

# A Practical Guide to Satisfying Customers in Service Recovery



**Hong Kong Association for Customer Service Excellence**

## FOREWORD

The Hong Kong Association for Customer Service Excellence (HKACE) was formed in February 2000 to promote customer service excellence in Hong Kong. To this end, we have embarked on a series of publications aimed at promoting best customer service practices in Hong Kong's leading service organizations.

In October 2001, HKACE organised, in partnership with the Hong Kong Productivity Council, three training workshops for its members on "How to Satisfy Difficult Customers". The workshops provided useful experience-sharing among participants coming from different service industries. The conclusions of the workshops are summarized in this document – "A Practical Guide to Satisfying Customers in Service Recovery". It is written to help readers appreciate better that complaint is a meaningful source of customer feedback on products and services. It incorporates real case examples and is filled with practical suggestions on effective handling of complaints and good service recovery, including an appeal to the readers for drawing up an action plan for self-improvement.

We hope this publication will contribute to fostering a culture of customer service excellence in Hong Kong, thereby enhancing the competitiveness of the service industries.

Allan Chiang  
Chairman  
Hong Kong Association for Customer Service Excellence

January 2002

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- I. Self-Assessment on Complaint Handling
- II. What is a Complaint?
- III. Profiting from Complaints
- IV. Understanding Customer's Needs
  - Emotion Needs
  - Solution Needs
- V. Principles of Complaint Handling
  - T.R.U.S.T.
- VI. Complaint Handling Model
  - Emotion First (*Accept, Apologize, Acknowledge*)
  - Problem-solving Second (*Analyze, Alternatives, Agreement*)
  - Positive Ending (*Assure*)
- VII. Guidelines for Complaint Handling
  - General Guidelines
  - At the Service Counter & Over the Telephone
  - Escalation
- VIII. Case Study
- IX. Energizing Yourself
- X. My Action Plan

Appendix 1 – Self-Assessment Scoring and Interpretation

Appendix 2 – Case Study Learning Points

**(I) SELF-ASSESSMENT ON COMPLAINT HANDLING**

The first step in handling complaint is to calm the customer down. Calming upset customers is difficult, but you can use the following assessment to evaluate what you have already known about the topic and learn some new things.

**Instruction:** Read each statement below and rate yourself on the following scale on how well you practise each of the techniques. Give yourself a “YES” if you already do this more than 95% of the time. Rate yourself a “NO” if you need improvement on this aspect of customer service.

	Yes (1)	No (2)
1. I treat complaints as gifts.		
2. I give customers an opportunity to vent their emotions.		
3. I listen for details while upset customers explain their cases.		
4. I put myself into the customers’ shoes when they have problems.		
5. I apologise to complainants for the inconvenience caused.		
6. I avoid blaming anyone for what is wrong.		
7. I do not take customers’ criticisms personally.		
8. I look for ways to satisfy complainants’ needs.		
9. I ask complainants what solutions they want.		
10. I learn lessons from complaints and review my complaint handling skills.		
11. I use empathetic words to avoid triggering customers’ dissatisfaction.		
12. I explain to complainants the reasons why we cannot provide the preferred solution.		
13. I escalate complaints to my superior without delay when they are out of my authority to handle.		
14. I recommend and get agreement with complainants on solutions.		
15. I appreciate customers for doing business with us.		
16. I follow through with customers to make sure the complaints are resolved to their satisfaction.		

Total: \_\_\_\_\_ (Please refer to page 24 for the scoring instruction).

## (II) WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?



According to Oxford Dictionary, complaint means “... one is dissatisfied, unhappy, etc.”

In terms of customer service, a complaint means that the customer’s expectations have not been met in the service encounters even if it is expressed pleasantly and without irritation.

### Reactions of Dissatisfied Customers

According to a research conducted by Technical Assistance Research Programs (TARP) in USA:

- 96% of unhappy customers don’t complain
- 91% of unhappy customers will tell 9 other people
- 51% of customers who complained come back if the problem is solved
- 82-95% of customers who complained come back if impressed

Researches conducted in different parts of the world have shown similar results about customers’ dissatisfaction. Do not under-estimate the power of customers.

Smart Quote

Mistakes are a part of life; you can’t avoid them. All you can hope is that they won’t be too expensive and that you don’t make the same mistake twice.

- Lee Iacocca

### Impact of Dissatisfied Customers

Losing a customer because he/she is dissatisfied has tremendous repercussions. Not only has your organization lost a customer, but one of your competitors has gained one.

Winning back a dissatisfied customer who has left is considerably harder and more costly than winning a new customer.

### (III) PROFITING FROM COMPLAINTS

#### Customers Who Complain Are Still Customers

Customers who take time and effort to complain still have some confidence in the organization. After all, they are still customers. According to Tom Peters, the customer should always be treated as an appreciating asset.

#### The Benefits of Complaints

The benefits of solving complaints satisfactorily are two-fold:

Organization	YOU
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improved company image</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Will enhance effectiveness in complaint handling</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased customer satisfaction</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Will improve your self-esteem</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased customer loyalty</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Will enhance confidence</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increased market share</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Will enjoy greater job satisfaction</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Avoided pitfalls in products or services</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Will increase your probability of getting a promotion</li><li>• Will improve interpersonal skills</li></ul>

Smart Quote

To satisfy the customer is the mission and purpose of every business.

- Peter Drucker

#### (IV) UNDERSTANDING COMPLAINANTS' NEEDS

Most customers who have a complaint simply want the matter put right. When the purchase of a product or service has gone wrong in some way, the customer just wants the assurance that he/she did not make a bad purchase decision in the first place. Most customers only become irritated, angry or even abusive when their initial attempts to get the matter put right have led them nowhere.

The needs of complainants can be classified into the following two types:

<b>Emotional Needs</b>	<b>Solution Needs</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Apologize to me</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take personal responsibility</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Show concerns</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Advise me solutions or alternatives</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Show understanding of my needs</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Explain what actions are to be taken</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Trust what I have said</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tell me how long it will take to resolve the case</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To be flexible in handling the case</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Keep me informed of the progress</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be in the customer's shoes</li></ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Save my face</li></ul>	

Smart Quote

A customer with the passion to get angry also has the ability to be loyal.

- Michael Leboeuf

**(V) PRINCIPLES OF COMPLAINT HANDLING**

The behaviors and thinking of human beings are often guided by their own set of values and principles. In handling complaints, there are five key principles which are applicable to all types of complaint cases. The five principles are individually represented by a single word which is hidden in the maze below. Some of these words can be read horizontally or vertically.

Try to find the five principles and some hints are listed below:

**Principle 1:** T R \_ \_ T W \_ \_ T H Y

**Principle 2:** R \_ \_ P E \_ T

**Principle 3:** U N \_ \_ \_ S T \_ \_ \_ I N G

**Principle 4:** S E N \_ \_ T I \_ \_ T Y

**Principle 5:** T I M \_ L \_ N E \_ \_

A	T	O	Q	Y	M	O	H	A	D	H	P
V	C	A	E	L	X	R	I	P	R	V	V
T	E	A	S	Y	P	L	E	L	S	E	D
G	P	O	F	G	H	K	A	C	E	J	S
O	S	E	N	S	I	T	I	V	I	T	Y
O	E	C	O	N	O	D	D	K	L	L	C
T	R	U	S	T	W	O	R	T	H	Y	D
I	H	N	Z	L	S	A	T	I	S	F	Y
M	I	D	V	P	C	C	W	L	E	E	O
E	G	E	F	D	S	T	S	O	P	K	H
L	H	R	G	S	O	R	R	Y	Y	D	A
I	E	S	R	A	D	C	H	M	O	O	D
N	S	T	O	O	X	S	E	R	Q	D	R
E	T	A	N	D	B	E	S	T	O	F	A
S	E	N	O	K	D	V	D	D	U	I	R
S	R	D	C	C	U	S	T	O	M	E	R
K	K	I	D	O	G	N	I	P	E	E	K
H	N	N	G	O	O	D	W	E	R	E	A
T	O	G	R	A	T	S	E	R	O	O	P



## **PRINCIPLE 1 - TRUSTWORTHY**

Trustworthy means taking responsibility and ownership in rendering reliable services at highly professional and ethical standards.

### **Characteristics of being Trustworthy**

- Take personal responsibility
- Be open and honest
- Be ethical
- Admit mistakes if the organization or staff is wrong

Smart Quote

People need responsibility. They resist assuming it, but they can't get along without it.

- John Steinbeck

### **Case in Action – Handling Complaint in an Ethical Manner**

Mr. Wong took out a life insurance policy from an insurance company in 1998. Unfortunately, Mr. Wong died in a traffic accident in January 2001, one week before the Lunar New Year. Mrs. Wong, the beneficiary of the said insurance policy, was in urgent need of the death proceeds before the Lunar New Year Holidays for funeral expenses. The Claims Manager sympathized with Mrs. Wong in her afflictions and promised to process the claim with top priority. Although the service standard for processing a death claim is normally 10 days, this claim was approved in only three days.

Mrs. Wong requested the Claims Manager to issue a cash cheque because of the urgency. However, the Claims Manager could not fulfill this request due to security reason so as to ensure that the claim was paid to the named beneficiary. Mrs. Wong was very angry and quarreled with the Claims Manager. After a long negotiation, the Claims Manager discovered that Mrs. Wong was receiving welfare assistance during that period. Mrs. Wong was concerned about the disqualification for welfare assistance if the death proceeds were recorded in her banking account.

In general, the payee of the claim cheque can be amended upon authorization of the named beneficiary. However, it was illegal for Mrs. Wong to hide the truth and the insurance company should not provide any tools to assist Mrs. Wong's illegal act. Finally, Mrs. Wong accepted the Claims Manager's suggestion to seek advice from Welfare Department and to bank in the cheque to a specified bank, which would allow her to withdraw cash from her account immediately, but it was unavoidable to have a transaction record in her bank account.

## PRINCIPLE 2 - RESPECT

Respect means to make the customers feel that they are important, being valued to the organization.

### Characteristics of showing Respect

- No bias or prejudice
- Be polite
- Be concentrated
- Use customer's name
- Remember what the customer has said

Smart Quote

Rule #1: The customer is always right.  
Rule #2: If you find the customer is wrong then return immediately to Rule#1.  
- Stew Leonard

Respect can be expressed in term of courteous communication. Below are some phrases to be avoided and used in complaint handling:

Phrases to Avoid	Phrases to Use
- Listen to me	- I'm happy to help you
- You must /should	- I promise I'll follow up the case immediately.
- This is our company policy	- May I ask you some questions to see how I can help you?
- I have no idea	- If you're not able to ...., we will not be able to ....
- I / We can't	- If you can ...., we will be able to ...
- That's not my job responsibility	- Thank you for your understanding.
- May be ....	- We appreciate your assistance
- I'm not sure	
- Did you check it up first?	
- That's not possible	

### **PRINCIPLE 3 - UNDERSTANDING**

Understanding means to be able to see things from the customer's point of view and to be aware of the customer's feelings.

#### **Characteristics of Being Understanding**

- Put yourself in the customer's shoes
- Let the customer vent
- Show empathy
- Tell your similar experiences that you may have or heard of

Smart Quote

You can be totally rational with a machine. But if you work with people, sometimes logic has to take a backseat to understanding.

- Akio Morita

#### **Examples of Showing Empathy**

- "I'm really sorry for sending you an incorrect bill."
- "I'm sorry that you have that experience."
- "Thank you for bringing the case to our attention."
- "We appreciate your feedback for our continuous service improvement."
- "I'm sorry about the inconsistent information provided by our staff."
- "I'm really sorry to learn that ....."
- "I'm sorry to hear about your (unhappy) experience."
- "I can understand how you feel."
- "I do understand your situation."
- "I'm sorry you feel that way."
- "I do share your concern."

#### **PRINCIPLE 4 - SENSITIVITY**

Sensitivity means awareness of the customer's needs as well as verbal and non-verbal clues in order to maintain an assertive communication.

##### **Characteristics of Being Sensitivity**

- Being flexible in handling the customer's requests
- Read between the lines of the customer's requests
- Match the spoken words with the non-verbal expressions
- Be aware of cultural differences
- Express concerns to the customer's needs

Smart Quote

If you are not thinking customer, you are not thinking.

- Theodore Levitt

##### **Case in Action – Being Flexible to Customer's Needs**

Mr. Cheung delivered his company's printer, for which the warranty had expired, to Printer Service Center for checking. A week later, Printer Customer Engineer contacted Mr. Cheung for further details of the problem of his printer. He clearly quoted and confirmed with Mr. Cheung the repair charges on the phone and faxed the formal quotation to Mr. Cheung afterwards as per his request.

After a few days, Mr. Cheung called the hotline of Printer Service Center and complained that the service quotation which he had received was in English only. It created much inconvenience for him in understanding the contents of the quotation. The staff explained to Mr. Cheung that the quotation was the company's official document and English is used as the company official language in legal document. However, Mr. Cheung stressed that such practice was unfair and discriminated against people who could not understand English.

The Printer company understood that customers had the rights to understand all the details on the quotation in order for them to consider whether to accept the repair charges or not. Hence, the Printer company arranged to translate the English quotation into Chinese for Mr. Cheung after a few days. Mr. Cheung received the quotation and he was satisfied with the arrangement and service.

## **PRINCIPLE 5 - TIMELINESS**

Timeliness means to act promptly without delay and follow through the complaint to the customer's satisfaction.

### **Characteristics of Timeliness**

- Responsive to customer's requests
- Take corrective actions quickly
- Get back to customer in a timely manner
- Follow through to ensure customer's satisfaction
- Escalate the case to superior, if necessary

Smart Quote

Be everywhere, do everything and never fail to astonish the customer.

- Macy's motto

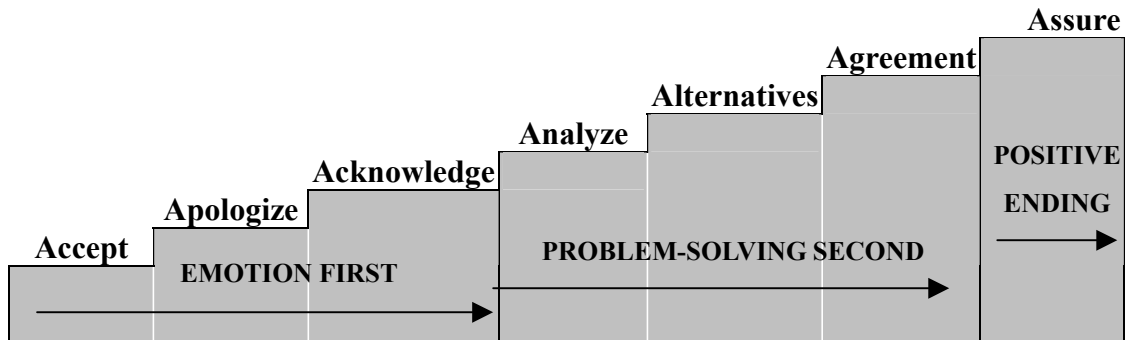
### **Case in Action – Speedy Action to turn Complaint into Compliment**

A bus shelter panel at a bus stop was damaged by a traffic accident and the concealed wires of the advertisement board were exposed. A passenger, Mr. Chan, was concerned about the danger posed by the exposed and broken electrical wires in a public area. Mr. Chan demanded that the bus company to repair the bus shelter panel at once. He also insisted that he be immediately informed of the follow-up action or he would repeatedly call the Customer Service Hotline every hour to check the progress. The case was passed to a supervisor for handling.

The supervisor comforted Mr. Chan and promised to follow up the case immediately. The case was also immediately reported to Facilities Management Department and transferred to the senior staff for urgent rectification. Meanwhile, the supervisor kept Mr. Chan informed of the progress. The damage was fixed on the same day. The supervisor immediately contacted Mr. Chan to inform him that the damaged board was repaired. Mr. Chan was very satisfied with the Company's efficiency and helpfulness and gave a commendation to the supervisor concerned.

**(VI) COMPLAINT HANDLING MODEL**

Complaint handling will be much easier if there is a step-by-step model to follow. You will be able to achieve efficiency and effectiveness in handling complaints by using the 7A’s model below.



**7A’s Complaint Handling Model**

Complaint Handling Steps		Explanation
<b>Emotion First</b>	<b>Accept</b>	- Use a positive tone to show your <i>competence</i> and <i>commitment</i> to offer assistance - Do NOT take complaint personally; think positive - Use customer’s name throughout the complaint handling process
	<b>Apologize</b>	- The act of apology is to show respect rather than to admit that we are wrong - Sincere apology for the “inconvenience” caused to the customer
	<b>Acknowledge</b>	- Empathize with the customer’s feeling - Show understanding and willingness to offer assistance
<b>Problem-solving Second</b>	<b>Analyze</b>	- Always handle one complaint issue at a time - Avoid bias and unnecessary assumptions - Listen without interruption - Ask questions to gather information and to clarify understanding
	<b>Alternatives</b>	- Suggest feasible solutions - not false hope - within your authority - Think of another alternative if it is not acceptable to the customer
	<b>Agreement</b>	- Confirm the solution is acceptable to customer
<b>Positive Ending</b>	<b>Assure</b>	- Show our genuine concern and sincerity - Express willingness to help in future - Thanks for the customer’s complaints/business

## (VI) COMPLAINT HANDLING MODEL

### Complaint Handling Model Example

Steps	Dialogue
	<b>S=Staff and C=Customer</b>
<b>Emotion first</b>	S: Good morning, this is John Chan. How may I help you?
- Accept	C: This is Peter Wong. Your staff has promised me to change the faulty telephone set this morning. However, I have been waiting in the whole morning but nobody has come. Just tell me what's happening.
- Apologize	S: Sorry Mr. Wong, I'm sorry you're upset ( <b>Apologize</b> ). I am sure I can help you ( <b>Accept and Acknowledge</b> ).
- Acknowledge	C: You had better give me a reasonable explanation. Or else, I will complain to the media.
	S: Mr. Wong, I want to help you to resolve this .... ( <b>Assure</b> )
<b>Problem-solving second</b>	S: .... but I need a little more information. May I know the problem? ( <b>Analyze</b> )
- Analyze	C: Your staff told me the technician would come this morning but I have been waiting for 3 hours and no one shows up.
- Alternatives	S: I can understand how you feel Mr. Wong and I apologize for the delay ( <b>Showing empathy</b> ). Could you tell me more about ....Uh huh. I see. Let me make sure I understand the situation correctly ..... ( <b>Summarize</b> ). Is that correct?
- Agreement	C: So what are you going to do about it?
	S: First of all, let me apologize again for the inconvenience caused ( <b>Apologize</b> ), Mr. Wong. I have checked that the delay was caused by an unexpected difficulty in the previous service order. To clear up your faulty phone problem a.s.a.p., I would suggest to contact the technician to come at 2 p.m. ( <b>Alternatives</b> ). Would that be convenient for you? ( <b>Agreement</b> )
	C: That's ok anyway.
<b>Positive Ending</b>	S: Thank you for your understanding ( <b>Showing empathy</b> ), Mr. Wong. I will issue the service order right away and the technician will come at 2 p.m. By the way, is there anything that we can help?
- Assure	C: No, I hope your staff will be on time this time.
	S: Don't worry about this as I will follow through this case personally ( <b>Assure</b> ). Thank you for using our telephone service ( <b>Appreciate</b> ). If you have any problem in the future, please feel free to call our Service Hotline 2xxx xxxx. Good-bye.

## **(VII) GUIDELINES FOR COMPLAINT HANDLING**

### **General Guidelines**

#### **10 Golden Rules on Complaint Handling**

- 1. Accept Responsibility**
- 2. Control Your Emotions**
- 3. Listen Carefully**
- 4. Apologize**
- 5. Show Empathy**
- 6. Don't Argue**
- 7. Focus on the Problem, not the Complainant**
- 8. Discover Customer's Needs**
- 9. Act Promptly and Keep Customer Informed**
- 10. Provide Assurance**

**Above all, be PROFESSIONAL!**



**(VII) GUIDELINES FOR COMPLAINT HANDLING**

**At the Service Counter and Over the Telephone**

	<b>At the Service Counter</b>	<b>Over the Telephone</b>
<b>Emotion First</b> - Accept - Apologize - Acknowledge	- Project a pleasant tone of voice and positive body language - Listen, listen, listen - Use the customer's name - Apologise	- Project a pleasant tone of voice - Listen, listen, listen - Use the customer's name - Apologise
<b>Problem Solving Second</b> - Analyze - Alternatives - Agreement	- Don't interrupt/argue - Take good notes - Move the customer aside to a quiet place - Handle one issue at a time - Get customer's agreement on solution - Brief your supervisor before handing over the case	- Don't interrupt/argue - Take good notes - Handle one issue at a time - Don't leave the customer on hold for too long - Transfer call with care - Get customer's agreement on solution - Brief your supervisor before passing the call
<b>Positive Ending</b> - Assure	- Act promptly - Cross-sell if appropriate - Offer further assistance - Thanks for the customer's business - Follow through the case	- Act promptly - Cross-sell if appropriate - Offer further assistance - Thanks for the customer's business - Let the customer hang up first - Follow through the case

## (VII) GUIDELINES FOR COMPLAINT HANDLING

### Escalation

To prevent triggering of customer's dissatisfaction and emotions higher, escalate the complaining customer to your superior if the case is out of your authority or you have been handling it for a long time without any progress to resolution. The purpose of escalation is to ensure that the complainant is being taken care of by the right party without delay.

Escalation Procedures	Example
<b>1. Repeat your intention</b>	“Mr. Chan, I would very much like to help you.”
<b>2. Describe the difficulties</b>	“I’m very sorry that I cannot do so right now, since it seems that you do not find any of the suggestions we have discussed appropriate.”
<b>3. Signal your concern and intention</b>	“I’m aware that this is taking a lot of your time and that we are not making progress. I’m sorry that I will need to transfer you to my supervisor now.”
<b>4. Repeat all steps above if necessary</b>	
<b>5. Escalate to the right party</b>	“Mr. Chan, I’m transferring you to my manager, please hold the line.”

### **(VIII) CASE STUDY**

The real-life cases below are intended to help you apply the principles and concepts of complaint handling explained in this guide. You are also encouraged to use your experience and creativity in tackling these cases. Please write down your answer in the space provided before you turn to the recommended solution in Appendix 2 on page 25.

#### **Case 1 – I Want a ‘New Car’**

Mr. Cheung brought a new car from a car dealer. Unfortunately, Mr. Cheung got a car accident in the midnight recently and the car caught fire. The whole car was burnt and towed back to the dealer’s service centre.

Mr. Cheung complained about the quality of the car and claimed that the accident was caused by product defect. He requested the Car Dealer to provide a new car as compensation. However, it was proven that the accident had no relation with the quality of the car. In fact, it was an accident. Hence, the car dealer sent a letter with empathy to Mr. Cheung to turn down his request.

Mr. Cheung was very angry on receiving the reply letter and he made a complaint to an executive of the car dealer.

## (VIII) CASE STUDY

### Case 2 – A ‘Loyal’ Customer

Mr. Lee was a retired policeman and 'enjoyed' visiting the customer service centre of a utility company. He enjoyed talking pointlessly for hours to the staff members and complaining against those who were – as he considered - at fault.

During each billing cycle, if the utility company did not stick to "the (approximate) date of next billing" indicated on the bill, Mr. Lee would fuss about the delay and inefficiency of the company. He would go to the company's customer service centre near his home, to voice his dissatisfaction and then ask for a copy bill.

One day while Mr. Lee was talking again pointlessly to Staff A (already for more than 2 hours) at the customer service centre, Staff B interrupted the conversation as there was an urgent phone call for Staff A. Mr. Lee was extremely annoyed and considered that Staff B did not respect him. He complained to Staff A afterwards and demanded that Staff B be dismissed or at least re-deployed to another customer service centre. He did not accept the apologies of Staff B or the explanations of Staff A, and was therefore referred to their line manager, whom he also found fault with.

Mr. Lee also phoned Staff A at home during holidays. Being upset with the harassment, Staff A referred the matter to senior management and was told he could decline such "out of office hours" phone calls. When Staff A eventually declined Mr. Lee's phone call, Mr. Lee could not accept the 'loss of face' and complained to senior management against Staff A for speaking foul language. He demanded the dismissal or at least re-deployment of both Staff A and Staff B, otherwise he would escalate his complaint to top management and the media.

Mr. Lee was invited to attend a meeting to resolve the issue but he refused. He would only meet with the utility company's managers in an office of ICAC or District Board.



## (IX) ENERGIZING YOURSELF

### Key Tips

- Take it professionally, not personally
- Assertiveness can help to reduce stress, not aggressive or passive
- Think positive; you can control your reactions
- Remember complaint handling is part of your job



**(X) MY ACTION PLAN**

The purpose of this section is to help you strive for professional career development in customer service. It is worthwhile for you to spend about an hour to complete this section. Please answer the following questions before you draw up your action plan for handling difficult customers on the next page.

1. What is your own definition of ‘Difficult Customers’? What are their behavioral characteristics?
2. Based on question 1, are they really DIFFICULT? What are the benefits that the difficult customers bring to your organization? How can you benefit yourself from handling the difficult customers?
3. If it is true that we learn from mistakes, what mistakes have you made that now help you calm difficult customers?
4. Assuming you are already irritated or in a bad mood, in what ways could you make sure you have patience and good listening skills for satisfying difficult customers?
5. What actions would you take to energize yourself so that you can take up new challenges in satisfying difficult customers?

**(X) MY ACTION PLAN**

When you have thought over the above questions, what aspects of your own behaviors and skills can you build or improve on? You can work it out on your own or with your immediate supervisor.

<p><b>Objectives (What?)</b></p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>
<p><b>Action Plan (How?)</b></p> <p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>
<p><b>Review Date (When?)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● <b>3 Months Review Date:</b> _____</li><li>● <b>6 Months Review Date:</b> _____</li></ul>

## **APPENDIX 1 – SELF-ASSESSMENT SCORING AND INTERPRETATION**

### **A. Scoring Instruction**

Simply total your responses by adding up the value in each question, where “YES” is equal to 1 and “NO” is equal to 2.

### **B. Interpretation**

The closer your total is to 16, the better you are at dealing with upset customers.

If your score is over 22, you will benefit from some training to increase your customer relation skills. This will reduce your stress level at work too. There are many ways you can improve your interpersonal skills with upset customers, including training and self-help books and videos

If your score is between 28 and 32, you can greatly reduce your stress level and increase your success level with customers by learning and applying new techniques.



## APPENDIX 2 – CASE STUDY LEARNING POINTS

Please note that the suggested answers below are only some of the many ways which you can tackle the case satisfactorily.

### **Case 1 – I Want a ‘New Car’**

- Fairness to all customers
- Do not focus on the irrelevant issues e.g. the personal relationship/influence
- Emphasize on the negotiable issues
  - Suggest alternatives to customers
  - Offer special discount on buying a new car as damages
  - Offer free maintenance service for a certain period of time to show sincerity
- Communicating assertively with the customer
- Be firm and confident when communicating with the customer
- Repeat on what you CAN DO, not what you CAN'T DO
- Escalate the case to superior if there is a deadlock in satisfying the customer
- Keep your superior and relevant parties informed of the complaint
- Express appreciation when the customer agrees to the recommended solution
- Personal visit to follow-through with customer to show respect

### **Case 2 – A ‘Loyal’ Customer**

- Think positively: “Handling difficult customer is part of your job” and do your best to turn him into a loyal customer
- Leave the customer to a quiet place to avoid disturbances to other customers
- Handle the customer with extra patience
- Provide timely and accurate service to the customer
- Ignore the irrelevant criticisms or abusive languages
- Know your bottom-line; but be flexible
- Give short and to-the-point explanation
- Don't argue with the customer
- Do not over-apologize
- Be aware of the security issue relating to the concerned staff and other customers
- Staff B should be tactful in assisting Staff A:
  - State your intention to help
  - Give the customer your name and title
- Seek management support in handling chronic complainants