



A QUICK RECOVERY FROM CUSTOMER SERVICE BREAKDOWNS

RAC

Mel Cartwright, RAC's Customer Care Operations Manager, gives us an insight into RAC's complaint handling system, which is not only completely customer centric, but moreover is profitable too. In 2006 they were named Customer Service Complaints Team of the Year in the National Customer Service Awards.







At the heart of RAC's success is the fact that they put great emphasis on recruiting the right people, as well as training and supporting them fully. Working in a complaints environment is highly challenging, so ensuring colleagues have a high level of competence and a positive attitude is paramount. RAC look to recruit individuals whose values match theirs, who can build relationships quickly and who can think outside the box. Above all, RAC want people who are committed to providing good customer service and who have a desire to do that particular job. They run open evenings when recruiting so that they can demonstrate to applicants what the job is all about and the attributes needed, so that each party is selecting each other.

Next, RAC's investment in training ensures that colleagues have the knowledge and confidence to resolve any issue. Once recruited, colleagues embark on a thorough and supported training programme. They spend an initial four weeks learning about the role and the organisa-

tion, including spending time with the patrol teams and listening to calls from customers who have broken down. In this way, they are able to get a good understanding of the roles of other colleagues, especially the difficulties they face.

Trainees also spend time with a 'buddy' in the Customer Care team so that they are able to observe the desired behaviours and familiarise themselves with customer feedback. The layout of the team is such that there is a mix of experience around each group of desks, facilitating discussion and the sharing of ideas. They begin by dealing with written complaints so that they're able to understand the customer's concerns and research all the available facts of the case before calling the customer. Telephone work is then introduced gradually at the individual's own pace, with their work being closely and regularly monitored and appraised.

RAC colleagues are supported by a bespoke system which was designed to help them deal with all feedback from customers, including complaints. For example it gives FSA guideline prompts, and has easy access to relevant information. When dealing with complaints, RAC's philosophy is that there are no scripts that must be adhered to, instead colleagues are fully empowered to respond to the customer's complaint in an honest and individual way. Colleagues are taught to recognise every customer and their situation as unique, and should

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therefore try and tailor the solution to meet each customer's individual needs. Another fundamental guideline to handling complaints is the 'mum test' – treat customers by imagining how you would want your mum to be treated in that situation!

Colleagues are also encouraged to think about what would resolve the problem for them. Whilst team members have autonomy to resolve customer issues in the most appropriate way, their performance and case management is subject to regular reviews to ensure that quality, customer focus and sound decision-making remain of the highest standard.

Giving team members such authority and autonomy is initially a frightening prospect, but RAC's experience is that the business spends less because colleagues are so careful in spending money. Indeed, RAC have found that many customers simply require a thorough explanation of what happened and an assurance that any problem will be rectified rather than compensation.

As well as responding to complaints on an individual customer basis, RAC uses its complaint data to drive improvements. On an ongoing basis every complaint is used to feed back any service failures into the business and identify the cause of these. Each complaint is investigated thoroughly to understand where a service has failed. In this way, any training needs or process improvements are identified and relevant managers are notified. They then give feedback to the team members involved, including giving full details of the complaint and the impact on the customer plus any incurred cost to the business, for example through compensation. If the complaint hasn't been caused by a service failure and it is the customer's expectations that have not been met, the team will investigate which part of the business has set that expectation and then work with them to ensure that expectations are set accurately in future.

A questionnaire is sent out to all customers who have made a complaint in order to get feedback on the customer's perception of how the complaint was dealt with by RAC, in terms of speed, empathy, outcome and explanation of any decision that was made. The results of this survey indicate that their customers think that RAC are handling their complaints extremely well, with around three quarters of respondents saying that they are more likely to renew their membership because of the way their complaint was handled. Furthermore, the survey results have improved year on year. If any comments are made on the survey that suggest that the customer is not completely happy with the way their complaint has been handled, RAC will call that customer



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to follow up on the issue. RAC have also made the investment in calculating the value of their customers. Whilst they are passionate about handling customer feedback to extremely high standards because it is the right thing to do, this approach has also added value to RAC in terms of measurable customer loyalty.

Put simply, RAC's culture is truly customer focused, with a complaints ratio of below 1% of breakdown call-outs demonstrating their level of excellence. Not only this, RAC are continuously seeking to improve their service. Every month the senior leadership team listen to all the calls involved in one end to end customer experience, to see if they can see any way that that experience could have been bettered. RAC also ring every customer who cancels their breakdown policy to find out why they are leaving. **S**