

## Complaints - The Tip of the Iceberg

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“Voice of the Customer” – VOC in short – is a key topic in all kind of customer service, TQM or Six Sigma training and related project work. There are two main categories for VOC, reactive data and proactive data. Whereas proactive data is collected with methods like focus groups, interviews, observations, surveys or test customers, reactive data is mainly based on customer complaints, feedback, hotline data or warranty claims. The nature of the human being restricts itself almost always to negative comments through reactive data channels.

Asking staff working in customer service departments about the nature of the feedback they receive from customers will result in answers like “No-one calls to tell us how good we are in delivering our service. Most of the calls - that are not questions - are more or less strong complaints.” On the one hand, this sounds frustrating, “not fair”. On the other hand, “negative feedback” is very powerful due to the fact that someone takes the time and tells us what goes wrong in our processes, hence shows us opportunities for getting better, for getting more competitive, for growing. The quality of this kind of information is usually much better than the feedback received via proactive channels like surveys due to the fact that respondents of surveys do usually not have a stake in the issue.

Customer research studies in the German financial industry some years ago have shown, that complaints normally reveal only the “tip of the iceberg”. Receiving 50 complaint letters means we get only the feedback from those people who take the time and the courage to complain. There might be about 1250 customers out there who experience a similar situation but do not complain. May be they go immediately to our competitor if they have a chance. We may never find out. Furthermore, the research has shown that there might be as much as 10 times more negative contact points with our company - like “Your call is important to us. Please stay on the line.” These negative incidents are not “big enough” for a complaint but always impactful enough to drive customers’ decision sooner or later.

### Conclusion

Welcome complaints! As long as you get complaints someone is interested in your service and wants to help you improving. Behind each complaint you can expect as much as 25 times the situation that has led to the complaint and as much as 250 negative “Moments of Truth” with your company. Use this valuable and powerful information for taking actions.

And, give positive feedback, too!

#### How do YOU feed back?

##### Reactive

The other day in Singapore, I had a small complaint about an SBS bus driver who did not really respect me cycling my way on the road. After getting home I took some time to recap what happened and wrote a very detailed letter to SBS to explain the situation.

##### Proactive

When I spent some days in a hotel in Batam, I received a survey form to be filled in before leaving the hotel. Did I fill it in? Make a guess...

