DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS
Read the article “10 Tips For Dealing With Customer Complaints” from forbes.com

1 WARM UP
Read and discuss the quote below. How does it relate to dealing with complaints?

"Customer service shouldn't just be a department, it should be the entire company."
- Tony Hsieh

2 DESCRIBING CUSTOMER SERVICE
Read the vocabulary, then decide if the words can be used to describe good or bad customer service.

Considerate  Tactless  Disorderly  Mediocre  Unresponsive
Hostile  Attentive  Child-friendly  Courteous  Personalised

Task - Use the vocabulary to describe a real-life bad customer service experience. Did you make a complaint?

3 HOW TO DEAL WITH COMPLAINTS
Complete the table using the vocab from the box. Use the common language from the table to help inform your decision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clarify the problem</th>
<th>End with helpful tone</th>
<th>Assure a follow-up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apologise</td>
<td>Give a plan of action</td>
<td>Offer alternative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen to the problem</td>
<td>Take responsibility</td>
<td>Give timeline for a solution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Complaint flowchart

1 - _____________________
First of all, I’m terribly sorry about that...
Let me apologise for...
<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Could you tell me exactly what happened...&lt;br&gt;Do you mind if I just go over that again...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I understand, I would feel the same way...&lt;br&gt;I see that puts you in a difficult situation...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>It looks like an oversight on our part...&lt;br&gt;I’m afraid there has been a mix-up...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>This should be resolved by the end of the day...&lt;br&gt;I’ll take care of this problem immediately...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I’ll look into other possibilities...&lt;br&gt;If this solution doesn’t work, we will find an alternative...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>What we have decided to do is...&lt;br&gt;Our action plan is...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>I’ll phone you tomorrow with an update...&lt;br&gt;I’ll follow up in a week to make sure that...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Is there anything else I can help you with today?&lt;br&gt;Don’t hesitate to call me again if you have any problems...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4 TEN TIPS TO HELP YOU WITH CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

Read the article below, then complete the task.

#1 Put Your Emotions Aside - Whether it's a friendly lady trying to tell you how to do your job better, or a disgruntled customer ready to erupt in rage, the best way you can handle any customer sharing a complaint is without personal emotions getting in the way. Calmly listen to what they are saying, then just as calmly reply and react with the following tips in mind...

#2 Avoid Challenging Their Complaint - It’s easy and, quite frankly, natural to want to tell a customer they are wrong in what they are saying. However, this won’t help to diffuse a customer from getting more upset while sharing their complaint. Instead of challenging their complaint, listen to what they are saying.

#3 Acknowledge What They Say - Listening to a customer complaint may not be an ideal scenario, but try your best to really hear what they are saying. Are they upset that something took too long? Or possibly a product they purchased isn’t what they had in mind? Maybe they are upset about a specific employee they encountered while working with your business. Whatever the “real reason” is for their complaint, acknowledge it and ensure you listen to what they say.

#4 Thank Your Customer - The old saying "kill them with kindness" could not be more true in a situation where a customer is complaining. But rather than smile and pretend to care, genuinely let them know you are thankful they are sharing their complaint. For example, tell them straight away that you appreciate them taking the time to talk to you about their concern, and you want to understand them fully. This opens up the opportunity for you to listen further, while giving them the understanding that you want to hear what they have to say.

#5 Offer Support - Support comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. Sometimes it's simply listening more, other times it means exchanging a faulty item for a new one. Support should not be black and white, though. If you really listened to what they had to say, you should be able to suggest a handful of ways to support them - or even better, one firm and perfectly ideal way to support them. You have to be the judge on what works best, but keep in mind that support means giving the customer something in response to their complaint.

Task: Now read the other 5 tips (6-10). Then in your own words describe how each tip relates to dealing with customer complaints.

#6 - Be Flexible
#7 - Make Sure Your Customers Hear What You Are Saying
#8 - Offer an Apology - With Gratitude Attached
#9 - Follow Up
#10 - Move On
5 POOR WAYS TO DEAL WITH COMPLAINTS

Identify the problem with each of the replies to a customer. Then correct each reply making them more customer friendly.

Tip - Use the flowchart from exercise 3 and the softening language from the table below as a guide.

1. **Payment dispute**
   You are completely incorrect. Our system says you have not paid the outstanding balance so you need to pay today.

2. **Delivery complaint**
   It was your fault that you did not receive the order. My colleagues do not make mistakes. I believe you gave us the wrong delivery address.

3. **Correspondence dispute**
   I did not receive an email from you. I am a competent employee so I would not have missed it. You probably sent it to the wrong account.

4. **Ordering problem**
   Yes, the order will be late, so you will not get your order this week. But you will get it soon. Call me back next week and I’ll give you another update.

5. **Faulty product**
   The products were damaged while being transported. But they were transported by a 3rd party company, so please complain to them as it is not our fault.

### Softening Language

In problems and complaints we often soften bad news by using phrases such as:

- I’m afraid (that) there has been a mistake...
- It seems (that) there has been a mix-up with your order...
- It appears (that) they forgot to enclose the instructions...
- There seems / appears to be a misunderstanding...
ROLE PLAYS

Work in pairs and act out each scenario. Take turns to be the customer complaining and the employee dealing with the complaint.

Tip - To deal effectively with each complaint use the flowchart from exercise 3 and the tips presented in the lesson.

Role Play 1
You ordered 1000 paint cans from your supplier. The order arrived 1 day late. There was also some damage to 20 paint cans making them impossible to sell. A box is missing too, which means you only have 9950 cans. You have worked with the supplier for 4 years, they are usually reliable and professional.

Role Play 2
You booked a flight with a world-famous airline. Unfortunately, the flight was delayed by 6 hours. As a result of this you missed an important business meeting. The employees at the airport were unhelpful and rude when you asked for a refund. You are a frequent flyer, but this was the first time you bought a ticket from this airline. Call the airline to complain.

Role Play 3
You work for a cleaning company that specialises in cleaning commercial properties. You are waiting to be paid by your biggest customer, you’ve been working with them for 5 years. You sent the invoice 4 weeks ago, and sent a reminder 1 week ago. A week has passed, they still haven’t paid. Call the owner to complain.
CASE STUDY

Read the case study below, then answer the questions.

Background
You work in the customer service department for Northern Railways, a budget railway located in the north of England. The company services thousands of journeys per day, connecting all the towns and cities in northern England. As thousands of customers use the train services each day you receive many complaints, ranging from minor to serious issues. You are responsible for email and social media correspondence.

Complaint 1
Everyday I pay $10 to travel from Leeds to Bolton. But everyday the service gets worse. There are less trains so the trains are overcrowded, I can’t even sit down! And, the trains are so dirty! Why should I pay for an expensive ticket, if I receive a terrible service?

Complaint 2
Awful experience! The 12:00 service from Bradford to Sheffield was cancelled at the last minute, as a result I missed my interview! Therefore I missed out on my dream job! I will never use Northern Rail again! Can I at least get a refund and an apology?

Complaint 3
Yesterday a member of your staff verbally attacked and threatened me. The incident occurred because I accidentally spilt my drink on the floor. I apologised, but he did not accept it. Instead he got very angry and began to shout at me. I am scared to travel on your trains again!

Complaint 4
I am a disabled man. I was unable to travel on your trains recently because the train did not have adequate access - this is totally unacceptable. I have contacted the Disability Rights Commission who are going to take you to court on my behalf. See you in court!!

Questions
1. Decide in which order you would prioritise the complaints? Explain.
2. How would you respond to each? Telephone, email or letter?
3. Describe how you would respond to each complaint. Use the tips and language from today’s lesson.
HOMEWORK

1. IDIOMS

Complete the exercises below.

1. Choose the correct word to complete the idiom.
   - Pass the blame / buck
   - Get to the bottom / top
   - Go the extra mile / kilometre
   - Get off on the wrong foot / hand
   - Drop the ball / plate

2. Match the idioms to their meaning.
   a) to make more effort than is expected of you
   b) make a mistake; mishandle things.
   c) to find out the truth relating to a situation
   d) shift the responsibility for something to someone else.
   e) make a bad start at something, bad first impression.

3. Answer the questions.
   1. Does getting off on the wrong foot with a customer lead to complaints?
   2. Have you ever dropped the ball at work which led to a customer complaint?
   3. When dealing with a complaint, why is it important not to pass the buck?
   4. Describe how you get to the bottom of difficult situations.
   5. What are the benefits of going the extra mile for customers?