

# How to Get More Feedback



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In last month's blog (June 2023), I emphasized that managers don't always know why their customers leave the business, never to return. One of the obvious answers is they don't hear customer complaints. If they heard complaints they could begin to figure out why their customer base is shrinking.

Customers may be picking up subtle clues that tell them not to complain. They assume voicing a complaint may make them look picky, irritated, or bossy. No one may have asked them about what has happened. How can you get more feedback, particularly valuable feedback, from your customers, who, after all, are the ones experiencing your service?



A Rockefeller Corporation study suggests that 68% of customers leave because they don't believe their complaint will be heard by someone who cares for them or that someone will do anything to fix their situation.

What is your approach to customers? Are you communicating clearly that you want to hear what they say? That you think that what they say will be helpful to your business. Many customers believe their complaint will fall on deaf ears and you don't care about them.

What's your complaint process like? After I verbally complain, I am frequently told that I have to write someone in the organization. That telling the person I am speaking with isn't adequate. When I ask why they can't pass my complaint along, this "someone," says, "Oh, they won't listen to me." Others find making a complaint burdensome if there is even a process.

One way that companies commonly attempt to get feedback is to ask these questions:

1. On a scale from 1 to 10, how likely are you to recommend us to a friend or colleague? (Or, on a scale from 1 to 7.)
2. How would you rate your last experience with us?
3. If you could change one thing about our product/service, what would it be?

These questions might get helpful information from customers, but they aren't asking for feedback. Most companies who use questions of this type never give the customer a chance to say anything about their rating, which might contain useful information.

It's a lot better to be direct about asking for feedback. The following questions are straightforward and will probably get you a response.

- Is there anything that frustrates you when working with us?
- Is there anything you think we could do better?
- What is one thing you wish we didn't do?
- What is something your favorite supplier does that you think we should do?

Once you have decided which questions to ask, try them out and see what kind of feedback you obtain when asking them.

With the data that you collect, analyze why the behaviors could be arranged so customers walk away more satisfied. Conduct a root cause analysis. And then consider changes you should make. Finally, get back to your customers and tell them what changes you have made because of their feedback. With this appreciation, they are likely to give you more feedback in the future.

Companies that focus on customer centricity seek out complaints. Customer-centric businesses have a mindset that sees these complaints as a "gift." It's a gift because you are getting information that will challenge your current way of doing business. And from this, you will likely reduce the loss of customers and identify growth opportunities. And you'll also be less likely to leave money sitting on the table because your customers will stay with you longer. They'll feel valued in partnership with you. And you'll learn what your customers want.

Here are four more ideas from the book *A Complaint Is a Gift Workbook* (available on Amazon or on this webpage.) by Janelle Barlow and Victoria Holtz.

1. Use every opportunity to ask your customers what they think about your products, service, pricing, and opening hours, for example. By requesting that customers provide their opinions, you create a psychological contract with them that says, "I value you, and I want to know as much as I can to help you." It's like shaking someone's hand in agreement.
2. Show your customers you take their opinions seriously by writing their comments down. Serious listening sends the message that you value them — especially if you ask how they think you can improve.
3. After customers share feedback, be sure to ask, "Is there anything more?" which shows you're not afraid of their feedback or complaints.
4. If you get a good idea you can use, be sure to tell them how much you appreciate their input. Of course, you can't just say those words. You've got to believe it.

It starts with the mindset that complaints are gifts. It's true that some complaints are hassles and not much fun. But when you look deeply enough you can find the value of being more customer-centric by listening.