

# StraightTALKING



## Getting it right

**Liz McKeon asks, how do you deal with genuine customer complaints?**

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**Do you want a client who has a genuine complaint to become a long-term lifetime client, or the ruin of your business and your career?**

Even in the best run salons and spas accidents happen, treatments go wrong. Do you have your team trained and the systems in place to effectively deal with that dreaded genuine complaint?

Every salon has to deal with situations in which things go wrong from a client's point of view. How you respond, when this happens, is the difference between having a nasty court case looming over you for the next couple of years and your reputation damaged or retaining that client for life, adding to the bottom line of your business.

Complaints must be handled courteously, sympathetically and swiftly. Make sure that your salon has an established procedure for dealing with client complaints and that it is known to all your staff: receptionists, therapists, juniors, part-timers... everybody who is in contact with your precious clients.

Notify your insurance provider, by phone immediately. Document the incident in writing for your provider, which will be sent to the insurance company, who will then send you claims forms for completion.

In the meantime the following tactics may help you to deal with complaining customers:

### 1. Empathy

Understand that before you contact the complaining client, you can't 'win'. Complaints are really just degrees of losing. Put yourself in the client's shoes, so that you can get a better understanding of their perspective. Reassure them that you care, understand and are listening to them, by allowing them to explain their situation.

### 2. Respect

Staying calm sends a message that you have respect for them, and it can be difficult to do this when an angry client is yelling at you. Remember their anger is not about you, they are upset about their situation and are taking it out on you.

### 3. Apologise

Offering an apology, regardless of how you feel or what you can do about the situation, will alleviate some of the stress the client is feeling.

### 4. Take responsibility

If the mistake has been made by a member of your staff, take full responsibility and assist the client so that their problem is solved.

### 5. Settlement

The hard part is the settlement of the complaint and you will have to do some work here. Since you are going to lose something, the degree of loss is up to you. Most likely you will end up giving away product, treatments, full refunds or whatever it takes. You and your client have lost regardless, but you owe it to yourself and your salon to salvage some type of relationship. Try to agree on an equitable solution, where hopefully you will still retain that client for life, thus adding to the bottom line in your business and most importantly, saving your salon's reputation.

The choice is yours - equip your staff with the right procedures necessary to handle upset clients, arriving at positive solutions with satisfied clients who are happy to return because of the way their problem was handled, or wait for the dreaded claim against your salon to arrive in the post.

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