

How to complain process including actual and sample letters.

**How to Complain Effectively: using the power of communications to get what you want and be treated fairly**

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# Chapter 1:

## Introduction – why complain?

*Complain: 1. To express pain, displeasure, etc.  
2. To find fault. 3. To make an accusation.  
(Webster's New World Dictionary)*

Occasionally a company will intentionally try to fleece you by selling something that they know is not worth what they are charging. The product or service is just junk, they know it, and they are simply trying to steal your money. There are certainly lots of these people around, always have been, and the internet has made it relatively easy for people just out for a fast buck to cheat others.

Local retailers and service companies, on the other hand, are usually somewhat more trustworthy. For starters, they are local and easier to find. In most cases they aren't going anywhere. And it's much more difficult to scam someone who is standing right in front of you. Most of us get reasonably good at picking up body language, eye movements and speech patterns that tell us someone is lying and can't be trusted. And we don't do business with those people.

It's harder to discern this behavior for a company operating thousands of miles away. The eBay® system of having buyers and sellers rate each other in public forums has taken most of the risk out of dealing with this popular auction site, but there are still many, many companies operating on the

net outside of eBay where you can get scammed. You have to be careful.

Most of the time, most companies are genuinely trying to serve their customers well and deliver good value for the money spent. This has always been true of most local retailers, and it is also true of most mail order and internet-based companies. In most markets and product categories, competition is fierce. Brand and product loyalty is extremely hard to develop and worth a great deal. By some estimates it costs ten times as much to find a new customer as it does to keep an existing customer. Companies know this, and try very, very hard to keep their customers happy.

### **but you're not a happy customer!**

Let's say the company you just did business with has failed to live up to your expectations. You are just not satisfied with your purchase. It is defective in some way, it did not deliver the value you expected from it, it's the wrong color/size/shape/quality etc. etc. It could be anything from an oil change to a new car, a sidewalk hotdog to a restaurant meal, an appliance to apparel. You are just not satisfied with it.

Now what?

### **you have several choices**

You can just swallow hard, toss the product or service, and vow to never go back there again. Or you can do that plus complain loudly and often to all your friends, neighbors,

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relatives and coworkers. Eventually they will get tired of hearing your story, but you will have made your point and they probably won't spend any money with the offending company either. So you will have accomplished something.

But in both these cases you are still out the money you spent. And you did not get the utility that you expected from your purchase. You still need that "thing" that you originally bought and that you are not satisfied with. And so you must go back into the marketplace and try to get something similar, probably from another company.

Now you've spent the money twice, but you've only gotten satisfied once. And you've spent some of your very valuable time in the process.

### **but wait! there's a third alternative. complain!**

Maybe, just maybe, if you complain well enough, and fast enough, and get to the right person, you might get some satisfaction from that purchase. The company might agree to replace the defective product or service, or perhaps refund your money. Or if they can't replace it for some reason, they might offer you another similar product or service worth an equivalent amount of money.

Is it worth trying to do that?

Yes! In most cases, it is. For three reasons.

First, as noted above, it costs a company a **lot** of money to find a new customer. It is much less expensive, and much faster, to just keep selling to existing customers. Companies know this, and usually they will try very hard to satisfy you if your complaint seems to have any truth in it at all.

## Mike Doolin

Second, companies know that for everyone who actually takes the time to write a letter of complaint, there are quite likely dozens or hundreds of other customers who had similar experiences who did not write a letter. You are just the tip of the iceberg.

Got food poisoning in a restaurant? The restaurant owner knows that probably dozens of others did too. And the public health inspector is just down the block, getting ready to turn the restaurant upside down looking for the cause. The oil change kid left the drain plug out of your car and you cooked your engine a couple of miles down the road? There's a real good chance that your plug was not the only one left off. And there's lots of tow trucks being called into service. Cruise ship company cancelled a couple of your port stops without telling you? There's a whole ship full of people who had the same experience. And they're not happy.

And finally, companies also know that nothing travels faster than bad news. If you are unhappy with a product or service, you are going to tell everyone who will listen about your bad experience.

These days, with a lot of people having personal email lists with literally hundreds of names on them, and web sites all over catering to people with complaints about specific companies, it doesn't take more than a few minutes to spread that bad news all over the planet. (Companies would much rather that you said nice things about them.)

And if they take care of your complaint in a timely fashion, you will probably spread that news around too. That just reinforces the image of the company as an organization that is providing quality merchandise or service and treating their

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customers well. And that is, of course, exactly the way companies want to be viewed.

### **complaints are symptoms of something gone wrong**

The point is that a complaint is usually a symptom of something gone wrong in a company. For some reason the company's internal quality control procedures have failed to spot the problem. Now, unwittingly, their customers have become their quality control department!

Companies know this. And the overwhelming majority of them take complaint letters very, very seriously. They know that if they don't identify and fix the problem that caused your complaint, the problem will keep happening and will ultimately cost them a lot of customers and a lot of money. And, eventually, maybe a lot of bad press. It is in their best interests to eliminate that problem right now. And in many cases it might be your letter that tipped them off to that problem. In a way you are actually helping them run their business more efficiently by complaining. And companies know this.

In my experience complaining to companies and organizations – and I've successfully done a fair amount of it over the years – most companies are only too happy to remedy your complaint. If you do it correctly.

And that's what we'll be talking about in the next chapter.

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