



“How To Handle Customer Complaints” Guideline

Introduction

Even though we may provide the best service and product, have the best contractor who has his best man on the job, we will all be faced with a customer complaint. This guideline will help provide you with information and procedures to satisfy these unfortunate situations.

Complaints can come in several ways – product delivery, damaged material, or dissatisfaction with the conduct of a person. Although you may use some of the principles discussed in this guideline to help resolve these types of complaints, this guideline is focused to help resolve complaints where a customer is dissatisfied with the final installation.

Good Rules To Follow

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|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Be Courteous | Act in a way that the customer feels that you are there to help and work with them to resolve the situation. |
| 2. Act Promptly | By acting quickly, a complaint can change from a negative image to a positive image. |
| 3. Document | Be sure to document all meetings and discussions. If a complaint becomes “ugly”, this will be very important. |
| 4. Be Reasonable | Sometimes you may not be at fault, but by reaching a fair and reasonable settlement, you may help your customer relationship. |

Initial Complaint

When your office first receives a complaint from a customer, the employees should know how to best handle the customer.

Do’s Do have a person or people designated to handle a complaint (ie. Technical Services).
Do act helpful and willing to give guidance.
Do direct them to a person who can resolve or settle.

Don’ts Don’t argue with customer.
Don’t transfer them to a voice mailbox without their approval.
Don’t continue to transfer them to people who can’t resolve or settle.

When an employee receives a complaint call, they should be able to try to understand the issue and direct the call to the correct person. You should have a listing of who should receive the call and a backup if possible. For example:

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|-----------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| a. Wrong Material Delivered | Customer Service | Operation’s Manager |
| b. Shipped Damaged Material | Customer Service | Operation’s Manager |
| c. Order Status | Customer Service | Operation’s Manager |
| d. Incorrect Pricing | Billing Department | Controller |
| e. Installation Problem | Technical Department | Salesperson |
| f. Employee Attitude | Department’s Manager | Executive Officer |

Once the complaint is directed to the correct person, that person should act in a professional manner to understand the problem and aid in assisting the customer.

Types of Installation Complaints

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|--------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Cracked Tiles and/or Grout | 6. Hollow Sounding Tiles | 10. Discoloration in Stone Tiles |
| 2. Discolored Grout | 7. Grout Falling Out | 11. Warpage of Natural Stone |
| 3. Unusual Tile Shade Variance | 8. Efflorescence | 12. Pitting of Glaze |
| 4. Lipage | 9. Loose Tiles | 13. Chipped Tiles |
| 5. Irregular Tile Sizing | | |

Jobsite Inspection

If the complaint cannot be resolve with advise over the phone, a jobsite inspection may be required to analyze the situation. Once again, this should be done within a reasonable timeframe – the sooner the better.

Ask These Questions Before A Jobsite Inspection

- a. Is the person going to the jobsite inspection qualified?
- b. Does the person have authority to make a small settlement if necessary?
- c. Is the tile contractor/dealer aware of the complaint?
- d. Will a representative of the tile contractor/dealer be present at the jobsite inspection?
- e. Should a manufacturer's representative be present at the jobsite inspection?

Is the person going to the jobsite inspection qualified? If you are sending an employee to a jobsite inspection, that person should be educated to be able to look at a situation and begin to make judgments why the situation occurred and what actions need to be made to resolve. One course that give this type of education is the CTIOA's Ceramic Tile Consultant course.

Does the person have the authority to make a small settlement if necessary? If the situation requires a solution, have you empowered your employee to make a settlement. Some companies have given salespeople a \$500 to \$1,000 clearance to make quick resolutions to a small problem. This can help make a customer very satisfied to be able to have a quick resolution and create a better image for your company.

Is the tile contractor/dealer aware of the complaint? Usually your tile contractor/dealer is the one who has informed you of the complaint. But, on occasion the end consumer may contact you directly. Be sure that the tile contractor/dealer is aware of the issue.

Will a representative of the tile contractor/dealer be present at the jobsite inspection? It is strongly recommended that a representative of the tile contractor/dealer be present for all jobsite inspections. Remember this was their customer and if there is any questions concerning how they installed the product, they should be present to explain. You do not want any miscommunication with your tile contractor/dealer, they may feel that you did not acted in their best interest.

Should a manufacturer's representative be present at the jobsite inspection? If the situation indicates that there may have been a problem with a manufacturer's product on the project, it would be beneficial for the manufacturer of that product be present. The manufacturer can help aid in creating a quick solution if necessary. Sometimes a manufacturer's representative might not be able to get to the jobsite for several weeks. In that case, it would be best to still make an initial jobsite inspection, and then follow-up with the manufacturer's representative if necessary.

Things To Take To A Jobsite Inspection

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|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| a. Complaint Report Form | c. Testing/ Cleaning/Repair Kit |
| b. Camera (preferably digital) | d. Complaint Settlement Form |

Complaint Report

If you perform a jobsite inspection, a complaint report should be completed to document who was present, what you saw, and any thoughts for the best course of action. This form is not only good for reporting the issue to your manager, but also your manufacturer if they were not available. Also, if this case does not get resolved and results in a court action, this report will become very important in the documentation process. Attached is an example of a "Complaint Report" form.

Manufacturer Involvement

If there is a complaint and the product may be in question, you must contact your manufacturer so that they are aware of the situation. In many cases, the manufacturer wants to be involved with a jobsite inspection and help to resolve it quickly.

When you begin a relationship with a manufacturer, you should have an understand their policies on job complaints.

- Do they have a written policy?
- Do they have a job complaint form that needs to be completed?
- Who has the authority to resolve the complaint? Usually, the salesperson has authority to a certain dollar value, then their manager to another level, and beyond that it may have to go to their executive group.
- If necessary, how quickly will they issue credits?
- Do they cover any of your costs if it has to be defended?

Independent Testing

Sometimes, the quality of a product may be in question. There are companies/associations that conduct independent testing. One source is the Tile Council of America (TCA). They provide testing of tiles, setting material and methods using ISO and ASTM methods and base their conclusions against ANSI standards. They also provide a list of Independent Installation Consultants who can come directly to the jobsite.

Tile Council of America, Inc.
100 Clemson Research Blvd.
Anderson, SC 29625

Phone: (864) 646-8453
Fax: (864) 646-2821
Website: www.tileusa.com
E-mail: technical@tileusa.com

Complaint Settlement

If a settlement is made, there should be documentation of the agreement and acknowledgement that the consumer is satisfied with the result. Attached is an example of a "Complaint Settlement" form.

Settlement vs. Lawsuit

Sometimes, the parties involved can not agree on a settlement, which means it may likely go to the courts. At this times and as much as we hate it, some consideration must be taken into the cost of a lawsuit and the image portrayed. In most instances, the consumer will win some amount of settlement above what was offered to them. Add that along with the attorney's fees, you may decide to "bite the bullet". You should work with the tile contractor/dealer and the manufacturer and see if together you can share in covering the additional settlement to avoid the fees.

Lawsuit

So an unfortunate situation has turned “ugly”. As soon as you get notice of a lawsuit, the complaint is out of your hands and you should turn it over to your attorney. And all documentation that you have will be beneficial to your defense.

In most lawsuits, any party who had involvement will be added as defendants – builder/GC, tile contractor/dealer, distributor, manufacturer, architect. Your attorney should guide you through the process of the defense and determine how closely related you should be with others in the defense.

COMPLAINT REPORT

Tile Contractor / Dealer

Address

City State Zip Code
()
Area Code Telephone

Date

Consumer

Address

City State Zip Code
()
Area Code Telephone

PRODUCT

Manufacturer Style Color Size

JOB INFORMATION

Invoice No./Date _____ / _____ Installation Method _____
Inspection Date _____ Grout _____
Dealer Representative _____ Grout Additive _____
Total Quantity _____ Substrate _____
Complaint Quantity _____ Installation Date _____

DESCRIPTION OF COMPLAINT

OTHER COMMENTS

Report Submitted By _____

COMPLAINT SETTLEMENT

Contractor _____

Property Owner _____

Phone _____

Phone _____

Project address if different than above

Street _____

City _____

State _____

In settlement of this complaint, _____ (*distributor name*) proposes to provide:

In settlement of this complaint, _____ (*distributor name*), does not accept responsibility for the cause of the complaint through neglect or any other reason. The settlement of this complaint is solely for the purpose of customer satisfaction.

The necessary tile and installation materials will be supplied in order to have the necessary work performed when this form is signed by all parties.

Any financial reimbursement for labor costs or other associated costs will be made after the owner has accepted the corrected work. The contractor agrees to perform the work in accordance with industry standards and will make every effort to complete the work to the satisfaction of the owner.

The above terms of settlement are agreed to by:

Distributor Rep: _____ Date _____

Contractor Rep: _____ Date _____

TO BE PROVIDED AFTER COMPLETION OF WORK

I accept the work performed by the Contractor in settlement of this complaint.

Owner _____ Date _____