

Segment 4 - Dealing with customer complaints and incidents

INTRODUCTION

However good the service and the food are in your shop or restaurant, there will always be customers who will complain. Remember, not all customers that complain are reasonable people – however – “the customer is always right”. As well as complaints, you may also have to deal with various incidents from accidents to left items. Dealing with these also requires a high degree of customer service, either directly from yourself, or on handing over to a colleague or superior.

AIMS OF THE SEGMENT

By the end of this segment you will:

- be able to deal effectively with a customer complaint;
- be able to deal effectively with different types of incidents.

HANDLING COMPLAINTS

The first thing that you should always remember is that nine out of ten complaints will be about the shop/restaurant, the food, products or services you offer and **NOT** about you.

Your attitude will play a vital part in how effective you are in dealing with customer complaints. Always have a positive attitude toward both the customer and the complaint.

Be positive. At least this customer actually took the time and effort to complain. The majority just accept poor service or poor quality food and simply complain with their feet. In other words they just leave the premises and never return.

They also cause you a lot of damage by telling their friends and work colleagues about their bad experience, thus planting a seed of doubt in their minds about visiting your shop or restaurant.

Complaints about the food and products are probably the most common, for example, you may serve a meal in the restaurant and include an item the customer didn't order. So what do you do?

Whether you are dealing with a complaint about the service given such as the time taken to queue or the food or products offered, there are key stages in how to effectively deal with both the customer and the complaint. Remember, this customer took the time and trouble to complain which means you have the opportunity to win back their custom. So, in the above case, the most sensible and obvious choice is to apologise and offer to change the meal.



So, how do you effectively deal with a customer complaint?

First of all you have to be aware of what the complaints policy of your shop or restaurant is. Do you have the responsibility/authority to deal with the complaint through to its conclusion? Or do you have to pass the situation over to a colleague or superior?

The first two stages apply to both of the above and, if all stages are handled correctly, they will ensure your customer is treated both professionally and courteously.

If at all possible, take your customer to one side or away from the majority of your customers. This way, they don't have an audience to play to, nor do other customers overhear.

DON'T get defensive. You do not want to get into an argument with your customer, even if they want to get into one with you. Never say "it's not my job". Politely ask the customer for their name and remember it.

First of all you have to find out what the problem is. **Ask** the customer to tell you exactly what the problem is. **LISTEN** very carefully to what they tell you. It might be helpful to take notes at this stage to verify later with the customer, or, if passing the complaint over, to give your colleague the full story. You will only anger the customer more if they have to repeat themselves to someone else or to correct your version. Whilst the customer is talking to you **don't** interrupt or jump to conclusions, let them 'get it off their chest'. Stay calm and make sure you understand the precise nature of their complaint. Repeat back to them the key points of their complaint. This has two benefits. Firstly, it proves to the customer you have been listening to them and secondly, you have the precise details of the complaint (this is where taking notes may be helpful).

The next stage is probably the most difficult – **you have to apologise!** You need to empathise with the customers' feelings, in other words, you understand how they feel and that you take the problem seriously. Don't blame other people or say it has nothing to do with you.

You then have to decide what to do and take the necessary action.

If you have to pass the customer and the complaint over, remember that the customer complained to you and will not want to repeat the story to someone else. Make sure you explain the problem fully (again notes may be helpful). Hand the customer over courteously by introducing them (by name) to your colleague or superior. Explain their position to the customer and inform them that the complaint will now be dealt with by this person.

If you are dealing with the complaint yourself, make sure you follow the accepted procedures within your shop/restaurant (refunds, replacing meals etc.). Always explain fully to the customer what you are doing, so they are aware of what is happening and why. This should ensure the customer is happy with what is happening and should alleviate further complaints or arguments. **Never** make any promises that you cannot deliver.

Finally, always ask if the customer is happy with the outcome. This is to make sure that the **customer** is happy with the outcome and you have dealt fully with their complaint. If dealt with professionally and courteously you will have won your customer back, thus ensuring their return time and time again. If there are any issues raised by the customers complaint, then ensure any necessary action is taken to make sure that that particular problem does not occur again.

COMMON COMPLAINTS

Listed below are some of the common complaints that could arise in your shop/restaurant. Put a tick against the ones you think you would be expected to handle yourself and a cross against those you think you would pass on to a colleague or superior.

- A customer complains that they have been given the wrong order.
- Someone is given the wrong change.
- A customer complains about the portion size.
- A customer rings in to say they have found a fly in the batter.
- A customer complains about the quality of the food.

DEALING WITH INCIDENTS

It is more than likely that during your time as a counter assistant or restaurant waiter/waitress you will have to deal with a number of different problems and incidents involving your customers. These could vary from lost children to dealing with intoxicated customers – and everything in between. For example, if you drop a chip whilst serving a customer ask someone else to finish the order, pick up the chip and dispose of it, then wash your hands before serving the next customer. Most of these problems are unpredictable, the important thing to remember in all cases is to remain calm and act promptly. How would you react if a customer collapsed at the counter or at a table in the restaurant? Would you ignore them and hope someone else would help them, or would you contact your duty first aider and follow their advice? Hopefully, it would be the latter. In a similar way to dealing with customer complaints, you have to be aware of what level of authority you have and how far you can go in dealing with the incident before you may have to pass it on.

Your shop/restaurant may well have established (and tested) procedures for dealing with these incidents and it is difficult to explain how to deal with these varying problems in a workbook. So, try these practical exercises with your colleagues or superior (even if, at the moment, it is not within your job description).

Use the text boxes to describe how **you** would deal with each situation, and then discuss it with your colleague/superior. You may well find new or better solutions.

A customer leaves a purse/wallet on the counter/table. What would you do?

A customer enters your shop/restaurant obviously drunk, how would you deal with this situation?

Make a note of some other incidents which have occurred recently and how they were dealt with.

In order to see what you have learnt so far, answer the following questions. Remember this is to help you find out what you have learnt to date, so try to answer the questions without referring back through your workbook or asking colleagues or superiors.

EXERCISES

Generally speaking, who would deal with complaints about the quality of the food?

Although it is important to let complaining customers to 'get it off their chest', what should you never do yourself?

How should you react when dealing with customer incidents?

Candidate's signature and date

Well done. You have now completed Segment 4 and also the "Introduction to Customer Service in Fish Frying" module.