



IN FRONT OF THE GUEST · SEASON 1 · MODULE 12: THE DIFFICULT GUEST · LESSON 41

A Complaint Is a Badly Wrapped Gift

The guest who complains gives you the chance.

The one who says nothing doesn't come back.

In five lines

Of all dissatisfied guests, only a minority complain; the rest stay silent, leave and tell the story outside. That is why a complaint, for all its bad wrapping — the tone, the timing, the occasional injustice — is a gift: it is the only dissatisfaction that gives you the chance to fix it. The professional sequence has four steps that are never skipped or reordered: listen all the way through (without interrupting, without getting defensive), empathize for real (with their experience, not with a form), decide with judgment and act now. And one prohibition that runs through all four: no excuses, no blame, no “the thing is” — the guest isn't interested in why the hotel failed; they're interested in what you are going to do.

The script, step by step

- 1. Listen all the way through.** A complaint needs to empty itself out before it can be resolved: eye contact, nodding, zero interruptions — not even to agree with them. Whoever interrupts to solve it too soon forces the guest to start over, and louder.
- 2. Empathize with the experience.** “I understand that after a day of traveling, this is the last thing you needed” — empathy names THEIR specific experience; it doesn't recite a formula. And careful: empathizing isn't taking the blame or arguing about the facts; it's acknowledging that their upset is real. That disarms more than any argument.
- 3. Decide with judgment and say it.** What you can solve yourself right now, what you need to escalate and when they will have an answer: “I'll fix this for you right now; the other matter I'll handle with the executive housekeeper and confirm with you before seven.” The guest tolerates almost anything except vagueness.
- 4. Act now and close the loop.** The first action, immediate and visible — even if it's small: instant action communicates that the complaint was heard. And the closing is the one from lesson 17: checking with the guest that it was put right. A complaint without verification is a complaint only half handled.

With limited resources: how to hold the standard

If you don't have...	How to hold the standard
The ability to solve what they ask for	You solve what can be solved and manage the rest with an owner and a deadline — lesson 8 already taught you this at the front desk. The guest can tell perfectly well a hotel that can't from a hotel that doesn't take care of things: always be the first one, visibly.
Authority to compensate	Listening, empathy and immediate action require nobody's authorization — and they are 80% of the recovery. The material side is escalated; the human side is carried out now.

In front of the guest

DO	DON'T	NEVER
Listen without interrupting, thank them for the complaint ("thank you for telling me — this way I can fix it"), decide and act now.	Interrupt to justify yourself. Explain the hotel's internal problems. Let the guest's tone rub off on you.	Argue the facts to prove you're right: you can win the argument and lose the guest, the review and the next table, which is listening. And never blame a colleague in front of the guest — the iron rule of lesson 3 applies twice as much under pressure.

Common mistakes

- ◆ Taking the complaint as a personal attack: they're complaining about the failure, not about you — and if they are complaining about you, all the more reason for professional calm.
- ◆ Opening with "the thing is": every recovery sentence that begins with an excuse ends in defeat.
- ◆ Overpromising to placate: a broken overpromise turns one complaint into two.
- ◆ Not recording it or passing it on: the complaint that dies on your shift will be repeated by another guest on Thursday — quality is crafted from the memory of failures.

THE GOLDEN RULE

**"The guest who complains gives you the chance.
The one who says nothing doesn't come back."**

This lesson's exercise

Remember a complaint you saw handled badly — in your hotel or as a customer. Identify the exact step of the sequence where it broke (listen, empathize, decide, act) and rewrite that moment as it should have been, with the exact words. In the answer that follows, I share my analysis.