

Issue Seventy Nine

LAUNCHPAD

Turn customer complaints into opportunities

Dealing with customer complaints can be both gruelling and rewarding. But being able to turn the situation around so your customer is happy with the outcome can strengthen their loyalty to your brand and inspire some gold standard word of mouth marketing.

Communication and attitude are as vital as expert product knowledge.



Listen and empathise

Let the customer tell their story. Ask questions to clarify. Let them know you want to understand. Let your customer know you can see it (and feel it) from their point of view.

Make sure you understand

Sum up your understanding of the problem. Ask the customer to confirm you have it correctly. Clarify factors your customer may not be aware of such as warehousing or supply issues, but make it clear you're not making excuses.

Apologise

Acknowledge that your customer has had a disappointing experience of your services or products. It may not be your fault; there may have been a breakdown in communication; there might be other things in play. Apologise anyway.

Make it right

If it's within your power to fix the issue straight away, outline what you recommend to sort out the problem. Check with your customer that they see it as an acceptable outcome.

Involve him or her to work together with you for the best solution.

Outline further requirements

Outline clearly if you need authorisation further up the line or to follow up with other parties (e.g. overseas suppliers). State how long you expect this to take and how you will advise the outcome. Give your customer a way to contact you so he or she feels he has some control in the situation.

Follow up

Make sure the issue is resolved and the customer is happy with the outcome. If not and it proves impossible to sort out that specific issue, what can you do to repair the situation? A written apology from the company? A voucher for a generous discount on the next order? Gift cards?

Don't just follow up with your customer. Follow up in the business. Was this just a one-off or is there something wrong with the product or the system? Is this likely to happen again? Sit down with the team to go over the system until you are all clear on how to deliver a great customer experience. Use it as a training point so you are sure that everyone on the team has the skills to deal with difficult situations and can see a customer complaint as a great opportunity to make your service even better.

'There are many who subscribe to the convention that service is a business cost, but our data demonstrates that superior service is an investment that can help drive business growth. Investing in quality talent, and ensuring they have the skills, training and tools that enable them to empathize and actively listen to customers are central to providing consistently excellent service experiences.'

Jim Bush, EVP American Express



'Customer service is the new marketing.'

Derek Sivers, Founder CD Baby

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BUSINESS SATELLITE

Building your dream team

In order for your business to be a success, you need to be surrounded by like-minded people with good core skills and values, aiming for the same end goal. In essence, this is your dream team. But how do you ensure you're recruiting the right team players?

Be clear What are the qualities you require from employees? Think, plan and be specific so that the right applicants come forward from the beginning. Provide clear instruction during the initial screening process and winnow out those who can't seem to follow these to a tee.

Test Spending a little extra time from the get go could save you headaches in the future. Provide practical tests for each position when hiring, rather than simply asking questions. Applicants can easily fluff up their answers to sound amazing, but being able to prove their abilities is another thing altogether.

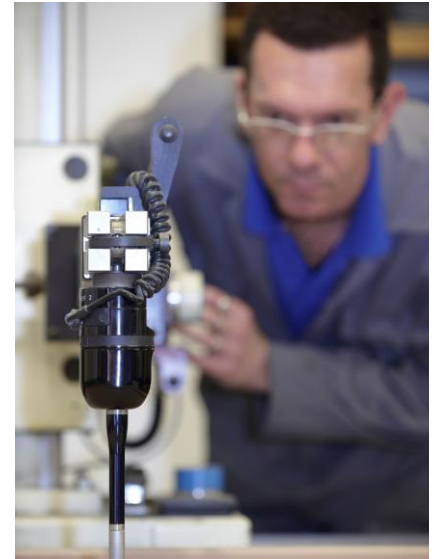
Ask for referrals That old saying - it's not what you know, it's who you know - isn't just a cliché. Ask staff for referrals and offer an incentive. Have them share the job description on social media.

Marketing Take the time to market your job description correctly. To add professionalism to the equation, ensure your logo is evident, spelling and grammar are correct and the language used reflects your company image. Consider who you want to hire and make sure your ad is seen in the right places by the right people. Is this a job for social or print media?

Be Patient It's not worth settling for the wrong candidate. If you haven't met the right one yet, keep trying. Investing a little time and money at the beginning can save you endless issues in the future.

'At first, dreams seem impossible, then improbable, and eventually inevitable.'

Christopher Reeve



Sustainability in the workplace

The word 'sustainable' seems to be thrown around on a regular basis these days, not just in relation to the food we eat, but also to business and the wider economy.

Sustainability in a work environment relates to an awareness of resources: how they are used and how we can conserve these resources to the benefit both of our environment and our pocket.

The impact this thinking can have in our workplace is significant. It can alter staff attitudes and behaviours positively, with a common goal, a shift in motivation and a more positive approach. Through sustainable practices, employees may be moved to reconsider other aspects of their approach, from how they exercise to how business is conducted. Sustainability is about respect: for the environment, other team members and the business itself. And it helps highlight to employees just how and where company resources are used.



Develop a strategy with your team. Here are some simple starters:

- Recycle whenever possible, including paper, plastics, aluminium, and glass
- Set your printers to double sided by default, and recycle paper
- Include a snippet on green practices in your induction manual
- Use environmentally friendly cleaning products
- Think about not using the in-sink waste disposal - recycle and compost as much waste as practicable
- Establish a carbon free travelling initiative with employees
- Dedicate five minutes of the weekly team meeting to generate new ideas

Sustainability ties in with sound business practices - building efficiency, minimising waste and maximising resources. A more efficient operation cuts costs. And sustainable businesses are in tune with today's market as customers and investors are more and more interested in the impact of business on society and the environment. By refocusing how you operate, you can make your business more sustainable.



Safe holiday shutdown

Is there a mad scramble to finish last minute jobs before you close down for Christmas? If so, it can be hard to have a clear picture of what needs to be done so that everything is secured before you relax and give yourself over to tinsel and bubbles. It's not just a case of last one out turn the lights off.

Safety and security are so much more on everyone's radar these days. You know what you've always done to close up for the holidays. But take a fresh look just to see if everything really is covered.

Consider whether your premises might be accessible to children over the holidays. Are they likely to be able to do any damage to themselves or your business, for instance, on scaffolding or with equipment? Construction and factory sites are probably already secured with fencing and locks but do you need to think about this for your business?

Don't tempt thieves. A notice in the front window giving your closedown dates may not be the best idea. Communicate closedown details to clients and suppliers. If you still need to let others know, more generalised signage giving a contact number if the office is unattended might be a better idea.

You have no control over extreme environmental events such as earthquake or flood. But think about whether equipment or other items in your workplace setup should be further secured on a 'just in case' basis. You might also subscribe to the [Civil Defence emergency alerts](#) or download the [Red Cross Hazard app](#) to your phone.



Holiday shutdown checklist

Depending on what kind of business you have and where it's situated, some of the following may be overkill. But take a minute to review. Brainstorm with your team to tailor the best approach for your business.

- Mail and deliveries:** If you don't have a Post Office box, contact your postal service and regular suppliers to ask them to hold deliveries.
- Alarms:** Check fire and intruder alarm systems, sprinkler systems and fire extinguishers.
- Backup:** Make sure your server and any laptops and devices have all been backed up.
- Clean-up:** Clean out the fridge and empty all bins. Does someone need to pop round during the holidays to put the bins out?
- Emergency contacts:** Update your after-hours contacts list. Include emergency contacts and numbers for building services such as plumber, electrician, and locksmith. Copy it to your team, make sure you have it on your phone and display it in a central area of the office.
- Hazards:** Remove or secure any flammable materials. Do you need to assess any potential fire or vermin hazards posed by overgrown vegetation or accumulated waste and rubbish on site? Do guttering, spouting or storm water drains need clearing as potential hazards in the event of fire or flood? Prevent access to scaffolds or formwork by removing ladders. Eliminate or minimise potential trip hazards.
- Security:** Secure all valuables. Lock tools away. Make sure any vehicles left onsite are locked and the keys secured. Lock any plant and machinery or remove it altogether.
- Onsite access:** Have you planned any maintenance, repairs or special projects onsite over the holidays? Make sure that staff responsible for arranging access and any contractors involved are fully informed of what's required. If any hot work is planned, make sure contractors are aware of and comply with applicable hot work permit and fire protection procedures. Are any staff going to be in over the break? Review procedures for their safety and go over these with them.

Scam-proof your business

Scams and scammers become more sophisticated every day. No surprises there. They rely on keeping a jump ahead of people. As businesses step up their investment in new technology and media platforms, scammers find new ways to worm their way in.

FYI... Social engineering

Many scams fall under the umbrella term 'social engineering'. These techniques aim to gain people's trust and con them into letting their guard down to leave themselves (or potentially your business) open to fraud. You might have the most high tech security system in the world but it's useless if a human is conned into propping the door open. Social engineering approaches want you to act without thinking, to click the link, open the attachment, to be helpful and friendly and open the door. Social engineering manipulates people into giving away valuable information or unwittingly giving a scammer system access. It is often the first opening that exposes a business to a security breach. These techniques have emerged as security risks. Brief your team to minimise the risk of cyber-attack or fraud.

Types of popular social engineering attacks include:

Phishing: the email from the bank or a supplier asking us to click this link or open that attachment or reply with our account details.	Baiting: who doesn't like free stuff? Baiting plays on this by leaving around USB flash drives infected with malware. A user reaches for a handy flash drive and then unwittingly infects their computer and potentially the network.
SMiShing: short for 'SMS phishing', it uses text message technology to fool you. It can trick a user into downloading malware such as a virus or Trojan horse, onto his or her mobile phone or other device. If the device is set up to synch with your office system, you can see the problem. SMiShers can use text messages to obtain financial data from users for identity theft or fraud.	Vishing: short for 'voice phishing'. This scammer fools the victim into thinking that he or she is assisting a genuine business contact. Some can display a fake number or caller ID on your phone. Automated recordings may direct you to call a given number or enter account details. Vishers may intercept your follow up call to confirm the call was genuine. A common trick is for the scammer not to hang up so they are able to stay on the line on your phone and impersonate a genuine contact.
Scareware: this involves convincing the user that their computer has been hacked or infected with malware or they have inadvertently made an illegal download. Predictably the problem can be fixed by clicking on the enclosed link. And then of course, the user's computer really has been infected with malware.	Ransomware: a user inadvertently downloads malware which locks up the computer or the whole network. The firm literally is held to ransom as it must pay the extortionist to be able to access its data, or else all files will be deleted, permanently encrypted or otherwise impossible to access.

Blocking scammers

Because there are so many variations on scams, brainstorm examples with your team. Role play scenarios so that you maintain good security for your business but don't accidentally enrage genuine customers and business contacts by being obstructive:

- Be alert to any requests for credit card or bank numbers, but be equally suspicious of requests for other business information such as contact details for the business' directors, for personal identifying information such as birthdates or other clues to passwords paving the way for hackers
- Have a secure backup solution
- Think about whether to invest in a comprehensive mobile security application that includes SMS (text) filtering as well as anti-theft, antivirus and web protection
- Brief the team that, if a call seems suspect, they should take the caller's details, and confirm with a manager, your IT provider or the supplier in question (whoever the scammer has masqueraded as) that the approach is legitimate. When calling to confirm, do so from a different phone

An Important Message

While every effort has been made to provide valuable, useful information in this publication, this firm and any related suppliers or associated companies accept no responsibility or any form of liability from reliance upon or use of its contents. Any suggestions should be considered carefully within your own particular circumstances, as they are intended as general information only.