

The Power of Recognizing Customer Emotions in Complaint Handling



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Recognizing the role of emotions in customer complaints is crucial. Merely solving the issue is not enough, as frustrated customers may be looking for more than just a solution to their problem. They may be sending a message to others, they could be making a decision about whether they want to stay with the supplier, or they may want to be recognized for the difficulties their problem created.

Extensive research reveals that customers seek both problem resolution and emotional recognition. This blog explores the importance of acknowledging and addressing customer emotions, highlighting how when you hit the sweet spot, you foster stronger relationships and customer loyalty.



The bottom line in effective complaint handling is that customer satisfaction extends beyond problem-solving. Emotional recognition significantly influences overall satisfaction. A businessowner friend experienced a great example of this a few years ago when taking care of one of his customer's problems, which strengthened that client relationship. The customer, who represented millions of dollars in sales—away too high percentage of my friend's total sales—called the owner while he was at a trade show in Las Vegas. A quality problem with one of his products potentially might shut down his client's entire production line in Mexico, costing thousands of dollars daily.

My friend, the owner, was told he needed to be at the plant in Nogales, Mexico, the next day by ten in the morning. Never mind the logistics of getting to a destination in Mexico some five hundred miles away. He rented a car, drove to Phoenix, slept overnight, and then drove early the next morning to Tucson, where he lived. He picked up his own car to drive across the Mexican border. On time at ten o'clock that morning, he met with his client's team, who then laid out the problem.

It turns out the issue was a simple communication matter that took about ten minutes to clear up. The owner said the head of purchasing, who opened the meeting, said, "I can assume the problem is solved since our supplier is dealing with it, and we won't have this issue again."

If my friend hadn't been contacted in Las Vegas, the issue would probably have been handled by the production team without adequate knowledge, resulting in the line going down and everyone fighting over who was to blame. Instead, he was given a gift to deal with an easily fixed issue. Yes, it could have been solved over the phone while he was at the trade show—so was it a gift or not?

Complaints can be seen as valuable opportunities. By actively listening and addressing concerns, businesses can strengthen relationships and improve strategies. Viewing complaints as gifts shifts the perspective from burden to growth.

My friend learned another important lesson: dependence on a single customer poses risks. His experience taught him to diversify so he wasn't dependent on just one big customer. Recognizing this, the business owner expanded his customer base. This knowledge was a genuine gift to him. Acknowledging and addressing customer emotions is vital for building strong relationships and fostering loyalty. Customers desire emotional recognition alongside problem resolution. Embracing complaints as gifts and leveraging them to improve business strategies leads to long-term satisfaction and loyalty.