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Learning from Your Employees' and Customers' Complaints

By Etienne A. Gibbs, MSW, Management Consultant and Trainer

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Listening to complaints, whether they're reasonable or not, is a part of every manager's job. Sometimes complaints can be overwhelming. However, when we take them in stride with an open mind, we can learn much from our employees' and customers' feelings about the workplace.

After all, a complaint is nothing more than a person telling you that his (or her) needs haven't been met. As dissatisfied customers, they are giving us a second chance to correct something that should have been done properly the first time around. (In this case the customer happens to be your employee.)

If you listen to them patiently and attentively, their complaints will alert you to a real or potential problem, or tell you of a better way to handle a situation.

We are not use, however, to coping with complaints. We let our emotions rule our thinking usually. Consequently, we let complaints wear us out because we take on the complaint as a personal attack on us. It is not!

The next time you are faced with an irate employee, here are some steps to consider:

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- Try doing something new and different.
- Listen attentively, patiently, and with good nature.
- Even if the complaint seems unreasonable, don't tell him so. Keep it to yourself.
- Because nobody wants to be accused of being unreasonable, especially if it's true, admit that he might be right. (The implication is that you may be wrong.)
- Invite him to offer you in his own words a solution to his complaint. Say, for example, "If you were in my shoes, what would you do to correct the situation?" (Be careful not to call his complaint or situation a problem, because doing so might aggravate him to the point that he loses his ability to think and express himself clearly.)
- Listen carefully and actively. Read his body language.
- Use feedback questions or statements to let him know that you're trying to understand and meet his needs. (Begin responses with statements like, "If I understand you correctly, ...")

When you take the time to listen to your complaining customers or employee, you'll hear what he's telling you. Then you'll be in a better position to turn him into a satisfied and loyal customer.

Remember: When you maximize your potential and that of the complaining customer, everyone wins. When you don't, we all lose.

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Etienne A. Gibbs, MSW, Management Consultant offer a free health survey at <http://eagibbs.usana.com>; and Identity Theft protection at www.prepaidlegal.com/hub/gibbs54. Reach him at eagibbs@ureach.com or at 502-386-1175.

Be Careful Who You Condemn

By Scott Brown

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We all know customers are not always right - in fact - often they're completely wrong. But if we allow our customers' "shortcomings" to be the focus of our employees' attentions we're destined to fail.

The inclination to complain about a customer happens to all of us from time to time. After a customer irritates us in some way and eventually walks away or hangs up the phone, we immediately look for a nearby co-worker so we can share our negative experiences.

"Hey Bob. You won't believe this jerk that was just on the phone..."

It becomes a bonding experience for co-workers, but unfortunately it alienates the customer. And when a frontline worker sees a manager dismissing a customer as "stupid" or an "idiot" it becomes clear to them that it's okay to classify customers. Some customers are good and some are just plain dumb. They then feel that they have the ability to determine which customers are worth their time and which ones are not.

This can be a very destructive culture for a business.

So as a manager, you can't allow your employees to see you disrespect a customer in any way. As I have already mentioned customers can be wrong - and yes, sometimes even dumb. But that's not our concern - at least not in this article. It's your job as a manager to keep your employees focused on finding new ways to keep customers happy and to look for problem areas that upset customers so you can prevent problems in the future.

It's no secret that you and your employees are going to have problem customers, but it's your responsibility to keep your employees focused on the fact that they have a job for one and only one reason - to serve the customer. Without customers, no one has a job.

Keep employees focused on what's important. The good news is that YOU are the one who decides what's important.

Scott Brown, is an insightful and entertaining speaker on management and customer service and creating a culture of service in organizations throughout the country. He is also the author of "Who Cares? Creating Service The Right Way - The Only Way." You can subscribe to Scott's FREE newsletter by visiting www.SBServicePro.com

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