

Complain with Confidence: How to Get What You Want

by John Tschohl



It's human nature for most of us to do anything we can to avoid confrontation. That's often true when we have a complaint about a product or service we purchased that did not live up to our expectations.

Often, we get so worked up that we march into the offending business with a chip on our shoulder and do exactly the opposite of what we should do when trying to get the problem solved to our satisfaction. We're scowling as we walk through the doors, and we're demanding as we describe the situation to employees, raising our voices as we do so.

What we must realize is that being angry and aggressive will work against us. The end goal is to get the problem resolved, not to put employees on the defensive. Just like bighorn sheep, when we lock horns, we get nowhere.

The following are steps you can take to complain with confidence, and in the process, get what you want:

1 Have a friendly, positive attitude. This is important, because you want to make that employee feel like he or she is your friend. This is important because friends have empathy for their friends who have problems and willingly offer to help them. When you approach an employee to register your complaint, smile, introduce yourself, ask for the employee's name, and shake his or her hand. You have now formed a personal bond with the employee, and that bond will work in your favor as you go through the process of registering your complaint and solving your problem.

2 Identify the problem. Is your internet speed not as promised? Was your printing job less than stellar? Is your car still making that rattling noise? Before you leave your home or office to visit the business and register a complaint, know exactly what you want to say.

3 Bring your receipts and other documents with you. They are proof of your purchase and detail how the product should work or should have been processed.

4 Be pleasant. Say, "I have an issue. I realize that you didn't personally cause this problem, but I hope you can solve it for me." You have now acknowledged the employee as a problem solver and recognized that he or she has the power to help you, which elevates his or her status to one of problem solver.

5 Offer suggestions for how you would like to have the problem solved. Do you want to keep the product but get a partial refund? Do you want to return it and get a complete refund? Or do you want to have it replaced? Then ask the employee what he or she can offer you.

6 Recognize that not all companies empower their employees to give you what you want. In that case, thank the employee, but ask to speak to the manager. You'll have to repeat everything you told the employee, but realize that this isn't a power play: It's doing what you must do to resolve the issue to your satisfaction. If the manager doesn't solve the problem, don't hesitate to contact the company's president or CEO.

7 If all else fails, you can contact the Better Business Bureau or the trade association that oversees the company you are dealing with.

In any conversation you have with employees or managers, treat them with respect. When you show respect, you get respect. You also motivate the person you are dealing with to solve your problem. ◀

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