

Headline Story

How to Work Through Client Conflicts

By Ted Janusz



Have you ever had an upset customer? Take heart, we all have. Surprisingly, studies show that 96 percent of dissatisfied clients don't complain. At least not to you.

Studies also show that of the customers who *do* complain, between 54 and 70 percent will do business again with the organization if the complaint is resolved. The figure soars to an incredible 95 percent if the client feels that the complaint was resolved quickly.

In addition, if you handle your customer's situation when they complain using the insights in this article, not only might you keep that client but you may also be able to turn them into a customer evangelist for your company.

Word-of-mouth is the most effective form of marketing for your business, since up to 80 percent of consumer choices are the result of personal recommendations, from family, friends, or online resources.

"Treat Me the Way I Want to Be Treated"

One of the ways to provide great customer service is through "personality-based issue resolution," as discussed by Matthew Dixon, Nick Toman and Rick Delisi in their book **The Effortless Experience**.

The authors relay the results of the efforts of Bradford & Bingley, a United Kingdom-based financial services firm, which reported a 20 percent increase in "willingness to recommend" and a 40 percent decrease in repeat customer calls after using this approach.

It's a process that allows you to make an educated guess about the personality profile of any customer, *typically within no more than thirty to sixty seconds*.

The four basic profiles of customers (and the names I have assigned them):

1. The **Analytical**, who needs to analyze and understand
2. The **Amiable**, who leads with their emotional needs
3. The **Administrator**, who just wants what they want, when they want it
4. The **Associator**, who loves to talk and show off their personality

The best part, say Dixon, Toman and Delisi, is that the process only requires you to ask no more than three questions in your quest to determine the personality of your customer:

1. Is the customer's issue complex?

If *no*, you do not need to continue the diagnosis process. If the customer's issue can be resolved quickly and easily, there is really no need to do anything besides be courteous and professional. In fact, for simple-issue situations, treat all customers as **Administrators**—just get them what they need as quickly and politely as possible.

But if the customer's issue is a complex one (such as a billing dispute), the authors advise to listen carefully to the words the customer uses to describe their issue. Continue with these questions ...

2. **Is the customer issuing clear directives?** If the answer is *yes*, then the customer is likely an **Administrator**. No need to further determine their personality, just promptly and concisely answer the customer.
3. But if the answer is "no," then ask the third and final question: **Is the customer displaying "emotional" behaviors?** If *no*, they are probably an **Analytical**. However, if the answer is *yes*, they are likely an **Amiable** or an **Associator**. What's the difference? **Amiables** want their personal point of view to be taken into consideration while **Associators** like to entertain, joke, and chat.

How to Handle Each of the Four Personalities

The **Analytical** is **process-oriented**. Their mantra is, the authors state: *Take the time to fully explain the resolution steps and allow me to talk.*

Remember: Do not interrupt—Explain the process to resolve the issue—Slow down the pace of the conversation

Be sure to demonstrate: Good listening skills – Thoroughness – Clarity

The **Amiable** is **empathy-oriented**. They request that you, *"Understand how I feel and take a sympathetic approach to resolve it."*

Remember: Call me by my name—Assure me that my issue will be resolved—Show how you are personally involved

Be sure to demonstrate:

Empathy—Patience—Understanding—Sincerity

The **Administrator** is **results-oriented**. They demand, *"Don't spend time on unnecessary details, just resolve my issue!"* Or as my father-in-law, Mr. Administrator Extraordinaire, asserts, *"Answer the question asked!"*

Remember: Directly address my issue—Speed up the pace of the conversation—Provide a clear timetable for results

Be sure to demonstrate: Confidence—Your ownership of the issue—A "can do" attitude

The **Associator** is **social-oriented**. They will eventually get around to telling you, *"Treat me like a person; don't provide me with generic answers."*

Remember: Maintain an informal tone—Do not provide scripted answers—Mention personal information, if appropriate

Employ the Platinum Rule

The key to resolving customer issues is the Platinum Rule: "Treat your customers the way *they* would like to be treated, not necessarily the way that *you* would like to be treated." The faster and better you are able to employ the Platinum Rule, the more issues you will be able to resolve and the more customers you will be able to retain.

Do you see yourself or your employees in one (or more) of these four personality styles? Why wait until you have conflicts in the office to employ a personality-based process to more effectively deal with others? Be proactive! You and your employees can take a free personality-based assessment at www.personalityperfect.com. Once you get the results, discuss how you can improve interactions both within the office and with your customers.