

A Complaint Is a Badly Wrapped Gift

I don't know your case, but I bet it broke in one of these three places — because 90% of badly handled complaints always die at the same crossroads. Break one, in the listening: the employee interrupted to defend or explain themselves before the guest had finished. At that instant the guest understood that their problem mattered less than the excuse — and from then on you're no longer arguing about the breakdown: you're arguing about the disdain.

Break two, in the blame: "that's Maintenance's job," "the thing is, the previous shift..." The guest doesn't want to know whose fault it was: they want to know who is taking charge. Every finger pointing at someone else confirms to them that nobody is. And break three, in the close: a promise was made ("we'll look into it and let you know") and nobody came back. A broken promise after a complaint is the complaint squared — now with evidence.

What I would have done fits the lesson's method: listen to the end with my body still, taking notes for the hotel's record; empathize with the annoyance without arguing the facts yet ("I completely understand that this has spoiled your afternoon"); decide with judgment what I can do and say so with a deadline and an owner; and verify — the two-hour call from lesson 17, which is where complaints turn into ambassadors. The gift was well wrapped; you only had to open it all the way.