

Seven steps to quality service Step six - managing difficult situations

By David Illingworth



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Synopsis

Step six in this series of seven training courses, engages participants in understanding that the 'service package' on offer to customers has many facets. This session, focused on 'managing difficult situations', leads to practical action plans for making a difference. Step six contains a leader's guide and a participant's workbook.

How to ...

How to handle difficult people and situations at work

How to find effective solutions for managing difficult people and situations

How to handle complaints effectively

David Illingworth

David has been encouraging and helping people for 30 years both as a line manager and as an international consultant to organizations across many cultures. He has a real passion for helping people and works extensively with helping young people to achieve their potential. Apart from his consultancy and business writing, he holds a number of Directorships in various businesses, including several e-businesses.

Acknowledgement

'Seven steps to quality service' is based on an original idea by Mike Pegg and his original works are used here with his permission. I gratefully acknowledge the encouragement and support that Mike has provided over the years.

Leader's guide

You cannot customize this PDF version. However, you can fully customize on the MS Word version also available from successSURE.com

The goals

The goals of this session are to provide you and your staff with a framework and practical tools that you can use:

To identify difficult situations you may face in your work.

To identify strategies for managing difficult people and situations.

To manage complaints successfully.

Overview of the session

Introduction.

Review successes since the last session.

Goals for the session.

Identifying difficulties.

EXERCISE: Difficult People.

EXERCISE: Difficult Situations.

Identifying Possible Solutions.

Presenting solutions.

Managing Complaints.

EXERCISE: Managing Complaints.

Conclusion.

EXERCISE: Managing Pressure:
My Action Plan.

Introduction

Welcome people. Begin by asking each person to write down and then share one concrete success they have had since the last session. Describe the goals of this session and then introduce the first theme.

Identifying difficulties

Introduce the first topic like this:

"We are in a job where we sometimes have to deal with difficult people and situations. Over the years we have learned how to manage many of these situations successfully. At times, for example, we all need:

- To give good service when under pressure.
- To deal with complaining customers.
- To balance the demands of both home and work.
- To find positive solutions to apparently impossible problems.

EXERCISE: Identifying difficult people and difficult situations.

Ask people to form two groups.

Group A is to make a poster headed '**Difficult People**'. They are to brainstorm the types of difficult customers or people; they may face in their work. These may include, for example, demanding customers or even complaining staff. **Group A** is then to focus on three of these types. Taking each in turn, they are to agree on three concrete ways to deal with each of these problem people. These suggestions are to be listed on a poster that they will later present back to the whole group.

Group B is to make a poster headed '**Difficult Situations**'. They are then to brainstorm the difficult situations they may face in their work. These may include, for example, delays in fixing repairs or staff shortages. **Group B** is then to focus on three of these examples. Taking each type of situation in turn, they are to brainstorm and then agree on three concrete ways to deal with each of these problems. They are then to make a poster that they will later present back to the whole group.

Give the groups 30 minutes to do this part of the exercise. Their presentations will form the first part of the next theme.

Difficult People

List the kinds of people that cause difficulty for you in your work. Then list three concrete things that you can do to manage these people successfully.

Difficult people	Three concrete actions
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.

Difficult Situations

List the kinds of situations that cause difficulty for you in your work. Then list three concrete things that you can do to manage these situations successfully.

Difficult situations	Three concrete actions
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.

Identifying solutions

Invite **Group A** to present their poster on '**Difficult People**'. Ask them to describe each of the types of difficult people they may face in their work and present their possible suggestions for managing these people. Give **Group A** at least ten minutes for their presentation. Follow this by encouraging the whole group to discuss what has been raised and suggest further ways of managing these people.

When discussing the various '**Difficult People**' that people might encounter, encourage the group to look at what they can do to respond to the situation and provide a good service and impress others who are watching their actions.

Emphasize that team members may also have an audience when dealing with the customer. Other customers may be watching to see how the organization's ambassador deals with the difficult situation! This 'Moment of Truth', therefore, becomes an opportunity to show how your organization finds positive solutions to problems.

Invite **Group B** to present their poster on '**Difficult Situations**'. Ask them to describe each of the types of problem situations they may face in their work and present their suggestions for managing these kinds of difficulties.

Give **Group B** at least ten minutes for their presentation. Follow this by encouraging the whole group to discuss what has been raised and to suggest further ways of managing these situations. Encourage the staff to think for themselves and suggest other concrete actions.

Time may be your greatest enemy. Staff may wish to discuss so many situations and solutions, that you may over-run the session. Build on their interest by, for example, continuing the exercise in the next meeting.

Managing Complaints

Begin by asking people to read the next page on suggestions for managing complaints. Tell them that they will soon have time to add their own suggestions.

EXERCISE: Managing Complaints

Ask people to form two groups. Each group is to prepare and then present two items:

- A three-minute role-play showing a staff member successfully managing a customer complaint.
- A poster listing three concrete things the staff member did to manage the complaint successfully.

Give people 15 minutes to prepare their

role-play and poster, and then gather the whole group back together. Ask each group to present both their role-play and poster. Follow each presentation with a short discussion.

After both groups have presented, have a longer discussion about how to manage complaints. Encouraging people to complain can be profitable. Research findings show:

‘It is better to have a talking customer than a walking customer’

Three guidelines for managing complaints are:

APOLOGIZE

Apologize at once, whether or not it is your fault. You are not taking the blame, but simply regretting what has happened on behalf of **your organization**. If you apologize immediately, the customer is more likely to stay calm.

ACCEPT

Accept the customer's point of view. Get their story about what happened. Empathize and show you understand the problem. Listen carefully. Get all the information and facts. If it isn't obvious, clarify what will satisfy the customer. At the same time, be clear on what you can and cannot do to satisfy the customer. Thank the customer for bringing the problem to your attention. Tell the customer what

you intend to do and when you will get back to them.

ACT

Take action to satisfy the customer. If this is beyond your control, pass on the complaint to your manager. Make sure, however, that you give your manager the full story. They will then be more able to get back to the customer with a satisfactory solution. Work out what can be done to stop this kind of problem happening in the future. If appropriate, make contact with the customer again to ask about their current experience with your service.

Conclude this part of the session by giving people the following exercise.

EXERCISE: Managing Pressure: My Action Plan

Remind people of the various themes that have been covered during the session. These included managing difficult people and situations. You also focused on managing complaints.

Bearing these things in mind, ask each person to think of the pressure situations they will face in their work in the future. Ask them to be as specific as possible and write down three concrete things they can do to manage pressure in these situations. Invite people to share their lists in pairs or trios or, if time permits, in the whole group.

Conclusion

Conclude the session by asking people to do the final exercise.

EXERCISE: Managing Pressure Successfully

Get the group to brainstorm and then agree on five concrete ways **your organi-**

zation can enable its staff to manage pressure successfully. Say that you will then communicate these suggestions to the Senior Management Team

Agree a date for the next session. Conclude by thanking people for working hard and finish the session in a positive way.

Managing Pressure: My Action Plan

Look ahead and think of future situations in which you might experience pressure in your work. Write three concrete things you can do to manage that pressure successfully.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Managing Pressure Successfully
How **Your Organization Can Support Its Staff**

Brainstorm and then agree on five concrete ways **your organization** can support its staff to enable them to manage pressure successfully.

...

The leader's review sheet

We have now completed step six of the program.

The concrete actions that **our team** will be taking as a result of this session are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

The concrete suggestions that emerged for improving **your organization** are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Name: Date:

Seven steps to quality service

Step six – managing difficult situations

Workbook

Before using this workbook customize the pages in your own way.
In particular, those words highlighted in red require your attention.

The goals

The goals of this session are to provide you and your colleagues with a framework and practical tools that you can use:

- To identify difficult situations you may face in your work.
- To identify strategies for managing difficult people and situations.
- To manage complaints successfully.

Introduction

The program leader will begin by asking each person to write down and share one concrete success they have had since the last session. They will outline the goals and then introduce the first theme.

Identifying difficulties

We are in a job where we sometimes have to deal with difficult people and situations. Over the years we have learned how to manage many of these situations successfully. At times, for example, we all need:

- To give good service when under pressure.
- To deal with complaining customers.
- To balance the demands of both home and work.
- To find positive solutions to apparently impossible problems.

EXERCISE: Identifying difficult people and difficult situations.

People will form two groups.

Group A is to make a poster headed '**Difficult People**'. They are to brainstorm the

kinds of difficult customers or people they may face in their work. These may include, for example, demanding customers or even complaining staff. **Group A** is then to focus on three of these categories. Taking each in turn, they are to agree on three concrete ways to deal with each of these problem people. These suggestions are to be listed on a poster, which they will later present back to the whole group.

Group B is to make a poster headed '**Difficult Situations**'. They are then to brainstorm the difficult situations they may face in their work. These may include, for example delays in fixing repairs or staff shortages. **Group B** is then to focus on three of these examples. Taking each type of situation in turn, they are to brainstorm and then agree on three concrete ways to deal with each of these problems. They are then to make a

Difficult People

List the kinds of people that cause difficulty for you in your work. Then list three concrete things that you can do to manage these people successfully.

Difficult people	Three concrete actions
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	1. 2. 3.
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List the kinds of situations that cause difficulty for you in your work. Then list three concrete things that you can do to manage these situations successfully.

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	1. 2. 3.
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Identifying strategies to deal with difficult situations and people

Group A will present their poster on '**Difficult People**'. They will describe each of the types of difficult people they may face in their work and present their possible suggestions for managing these people.

We all need to remember that there may be an audience watching when they are dealing with, for example, a difficult customer. Other customers will see how **your organization's** ambassador deals with the difficult situation. This 'Moment of Truth', therefore, becomes an opportunity to show how **your organization** finds positive and satisfactory solutions towards your customer's and clients problems and complaints.

Group B will then present their poster on '**Difficult Situations**'. They will describe each of the types of problem situations they may face in their work and present their suggestions for managing these difficulties.

Managing complaints

Three guidelines for managing complaints are:

APOLOGIZE

Apologize at once, whether or not it is your fault. You are not taking the blame, but simply regretting what has happened on behalf of **your organization**. If you apologize immediately, the customer is more likely stay calm.

ACCEPT

Accept the customer's point of view. Get their story about what happened. Empathize and show you understand the problem. Listen carefully. Get all the information and facts. If it isn't obvious, clarify what will satisfy the customer. At the same time, be clear on what you can and cannot do to satisfy the customer. Thank the customer for bringing the problem to your attention. Tell the customer what you intend to do and when you will get back to them.

ACT

Take action to satisfy the customer. If this is beyond your control, pass on the complaint to your manager. Make sure, however, that you give your manager the full story. They will then be more able to get back to the customer with a satisfactory solution.

Work out what can be done to stop this kind of problem happening in the future. If appropriate, make contact with the customer again to ask about their current experience with your service.

EXERCISE: Managing Complaints

People will form two groups. Each group is to prepare and then present two items:

- A three-minute role-play showing a team member successfully managing a customer complaint.
- A poster listing three concrete things the team member did to manage the complaint successfully.

After both groups have presented, have a longer discussion about how to manage complaints. Encouraging people to complain can be profitable. Research findings show:

‘It is better to have a talking customer than a walking customer’

EXERCISE: Managing Pressure My Action Plan

Think of the pressure situations that you will face in your work in the future. Be as specific as possible and write down three concrete things you can do to manage pressure in these situations.

Managing Pressure: My Action Plan

Look ahead and think of future situations in which you might experience pressure in your work. Write three concrete things you can do to manage that pressure successfully.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Conclusion

Conclude the session by doing the final exercise.

Managing Pressure Successfully

Brainstorm and then agree on five concrete ways **your organization** can enable its people to manage pressure successfully. These ideas will then be communicated to the Senior Management Team.

Managing Pressure Successfully How **Your Organization** Can Support Its Staff

Brainstorm and then agree on five concrete ways **your organization** can support its staff to enable them to manage pressure successfully.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.