

The Customer's Complaint

Objective

- To illustrate the distortion that may occur when information from a customer is transmitted through several individuals to a final destination

Method

1. Break participants into groups of six to eight.
2. Ask for one volunteer from each group to be a customer.
3. Volunteers accompany you out of the room, where you read The Customer's Complaint, Handout 33.1. Volunteers must not take notes on what they hear.
4. The volunteers return to the room and repeat the customer's complaint to the first members of their individual teams. This must be done out of earshot of the other team members, as well as of the other teams.
5. The first team member repeats the message to the second team member in the same manner that he/she received the information.
6. The process is repeated until each team member has individually received the customer's complaint. The sixth and last member of each team must write on a flip chart his or her response to the customer's complaint.
7. Each group presents their response to the customer and compares it to the customer's original complaint.

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8. Distribute Handout 33.2 and ask teams to use it to assess their performance.
9. Lead a discussion on the group's responses to the questions on Handout 33.2.

Notes and Variations

To each team assign an observer to each team who will take notes on the team's performance and present his/her findings to the group.

Handout 33.1: The Customer's Complaint

It is Wednesday, when you discover problems with Universal Widgets. You call the salesperson and deliver the following message:

"We've got a major problem. We're launching a new product next month and our production schedule is in jeopardy because of your widgets. Last month we awarded you the contract for 10,000 widgets, with the first shipment guaranteed for delivery on Monday. They arrived on Monday, but 10 of the first 100 failed to meet our specifications. John Smyth, our production manager, says, 'It's a waste of time to test the other widgets since a second shipment is due on Friday.' We need widgets that work and your competitor at Acme says that he can get 20,000 units here by Friday. And he guarantees that they'll meet our specs. If you can't guarantee the next shipment, don't bother sending them. If you can guarantee them, how will you replace the first shipment?"

Handout 33.2: Team Assessment

1. How appropriate was your response to the customer's complaint?
2. In what ways did the customer's complaint get altered or distorted?
3. What factors contributed most to the breakdowns?
4. What factors helped in the communication process?
5. What actions could have been taken to improve the process?

