



Effectively
addressing
client
complaints

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APPEASING an UNHAPPY GUEST

Though all spas attempt to deliver unwavering great guest experience; the fact is that every business has guests who will complain and express their dissatisfaction.

by Dori Soukup

They can go on Facebook, Yelp, LinkedIn, Twitter and so on... Guests complaints can ruin your reputation if not addressed properly.

For each unsatisfied client who complains, 26 other unhappy clients say nothing, and 24 of them will not come back.

The average client who experienced a problem with your business will tell 9 or 10 people about it.

When complaints are addressed quickly, 70 to 95% will do business with the company again.

As a consultant, I am hired to go to spas as a secret shopper to assess performance—this includes how the team will manage a complaint.

During my last visit to a spa, I made a complaint and the receptionist informed me, “The manager is not available at this time to address your dissatisfaction.” This is obviously an unacceptable way to handle an unsatisfied guest. As a spa leader you must do two things:

1. Train your team on how to deliver a great guest experience and follow your structure, protocols and rituals so every guest is happy!

2. Train the team on how to manage unsatisfied guests and how to offer a resolution.

The following steps will help you discover how to best address guest complaints and regain them as a client.



●●● **Step 1:** Adjust your mindset

Once you are aware that your guest is unhappy, your first priority is to put yourself in their shoes. Do not place the blame on another person—take responsibility for the situation. You should be focusing on how you can solve their problem. Do not do this in the reception area—go to a private place.

●●● **Step 2:** Actively listen

This is most important. Hear them out; let them vent. Start the dialogue with a neutral statement, such as, “Please share with me what happened,” or “Please tell me why you are upset.” This helps you create a partnership between yourself and the guest. It lets them know that you are ready to listen. Do not jump to conclusions. Let them tell you their story and do not interrupt the conversation. Give the guest all of your attention.

●●● **Step 3:** Repeat their concern

Repeat the guest’s concern so you are certain that you are addressing the right issue. Use calm, objective wording. For example, “As I understand it, you have every right to be upset. Please accept my apologies.” Repeating the problem shows the guest that you were listening, which helps to reduce stress levels. Additionally, it helps you agree on the problem that needs to be solved.

●●● **Step 4:** Be empathetic and apologize

Once you fully understand their concerns, be empathetic. Make sure that your body language and voice communicate this understanding.

For example, you could say, “I understand why you are upset. I would be, too. I am very sorry that you did not get the experience that you were promised.”

“Quality in service or product is not what you put into it, it is what the client gets out of it!”
- Peter Drucker

••• Step 5: Present a solution

There are two ways to do this.

1. Ask the guest, “What can I do to make it up to you?” You may find that most often they say, “Nothing, I just wanted you to know about it.”
2. Offer a satisfactory resolution. Ritz-Carlton employees are empowered to resolve complaints on the spot. Each employee can spend as much as \$2,500 to resolve guest satisfaction issues. If you are going to offer a resolution, try giving them a gift card to use toward a future visit. This will encourage the guest to come back, and it allows you to redeem yourself with the chance to turn them into a loyal client again. If you do issue a gift card, make sure you make a note in their records to ensure they get treated like royalty when they return.

••• Step 6: Surprise them and follow up

A complaint can be made in person, over the phone or online. Either way, once you have both agreed on a solution, you will need to take action—immediately. Once the situation has been resolved, follow up on whatever you promised. Go above and beyond their expectations. For instance, you could send an unexpected gift with a hand-written apology. This will help them re-engage and form a new opinion of your business.

••• Step 7: Learn from your mistakes

Your last step is to learn from your mistakes. Identify the problem, come up with a solution, train the team and make sure it is fixed immediately and that there is continual improvement on similar situations that come up in the future. Continue improving by role playing to ensure the ongoing improvement of your guest experience.

Also, make sure that all of your team members know how to handle complaints.



Keep in mind that your guests want to be taken seriously, listened to and respected. This begins with a timely, sincere response. Addressing a complaint as soon as it comes up will make for a quick recovery.

As spa leaders, your focus on retention is key to your success. It is a fact that it costs at least five times as much to attract a new client than it does to keep an existing one. That is why the entire team should focus on treating each guest like a gem! Winning new clients is much more expensive. To help you reduce guest complaints and increase guest satisfaction, calculate your current retention and set new retention targets for each team member. Develop a bonus program to reward high retention.

Meeting the basic needs of a guest is not enough. If you want to make a lasting impression and create raving fans, you need to go the extra mile. Giving your guests more than they expect will not only keep them coming back, it will also inspire them to tell their friends about the great spa experience they received. ■



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