



The Raphel Report

**Observations on marketing,
advertising, sales and
promotions
by Murray Raphel,
Chairman, Raphel Marketing**

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Why You Should Welcome Customer Complaints

Excerpt from Don Gallegos' new customer service book,
"Win the Customer, Not the Argument"

I love customer complaints!

You should, too. To see why, just consider the alternatives when one of your customers is unhappy with your business:

- She can tell her friends and neighbors as well as random people she meets on the street how awful your business is;
 - She can be so upset she stops shopping with you and never comes back;
- or
- She can complain and let you try to make things right.

Of the three alternatives the customer has, only the third gives you an opportunity to make her happy. In some cases, you can turn a complaint upside down and create a very loyal customer.

One day I was sitting in my office and my phone rang. Just as soon as I answered the phone, a customer started yelling at me.

He was upset over an incident that happened in one of our stores. The man was yelling so loudly that I held the phone receiver five inches from my ear to avoid permanent hearing loss.

I listened.

He continued to yell.

When he wore down a bit and paused to catch his breath, I took advantage of the opportunity to get a word into the conversation.

I said, "Mr. Parks, I'm surprised you're not madder."

Dead silence.

I said, "I have to apologize. We obviously have done a poor job of training."

He said, "Oh no, it's not your fault," in a quiet voice.

He was on my side now. I said, "Yes, that employee thinks what he did was right and that is really our fault. Give me your address - we'll take care of this right away."

Within the hour, a manager arrived at his house with a gift certificate, an apology

and a business card.

The important thing to understand is I did not even know if what Mr. Parks said was true. I didn't even investigate his complaint right away.

Mr. Parks obviously was so upset that he had to call the president of the company. My job was to make him happy. There would be time down the road to talk to people about what had upset Mr. Parks and to make any necessary changes in our policies and procedures.

The first thing that had to be done was to make Mr. Parks happy.

I have always told our people that the best way to handle an irate customer or any irate person is to do the following: When people are mad, and I mean really mad ... the first thing you do is AGREE with them. It drives them nuts! By agreeing with them, you will often immediately calm them down and together you can work out any problems.

To fix a complaint, you don't have to wait until a customer actually calls you or shows up at your door. If you find out about a problem, you can be proactive.

A few years ago, I gave a presentation about customer service to our accounting department.

After the meeting, an employee told me that her neighbor had quit shopping with us because she tried to cash a check and we "gave her a bad time" when we refused to cash her check.

Her neighbor had never been back to our store. That night I had the store manager show up at the neighbor's house with an apology, a gift certificate and a request that the woman give us another chance.

She was surprised by our effort to correct our behavior and said she would try us again.

The next day, the young woman from the accounting department came into my office to tell me that she could not believe what we did. Her neighbor had come over to her house after the manager had been there just to let her know how surprised she was and to relay the story.

The point here is that even our own employee did not know how serious we were about improving our customer service. Once employees see that owners and managers care deeply about each customer, they are quick to follow the lead.