

THE HANDLING COMPLAINTS POCKETBOOK

2nd Edition

By Angelena Boden

Drawings by Phil Hailstone

“Strikes an effective balance between improving understanding and giving practical tips and techniques. Essential reading for anyone who has ever avoided facing a customer with a complaint and, let’s be honest, who hasn’t.”

Martin Peters, Managing Director, Leicester Promotions Ltd

Dedication: For my late father, Roy Boden.

CONTENTS

| | | | | | |
|---|---|----|---|---|----|
|  | INTRODUCTION A cautionary tale, a new approach | 5 |  | COMMUNICATING WITH THE COMPLAINER Communication skills, listening, language, non-verbal, body language, staying positive | 57 |
|  | WHY PEOPLE COMPLAIN Understanding why, reasons, handling complaints well | 7 |  | PSYCHOLOGY OF COMMUNICATION Transactional analysis, ego states, ego state model, Parent, Child, Adult, and the ways they complain, summary | 65 |
|  | WELCOMING COMPLAINTS Why complaints are good news, complaints are opportunities, scary facts, the income multiplier effect, make it easy to complain, being nice, reducing complaints | 21 |  | ANALYSING THE TRANSACTIONS Stimulus & response, crossed transactions, uncrossing a transaction, ulterior transactions, staying in Adult | 77 |
|  | HOW PEOPLE COMPLAIN Tips & techniques, deal with feelings & facts, telephone complaints, email complaints, next steps, presenting the solution, golden guidelines | 31 |  | INTERNAL COMPLAINTS Defining the customer, passing blame, two way process, company culture, insecurity, taking action, multi-skilling, team building | 89 |
|  | COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT POLICIES Consistent approach, what to include, ensure prompt action, information from customers, monitoring, logging, analysing, who deals with the complaint?, establishing procedures, considerations for a policy | 45 |  | BUILDING CUSTOMER LOYALTY Complaints into compliments, displacement, losing customers, treat like royalty, solving problems, saying thank you, compliments & comments, relationship marketing, customer expectations, and finally | 99 |

COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT POLICIES

CONSISTENT APPROACH



Most medium to large businesses have a policy for handling complaints but perhaps need to review it from time to time. Businesses that take a more *ad hoc* line would benefit from developing a consistent approach. Whatever policy is in place it should be:

- Easy to understand
- Simple to implement
- Effectively communicated to all staff



COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT POLICIES

WHAT TO INCLUDE



Some of the key features of a good policy include:

- Mechanisms for people to complain, including online and social media
- System for logging and analysing complaints
- Identification of those who will be responsible
- Procedures for handling different levels of complaint
- Ways of keeping customers informed
- Structure of compensations
- Follow-up action

COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT POLICIES

ENSURE PROMPT ACTION



Complaints need to be handled without delay.

Many customers are angry, upset or disappointed when they complain. They don't want to have to go through the process because they expect it to be time-consuming and stressful. This is made worse when they don't get an immediate or satisfactory answer. Customers accuse businesses of delay tactics and this is bad for your reputation.

Money is an emotive subject. However small or large the amount is, it is the customer's money and they want it back (if they are entitled to it).

Speedy refunds, resolutions about disputed goods, empathetic responses to customer feelings show yours is a caring company and the customer is valued.

If the complaint is being investigated, which takes time, keep the customer informed and provide an indication of when matters will be settled.

COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT POLICIES

INFORMATION FROM CUSTOMERS



There is no point having a policy to handle unhappy customers if they are not encouraged to come forward in the first place. Such an invitation to comment or complain can take the form of something impersonal written on the packaging:

Customers who are not entirely satisfied with this product should ... (action)

Questionnaires, comment cards, suggestion boxes, exit surveys, market research are all positive ways of encouraging customer feedback. Ask them to follow you on social media sites where you have a presence.

Informal verbal feedback from talking to customers is often the most valuable of all!

COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT POLICIES

MONITORING SOCIAL MEDIA



The growth of social media has encouraged customers to share their opinions and experiences good and bad with a very wide audience in seconds.

According to the Guardian, May 12th 2012, Twitter has become so widely used for airing grievances that companies such as BT, Halifax and LA Fitness have Twitter accounts specifically to deal with customer feedback, separate from their general public-facing accounts.

As well as logging and analysing face-to-face, telephone and email complaints, businesses need a strong social media presence and regular monitoring. It's all about reputation management and building customer relationships.

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Vimeo are just a few of the general media outlets used by individuals and businesses. Google + is tipped to become a major player. More specialist sites including TripAdvisor® and Amazon encourage customer feedback and ratings.

Blogging, vlogging and micro video complete the picture. You don't know who is saying what about you.

COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT POLICIES

LOGGING



When logging complaints, whatever their source, consider what kind of information you need:

- Name, address, contact numbers
- Date, nature of complaint
- Action – solution suggested
- Customer response to suggestion
- Time-frame to put matters right
- Person responsible for action
- Corrective action to be taken to prevent problem from recurring



COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT POLICIES

ANALYSING



Analysis will throw up recurring problems and weak areas, and identify particular periods or departments involved. All information needs to be presented in a simple, non-critical fashion and passed to the relevant managers. They in turn will need to consult staff and formulate corrective action.

Switched-on managers and directors will want periodic information about customer complaints. Some companies attach bonuses and other rewards to the fall in numbers of complaints received.



COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT POLICIES



WHO DEALS WITH THE COMPLAINT?

CUSTOMER SERVICE DESKS

Identifying key people in the organisation to deal specifically with customer complaints, comments and even compliments has become a preferred approach for major retailers and transport companies. Staff need to be highly trained to handle all kinds of difficult people and situations, and need full support from the rest of the team and the management.

- Customer Service desks become central points easily identified and accessible by consumers
- Smaller businesses may identify individuals in each department to do a similar job
- Some managers prefer all staff to be able to deal effectively with complaints whether or not it is anything to do with them
- Social media managers may deal with all aspects of CRM

Whatever the approach adopted, the system must be clearly identified and communicated to everyone. The bottom line is that the customer doesn't care who deals with the problem as long as someone does!

About the Author

Angelena Boden BA, M.Soc.Sc., PGCE

Angelena has been a freelance trainer in people behaviour related subjects for over 30 years. Her specialisms are in conflict resolution, handling complaints, reputation management, customer service and interpersonal skills. Her main field of expertise is in the tourism and hospitality industries but she works across all sectors: private, public and third sector, including the Isle of Man prison.

Angelena is also the founder and Director of Fifteen Minute Trainer Ltd, an online training company providing video and podcast resources for businesses. She is passionate about global sharing and at the time of this book's publication is working on a voluntary basis in Cape Town, South Africa – setting up a training facility in a township, in partnership with the local community.

Contact

Email: angelena@thefifteenminutetrainer.com or bodenangelena@gmail.com

Website: www.thefifteenminutetrainer.com



A handwritten signature of Angelena Boden in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.