Handling Customer Complaints

It has probably happened to you. A customer, possibly a student, is unhappy about something and complains to you about it. If you do not treat the concern as legitimate, you could not only lose a customer, but also miss out on valuable insights into the feelings of many others.

Customer complaints are actually blessings. Here’s why:

- Complaining customers often identify problem areas and other glitches in our processes.
- The complaining customer represents others who won’t say a word. As a rule of thumb, for every customer who complains, there are 26 others who remain silent.
- A complaint is often a wake-up call for what our customers really need.
- When customers are finished complaining, they will talk to others. We want them to share how satisfied they are with the way their complaints were handled.
- Fixing complaints removes excuses to complain. Sometimes our response to complaints can educate customers about our requirements and procedures.

The way we handle complaints shapes our customers’ perception of service and responsiveness. Albert Barneto, a customer service practitioner, suggests using the B.L.A.S.T. method:

- **Believe.** Even if the customer is wrong, he or she believes they are right. Don’t be dismissive. Acknowledge their feelings.
- **Listen.** Instead of instantly thinking of excuses or solutions, take a second to relax and really listen. Repeat the issue back to the customer after he or she has finished venting.
- **Apologize.** A sincere apology will usually diffuse much of the customer’s frustration. Apologize even if it’s not your fault.
- **Satisfy.** Take on the responsibility of making things right. Sometimes it is necessary to clarify the process to adjust customers’ expectations. Explain what you can do, preferably providing the customer with options.
- **Thank.** Tell the customer you appreciate the input. We would rather have our customers complain to us than to others, especially potential customers.

Source: Kevin Wirth; Albert Barneto