

# Customer Complaints and Types of Customers<sup>1</sup>

Allen F. Wysocki, Karl W. Kepner, and Michelle W. Glasser<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

In this article we will discuss customer complaints and types of customers. Recent articles by these authors discussed Superior Customer Performance. The handling of customer complaints is an important component of providing Superior Customer Performance. Three important aspects of the complaint process are actively seeking customer complaints, recognizing the type of customer that is complaining, and responding appropriately based on the type of complainer.

## Actively Seeking Customer Complaints

It is important to realize that organizations that are totally customer-focused do not just respond effectively to customer complaints; they actively seek them out. What specific activities does your organization utilize to provide customers with easy opportunities to register their dissatisfaction? Are these activities sufficient? Remember, research indicates that for every complaint expressed there are over 25 unregistered complaints. Many dissatisfied customers just quietly take their business elsewhere. Therefore, organizations that are truly committed to delivering Superior Customer Performance work hard at providing their customers opportunities to complain. What opportunities exist for your organization to more aggressively invite and receive customer complaints? No organization is so perfect in the delivery of Superior Customer Performance that significant

levels of dissatisfaction (the source of complaints) do not exist. No news from customers regarding your performance is not necessarily good news.

## Types of Complainers and How to Respond Effectively

At least five types of complainers can be identified. Each type is motivated by different beliefs, attitudes, and needs. Consider the following definitions of the types of complainers, how one might respond to them, and the danger of not handling complaints effectively.

**The Meek Customer.** Generally, will not complain.

Response: Must work hard at soliciting comments and complaints and act appropriately to resolve complaints.

**The Aggressive Customer.** Opposite of the Meek Customer. Readily complains, often loudly and at length.

Response: Listen completely, ask: "what else?," agree that a problem exists, and indicate what will be done to resolve it and when.

Danger: Being aggressive in return. The Aggressive Customer does not respond well to excuses or reasons why the product or service was unsatisfactory.

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2. Allen F. Wysocki, assistant professor; Karl W. Kepner, distinguished professor; and Michelle W. Glasser, graduate research assistant; Department of Food and Resource Economics, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

**The High-Roller Customer.** Expects the absolute best and is willing to pay for it. Likely to complain in a reasonable manner, unless a hybrid of the Aggressive Customer.

Response: Is interested in results and what you are going to do to recover from the customer service breakdown. Always listen respectfully and actively and question carefully to fully determine cause. Ask: “what else?” and correct the situation. Like the Aggressive Customer, the High-Roller Customer is not interested in excuses.

**The Rip-Off Customer.** The goal is not to get the complaint satisfied but rather to win by getting something the customer is not entitled to receive. A constant and repetitive “not good enough” response to efforts to satisfy this customer is a sure indicator of a rip-off artist.

Response: Remain unfailingly objective. Use accurate quantified data to backup your response. Be sure the adjustment is in keeping with what the organization would normally do under the circumstances. Consider asking “What can I do to make things right?” after the first “not good enough.”

**The Chronic Complainer Customer.** Is never satisfied; there is always something wrong. This customer’s mission is to whine. Yet, he is your customer, and as frustrating as this customer can be, he cannot be dismissed.

Response: Extraordinary patience is required. One must listen carefully and completely and never let one’s anger get aroused. A sympathetic ear, a sincere apology, and an honest effort to correct the situation are likely to be the most productive. Unlike the Rip-Off Customer, most Chronic Complainer Customers will accept and appreciate your efforts to make things right. This customer wants an apology and appreciates it when you listen. Tends to be a good customer (in spite of his constant complaining) and will tell others about your positive response to his complaints.

## Handling Customer Complaints

All good managers want to hear about every complaint their customers have. Only when a complaint has been expressed can the appropriate corrective action be taken. Without customer complaints management often assumes that everything is okay.

It is estimated that for every customer complaint received, there are at least 26 complaints that are never expressed. What are the implications of this statistic? Furthermore, a customer with a complaint is likely to tell 20-25 other customers and potential customers about his complaint.

Therefore, every organization needs a procedure for resolving customer complaints.

## A Suggested Customer Complaint Procedure

Consider the following eight-step customer complaint procedure for handling customer complaints in your organization:

1. Provide customers with the opportunity to complain.
2. Give customers your full and undivided attention.
3. Listen completely.
4. Ask the key question: “what else?”
5. Agree that a problem exists; never disagree or argue.
6. Apologize.
7. Resolve the complaint. (Ask again: “what else?”)
8. Thank the customer for bringing the complaint to your attention.

As you examine these eight steps, determine which ones your organization does most and least effectively. Use your answers to determine where you need to improve your customer complaint procedure.

## Conclusion

All customer service personnel need to be trained in handling customer complaints effectively and being empowered to respond in a positive manner. Upcoming articles will address this issue in detail.

We hope you found this article useful and invite readers to provide feedback (via email) on how your organization handles customer complaints and which practices are most prevalent in your organization. Drs. Wysocki and Kepner are happy to lead a workshop on complaints and types of customers.

Your comments and suggestions are always welcome and you may email us directly at [wysocki@ufl.edu](mailto:wysocki@ufl.edu) or respond via extension web page <http://www.fred.ifas.ufl.edu/directory/wysocki-allen.shtml>.

## References

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