



Conquering Complaints – Part Two

By Doug Kennedy

3 min0 Comments



With the proliferation of online guest reviews and social media postings, training all of your guest contact colleagues to properly respond to guest complaints is more important than ever before in the history of the lodging industry.

As we explored in Part One of this series, the first step in Conquering Complaints is to understand their root causes. Last month we explored what I call the "Carrot Model" as a way of analyzing the root causes of guest complaints.

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Invent the Future

When planted in a garden, the leafy greens sprouting out the top of the carrot represents the part of the complaint that frontline associates see being presented to them by the guest, whether in person or on the phone, as the issue to be resolved.

Just below the surface though lies the cause of the problem, represented by the orange, edible part of the carrot. The top of this part represents what employees often think of as being the cause of the guest's verbal complaint, which is typically about a long wait time, an error, a physical shortcoming in a guest room or meal, or a process issue.

However, it's the "tip" of the carrot which is representative of the actual root cause of the reaction of the guest as displayed on the surface; the raw human emotion that we all sometimes feel as customers and guests. Therefore, showing compassion for the complainer is as important as resolving the issue.

Click here to read [Part One](#) in full.

Now let's take a closer look at the personality types of those who complain, as well as those who are responsible for receiving and resolving complaints.

"Free Stuff Seekers." For many hoteliers, this is the first type of complainer personality type that comes to mind. Their favorite remark is "What are you going to do for me now?" Indeed, there definitely are and always have been a certain percentage of the general public that seems to actually look for shortcomings and gaps in service in order to seek compensation. However, based on my experiences this is a much smaller sub-set than many service providers think. The problem is that they make a lot of noise and therefore receive a lot of notice from hoteliers, causing too many of us to become cynical, when in fact they are by far in the minority. To succeed in our industry, do not let these boundary-testing individuals make you have negative expectations regarding the rest of guests who voice their concerns.

"Consistently Negative Sorters." This subset represents those guests who always seem to find fault even with the best service experiences. They seem to enjoy complaining and pointing out the smallest of shortcomings. Their favorite line is "And another thing we noticed..." As I've come to realize over the years, there are some individuals who seem to be hard-wired towards negativity and that have a generally gloomy outlook on all of the circumstances of their lives. Whereas most of us would say "It's mostly sunny today" they would say "It's a partly cloudy sky." They are the ones who say "I think I'm coming down with a really bad cold" rather than "I'm fighting a little cold."

"Righteous World Changers." Complainers with this personality type seem to have made it their mission to fight for the rights of others. They often say "It's not a big deal for me personally, but it's just not right" or "Guests should not have to go through this..." or "It's just not fair."

Ironically, both of these last two personality types can be some of our most loyal guests, returning again and again to the hotel despite that they always spend most of their stay on a fault-finding mission. Given the small profit margins in the hotel and lodging industry, the fact is we need their business too!

"Simply Stressed Outers." Based on my experiences, this subset represents by far the largest population of guests who complain. These are guests with otherwise normal, mostly optimistic personality types who are simply tired, hungry and overall stressed out. Whereas most people think that travel is fun, exciting and engaging, the truth is that it is also stressful, unpredictable, and often does not live up to one's lofty expectations. For example, most outbound travelers take early morning flights on the day of their departure; just think about what time their alarm clock went off in the morning for them to make the 7am flight. Think about how crowded the conditions are on the airplanes and the lack of food onboard during flight delays. For those who arrive by car, think about how much traffic they had to fight en route. Although their GPS said it would take 2 hours and 10 minutes at the outset, the unexpected traffic jam made it a 4-hour journey. This group also includes the business travelers who received upsetting news via email or who faced unexpected changes of plans.

Finally, there is a small but very vocal subset of complainers who are nothing more than **"Big Body Bullies."** These are the same individuals who found joy in harassing others in middle school and who now as grown-ups (using term loosely) practice the same behaviors on the other side of the front desk, restaurant counter or phone line.

By understanding the various personality types of guests who complain, service providers can provide just the right style of service recovery and use the most appropriate techniques, all of which we will cover in Part Three of this series. Stay tuned!