

Handling a Complaint

A complaint provides the opportunity to learn what your client really thinks about your service and to make changes in your company. Complaints are more valuable than compliments. Welcome them. It provides an opportunity to learn. Clients who go through the trouble of complaining are usually interested in giving you the chance to make things right.

The number one rule to receiving a complaint from a former client is to listen. And always remain calm and composed. A person calling with a complaint may be insulting and rude, but you must be professional throughout. You must not react in the same manner or tone of voice. Try to defuse the fuse.

Assure the client that you will do what you can to help them. Have a pen and paper handy. Write down any notes that are critical to the conversation. Dates, what happened, who discovered the problem, has it been corrected, etc. Use a template to log complaints systematically. Use the complaints as a learning tool for the entire company, including field inspectors and office staff.

Listen to what they say. The first couple sentences will tell you exactly what problem(s) they are experiencing. Pay full attention to what is being said without interrupting them. Make sure that you listen completely to the caller's account of their experience and the situation. If the caller is upset, rambling, and not able to verbalize well, then help or assist them by asking questions such as, "And then tell me what happened after that." "Could you tell me more about that?" "What happened next?" "How can I help you?" "What are you expecting from us?"

Before proceeding to a resolution, make sure that you understand the situation. Ask questions to see if there's been a simple misunderstanding that can be easily resolved. If the complaint is more than just a misunderstanding, ask questions to genuinely understand the complaint and the problem your client is experiencing. Summarize what you understand the problem to be. The caller will acknowledge or correct you. Try, "So, what you're saying is..." "Do I understand you correctly or did I miss the point?"

Express empathy to the caller. Let the caller know that you understand their situation and what they're going through. Tell them again that you will help them.

If there is a solution, make sure that the client has no doubt as to its specifics and how the issue will be resolved. Ask the client to confirm that they agree with the proposed solution to their situation. "How do you feel about the solution I've suggested?" "How does that sound to you?" "Are you in agreement with that so far?"

If the caller wants to speak to the owner of the company, try the following, "Mary, please give me the opportunity to resolve this matter. I am sure I'll be able to help. But if you are still not satisfied, I'll personally get the owner on the phone with you."

If the caller uses profanity, you might say, "There is no reason to use profanity. Please continue without using those words."