



Caswell **CORPORATE COACHING** Company
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William E. Caswell

Bill Caswell is an experienced coach of CEOs and senior executives around the globe. The author of 14 books, Bill has penned the 12-book series *The Respect Revolution* written, by a CEO for CEOs, as a guide to getting your company to *Excellence* and keeping it there.

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The Benefit of Angry Clients

In a previous article, I suggested that people (we suppliers, that is) frequently respond to angry clients both emotionally and defensively, especially when we believe the client is unfair in the accusation. This column showed last month that such a response doesn't suit the situation and, we offered the suggestion that your response should focus on the anger – not on the issue. Then, once the anger shows signs of being under control, you can move onto the resolution of the issue or the problem. Further, what most people fail to realize is that a problem with a client offers the supplier a wonderful opportunity for more business – the bigger the problem, the greater the business opportunity.

As we said last month, a customer complaint is a wise marketer's dream, a situation to be nurtured, expanded upon, and benefitted from. To repeat, we indicated that the first of two complementary reactions to a complaint is to handle the call deftly and to your own advantage, as detailed in last month's paper. The second action is how (and why) this frustrating occurrence can be turned into a sales-bonding opportunity for you with that client.

The Scenario

The scenario already laid out is that when a client calls in a state of frustration, your primary action must be to deal with that person's anger. Your primary action is NOT to assuage your own ego, and NOT to defend your company's high quality standards, but simply to deflate the client's anger. Once that is done, you move to the problem and through careful listening, write down the many client complaints attached to the main issue. Quickly offer solutions to the little pieces – and do not cloud your direction by worrying about the pennies – or worrying about right and wrong. So what if this is the third time you've made this particular point to the client? Who's keeping track? Just a senseless tally taker! The GPS lady does not tell you that you ignored her instruction to turn right three times in a row; she simply tells you to best step to take now to move forward at this point. So should you, because that is all that matters. **WHAT IS THE BEST ACTION TO TAKE AT THIS MOMENT TO MOVE FORWARD?** (Irrespective of the history that got us to this point)

As you deal with the client's concerns (and not your own, or your sense of insult, pride, etc.) you will find the conversation becoming more and more civil. It can actually start to become pleasant.

A little trick, by the way, is not to offer the first solution. Ask the client for one: "What do you think we should do about it?" Most people will be surprised to find that clients suggest a less demanding solution than you yourself might. Typically our response might be: "Yes, I will replace the whole part." But, if you ask the client, that person could say: "You don't have to replace the whole part; just make a cut at x and y." I'm here to tell you that such a favorable response is not rare, but will be the case, most of the time.

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Bill Caswell is always available for comments or questions at:

bill@caswellccc.com

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CCCC
Ottawa Canada
613-232-1243
www.caswellccc.com

How you Benefit from the Situation

Try to use your own experience as an example. Can you recall returning an item to a store in a great huff only to pleasantly surprised by the results? My friend Judith related a story to me a short time ago of returning a dress to a shop because the thread along one seam was pulled. Her story went something like this: Judith prepared herself for an argument with the clerk to convince her that she, Judith, had not abused the dress in the first place. Judith arrived at the shop hoping to find the clerk that had served her. No such luck. So she tackled the first clerk she spotted. "I have a faulty product!" blurted out Judith loudly enough for everyone else nearby to hear. The clerk, Samantha, responded. "Oh my goodness, that shouldn't happen; that must have been upsetting for you." "You're damn right" continued Judith, "a \$300 dress should not be shoddy! See! Look at it, here!"

Samantha replied, "Dear me, this is upsetting for this store too, because we pride ourselves on quality product lines. While we don't know why this pull occurred, we will certainly check it out with the distributor. For the moment, why don't you pick out another dress? I will check it seam by seam with you afterwards, just to be sure."

Judith was happy to find exactly the same dress on the rack, the one she had adored so much when she first chose it, above all others. The clerk, Samantha, did as she promised and checked the garment out seam by seam. All was in order. As she was wrapping up the transaction, another lady appeared with a name tag that said: Manager. "Hello. While you were in the changing room, Samantha told me about your unpleasant situation. I am glad you have found a replacement. Let me offer you to pick out any scarf in the shop at no charge to go along with your new dress. It's our small way of trying to make up for your inconvenience." Judith was all smiles as she selected just the 'perfect' scarf, leaving the shop in a buoyant mood, saying farewell to both Samantha and the manager as if they were Judith's long-lost buddies. "I will be back soon," she exclaimed happily.

Change your Point of View

What has happened here is that by responding to a problem appropriately the clerk has engaged in teamwork with the client to solve it. Teamwork builds confidence and trust; it bonds you closer to the other individual. This is a natural higher-animal consequence. If the problem had never occurred Samantha would not have been offered the opportunity to create such a bond – a bond that will lead to more sales from Judith, and probably over a very long term.

This is how we hope you can change your point of view: instead of a problem with a client being viewed as a nuisance, it can and should be viewed as creating a chance for a positive response, which in turn, creates an opportunity to cement relations, which in turn can, and usually does, lead to more sales. Dresses, gadgets, steel beams, or battleships! It's all the same.

Bill