

To calm these situations down, it helps to take a positive approach to conflict resolution, where discussion is courteous and non-confrontational, and the focus is on issues rather

than on individuals. If this is done, then, as long as people listen carefully and explore facts, issues and possible solutions properly, conflict can often be resolved effectively

1. Royal Pharmaceutical Society [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A review or assessment to determine how good or bad service is, or how compliant the company is [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Retrieved from: http://ezinearticles.com/?Dealing-with-Difficult-Employees:-9-Facts-You-Must-Document-And-Why&id=291740 9 Adapted from: http://www.sts-training.com/toolboxes/bsbcco301a/intranet/asm/compl1.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Adapted from: http://www.sts-training.com/toolboxes/bsbcco301a/intranet/asm/compl4.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-4)