

HANDLING CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

By Alvah Parker

Most professionals take pride in the work they do. Dealing with complaints is often challenging and upsetting. It is very natural to try to explain or justify what was done. The suggestions I have made in this list are not easy to do in the heat of a situation. So when you hear a complaint about you or your business/practice perhaps the best strategy is to count to ten and then do some of the following:

1. **Listen** - Resist the temptation to argue with the client. Instead ask questions to get to the bottom of the situation. What is the client really upset about? Show the client that you really understand the situation from the client's perspective.
2. **Don't be defensive** - This will get in the way of your listening to the client. Allow the client the time and space to be heard. If you get defensive you'll build a wall between you and the client. Try to find ways to build a bridge so that you are aligned with the client.
3. **If you agree that it was a mistake, fix it immediately or do what you can to satisfy the client and apologize** - We all make mistakes at times. Check to see if there is anything in your office procedure that can help you to avoid a similar mistake again.
4. **For a more complex issue research the problem before you make any decisions** - Find out what actually happened. Is a system in your office not working correctly? Does it need to be fixed? Has the client misunderstood something? Give yourself time to figure out a fair resolution.
5. **Look for lessons in the situation** - If the situation was caused by something you or your staff control, find a way to fix it for the future. This means assessing the systems you have in place and your methods and procedures. It also may mean retraining an employee or employees.
6. **Reeducate the client when necessary** - How did you set client's expectations? Were you clear about what he/she could expect? Help the client to understand the process now to guard against future misunderstandings.
7. **Know that if one client complained there are others feeling the same way** - What do you need to do to address the problem with the others? Who else might have been affected in the same way?
8. **Give the client choice of possible resolutions** - How can you make this right with the client? Negotiate a way that works for both of you. Sometimes just fixing the problem is sufficient. At other times the client is looking for something else. Look for an equitable resolution.
9. **Thank the client for helping you with your business** - As painful as they can be complaints from clients often let you know exactly where you need to work to improve your practice/business.
10. **Follow up with those who complained to be sure they are fully satisfied** - If you have altered a system or changed a way of doing business and the client is affected by that change, follow up to be sure that the client noted the change.