



**MasterCard Working™**  
FOR SMALL BUSINESS

**Susan-Says®:**

**A complaining customer may become your best customer.**

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“Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning,” according to Microsoft founder Bill Gates.

No matter the size of your business, customers who complain are giving you a chance to keep their business. Most unhappy customers don't take the time to complain. According to the Technical Assistance Research Program (TARP), only 4% of customer's who experience problems complain. Instead, they simply go away angry and stop doing business with you. And even though they didn't tell you about their problem, they are more than happy to tell all of their friends. The experts say, the average upset customer tells nine people. One in five tells more than 20 people.

To avoid losing customers because of poor service, it is imperative to create a complaint management system that is well-publicized and user-friendly. It's also important to make sure you train all – and I do mean all – of your employees on how to deal with complaints.

When faced with a customer complaint, the most important point to keep in mind is that this customer has enough confidence in your organization to bring the situation to your attention. Look at it this way – at least they are still talking to you.

**Allow the customer to vent.** Most likely, the customer will be angry and may also be rude. That's okay. Allow the customer to vent and don't interrupt. And no matter what he or she says, don't take it personally. If you feel your temper rising, take a deep breath and bite your tongue.

**Express empathy.** Empathy is not the same thing as sympathy. Empathy is a method of letting a customer know you appreciate and can understand their feelings without necessarily agreeing with them. For example, you might say, “I can see why you feel that way.” Make sure your tone of voice matches your words. You want to sound sincere. When the customer runs out of steam, ask

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them if there is anything else before you start to respond. Then restate the problem and make sure the customer confirms that you have heard them correctly.

**Look for resolution.** Start by thanking the customer for taking the time to bring the situation to your attention. Explain that you appreciate hearing from them because it gives you the opportunity to take corrective action. Next, apologize for their inconvenience. Then ask the customer what would be the ideal resolution in their mind. If it's something that can be done, then by all means do it. You may be surprised at how little it will take to turn the situation around.

If it is not possible to provide what they want, then suggest other possible options. Discuss each of the options with the customer and try to reach a mutual agreement. Make sure you also agree upon a timeline for execution. And get all the necessary information you'll need to live up to your end of the bargain.

Be sure to thank the customer once again for taking the time to bring the situation to your attention. Follow up with the customer at a later date to ensure they are satisfied.

It is important to remember that most complainers don't want explanations or excuses of why things went wrong. They want to be treated with respect and provided with a solution to their problem. Keep in mind, of those customers who do complain, 56 to 70 percent will do business with your company again if the complaint is resolved. That goes up to 96 percent if the complaint is resolved quickly. And we all know, it cost more to acquire a new customer than it does to keep an existing one.

Finally, the research shows that customers who have never had a problem with a company are less loyal than those who have had a problem satisfactorily resolved. Plus, they are more likely to tell others how pleased they are with how the situation was handled. Turning an unhappy customer into a happy one may be your best marketing strategy.

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