

If You Can't Say Something Nice About Customer Service...COMPLAIN!

by John Tschohl, President and Founder, Service Quality Institute - August 17, 2017

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In the customer service industry, we cannot avoid complaints. Complaints happen every day and when a customer complains it is usually for a good reason or genuine concern. They usually have made a purchase that did not meet their expectation—a product, service, or maybe a combination of the two. We must take care of the customer by listening to the complaint, and resolving it, to ensure a happy customer.

Fewer than half of unhappy customers will bring a complaint to your attention. Those who never say anything will tell an average of 11 or more people about their bad experience. It is important that we recognize complaints as *opportunities*, so we can sway these averages, one resolved complaint at a time. It is my belief that no transaction is complete unless the service that customers receive will motivate them to return and do business with you again.

Customers want to know someone is listening and they are understood, and they are hoping you are willing to take care of the problem to their satisfaction. No matter what the situation is, when a customer brings a complaint to your attention—even if they do it in a less-than-desirable way—be thankful. We must realize that improper handling of a customer complaint can be costly to the business.

Handle a customer complaint in a smooth and professional manner

When something goes wrong how do you take the customer from hell to heaven in 60 seconds? The solution is to empower and reward employees to solve problems quickly and to the customer's satisfaction. Follow up with a phone call. Even a small gesture of apology can turn a bad situation into a good one. The cost could be minimal—maybe a simple upgrade on the customer's next purchase or a gift certificate. A simple gesture like this could result in an *over happy* customer. When you resolve customer complaints successfully, you will better understand their needs, retain them as loyal customers, and enhance your business.



I have been writing about Stew Leonard for over 25 years. Stew Jr. has a huge 6,000 pound rock in front of their store that says **Rule 1** The customer is always right! **Rule 2** If the customer is ever wrong reread **Rule 1**. The company has received worldwide acclaim for excellence in customer service and quality and is featured in two of management expert Tom Peter's books: *A Passion for Excellence* and *Thriving on Chaos*. In 1992, Stew Leonard's earned an entry into

The Guinness Book of World Records for having "the greatest sales per unit area of any single food store in the United States."

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In my book, *The Customer is Boss*, I show you how to complain correctly. Most people begin their complaint with the person they are complaining about. Not a good idea. It all starts at the bottom and many people don't believe it will do any good. And, they are right. After all, if the complaint comes in at the bottom level, they surely are not going to send it on up to management to show what a terrible job they did on handling it.



I tell everyone that they have the right to a good experience, a quality product, and top of the line customer service. I also tell everyone that it's their responsibility to let the appropriate channels know when there is an issue. You deserve quality and top notch performance.

There are a couple of things that work when trying to motivate a business to give you better customer service:

- Ask for good service: "I really need your help."
- Act as if you expect good service.
- Treat salespeople as friends—a friendly attitude toward salespeople is so rare that clerks treated respectfully jump to attention to serve you as if you were a celebrity.
- Change your attitude toward good service. Your chances of receiving good service improve immensely. Speak up.
- State clearly your expectations and ask for a speedy resolution to problems.

Don't feel sorry for business, government, or non-profit groups when you complain about bad service. You're doing them a favor by complaining.

Complaints are good for business so don't shut up, speak up.--John Tschohl



John Tschohl is a professional speaker, trainer, and consultant. He is the President and founder of Service Quality Institute (the global leader in customer service) with operations in over 40 countries. John is a self-made millionaire traveling and speaking more than 50 times each year. He is considered to be one of the foremost authorities on service strategy, success, empowerment and customer service in the world. John's monthly strategic newsletter is available online at no charge. He can also be reached on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.