SHOWHOW · SOP

Handling a Customer Complaint

Most customers who complain just want to be heard and to see something fixed. Staff who freeze or argue turn a cold coffee into a one-star review. This procedure is for front-line staff in cafés, restaurants, salons, shops and cleaning companies, so everyone knows what they can fix on the spot, when to call a manager and how to keep a record of what happened.

What you'll need

- What staff can offer without asking (redo, discount, refund)
- Manager's phone number
- Complaint log or notebook

Steps

01 **Stop what you're doing and face the customer.**

Put down what's in your hands. Showing you're listening calms most situations by itself.

02 **Let them finish without interrupting.**

Don't explain or defend while they're talking, even if they're wrong about something.

03 **Repeat the problem back in one sentence.**

"So your order came out cold and you waited 20 minutes for it." It shows you understood.

04 **Apologize for their experience, plainly.**

"I'm sorry, that's not how it should be." No "but" afterward.

05 **Offer a fix you're allowed to give right away.**

Remake the order, redo the service or take it off what they pay. If you're not sure what would help, ask them.

06 **Get the manager if the fix is more than you can offer.**

Tell the customer who you're getting and how long it will take. Brief the manager out of earshot so the customer doesn't have to repeat everything.

07 **Step away calmly if a customer becomes abusive.**

Say "I'm going to get my manager" and leave. You don't have to take abuse.

> **Watch out:** If anyone feels unsafe, get a manager or call for help. Safety comes before the sale.

08 **Fix the problem as fast as you can.**

Put their fix ahead of the line. A complaint fixed in 3 minutes is often forgotten.

09 **Thank them before they leave.**

"Thanks for telling us. We'll sort it out." A customer who complains is giving you a chance to keep them.

10 **Write the complaint in the log before the end of your shift.**

Date, time, what happened, what you offered and who handled it.

11 **Tell the manager if the same complaint has come up before.**

A repeated complaint points to a procedure that needs changing, not a person to blame.

How to adapt it

- Decide in advance what staff can offer without asking, and write it into the step about offering a fix.
- Add how to reply to online reviews if your staff handle your social media.
- Role-play two complaints during training. It's awkward once, then it's easy.
- Read the log every month and look for patterns.