

## Quick Guide: Dealing with Complaints

While we all like to think that we meet our clients' needs and that our quality of service is tip-top, there are still occasions when our clients disagree! So before it gets to the stage where we lose our clients, or they start proceedings, here are some helpful tips for dealing with complaints:

1. **Let the caller have their say.** When someone is angry or upset it is helpful for them to have the opportunity to "let off steam". It also indicates to the caller that you are willing to take the time to listen.
2. **Say you are sorry to hear what has happened.** This does not mean you are admitting that you or the firm are in the wrong, but that you are sorry the caller thinks this is the case and is upset.
3. **Listen actively.** Show that you are listening by using listening noises such as "Yes", "uh-huh", "right", "OK". Check your understanding by reflecting back what has been said.
4. **Get at the facts by questioning effectively.** Make sure you get to the heart of the problem. Often there can be more than one problem - make sure you get to all of them. Remember that the caller may not always voice them in order of importance.
5. **Keep an open mind** and do not make assumptions. This is easier said than done, but vital if you are to remain in control of your thinking and the situation.
6. **Do not argue or be defensive** – this will simply further wind-up your caller! Instead, concentrate on the situation (facts) not the personalities.
7. **Ask the caller what outcome they want.** This is really why they are complaining in the first place: they want something done! So, do they want someone to visit and talk through the problem? Or do they want another copy of a document sent by courier? Try to build on the caller's ideas and suggestions.
8. **Explain what you cannot do and concentrate on what you can do.** For example: "I am not able to access the file/network at present however I can get you a copy by two o'clock on a bike, or by one o'clock if I fax it to you." Be careful only to provide solutions that are within your control.
9. **Do not impose your own solution.** You must reach a solution that the caller finds acceptable. So ask them which solution they would prefer! This involves them in the process and gives them back a feeling of control.
10. **Always summarise.** Remember to check that the caller understands what you cannot do, what you are going to do, and agrees a deadline with you.

**Compiled by Des Whitehorn**