

## How to Handle Customer Complaints

Fifteen years ago I had a complaint at a very well known Italian restaurant in Minneapolis. I still remember how badly the employee responded to my concern. In fact, I've used it in my customer service seminars. It shows the power we all have to give our customers a memorable experience.

Here are some rules I teach in my seminars to help people handle customer complaints. If you and your staff follow these rules you can turn unhappy customers into loyal cheerleaders for your business.

### **1. Listen completely.**

Give them your complete attention. Don't multi-task. Don't "half-listen". Write down what they are telling you and get specifics from them. Then confirm that you understand. Focus only on them.

### **2. Let them vent.**

Don't interrupt. Don't explain, defend or justify. They don't care why the problem occurred and they don't want your side of the story. They are angry and they want to vent, so let them.

### **3. Apologize and mean it.**

This is often hard especially if you did not cause the problem. When you apologize in this situation you are not necessarily taking blame for causing the problem. You are apologizing for the customer having a bad experience. Put yourself in their shoes. Be sincere.

### **4. Ask them how you can make things right. Then do more.**

Too many employees have either no response to complaints or a generic, stock response, like taking money off the bill. But that risks making the customer even more angry if that's not what they want done. In fact you might even offend someone by offering them a discount.

A better strategy is to ask them what they want. You have to be genuine and polite. Most people don't want much. They usually just want you to listen. But whatever they say always do it and more. For example, if they ask for their meal free your response might be "Mr. Smith, of course your meal tonight is on the house. But I'd also like to buy you and your family dinner the next time you join us. Would that be okay?"

### **5. Assure them you'll fix the problem.**

Because you listened and you confirmed their complaint you know why they are upset. Take the next step and assure them you will take action to prevent it from happening again. Otherwise, why would they come back? (By the way, you need to fix the problem too.)

### **6. Thank them.**

Without direct customer feedback we have no idea if we are delivering the experience our customers want. When they tell us we have failed they are offering priceless information on how we can improve our business. They are telling us what we need to do to keep customers coming back. So thank them for their help. It's a rare customer who will take the time and effort to offer feedback. Thanking them will go a long way toward winning them back.

If your employees handle every customer complaint using these steps, you'll keep 99% of them coming back. You'll have a healthier business because it keeps getting better. And we all know happy, loyal customers are the foundation of a healthy, sustainable business.

About the Author:

*Kevin Stirtz helps companies increase revenue and profits by improving customer loyalty. Get a free copy of his latest book: More Loyal Customers at [www.StirtzGroup.com](http://www.StirtzGroup.com).*