

RIVETING IDEAS™



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With our third edition of Riveting Ideas comes more exciting news about our continuing expansion of products and service. We're delighted to announce that Stephens Rivet and Machine has been made Canada's only Authorized Representative for Valley Rivet, North America's largest rivet manufacturer. Read more about what this means for you in the formal announcement, below. Also in this issue, Dr. Jen weighs in on customer service, with tips on handling complaints effectively. With this issue come our good wishes for the holiday season, and health and prosperity for the coming year.



About the author:

Exclusive to *Riveting Ideas*, communication expert and best-selling author Dr. Jennifer MacLennan provides insight into a variety of communication topics. Over a distinguished career spanning nearly three decades, Dr. Jen has coached hundreds of professionals to greater communication effectiveness, both in hands-on training and through her many books. A professor in the College of Engineering, University of Saskatchewan, where she is D.K. Seaman Chair in Professional and Technical Communication, Dr. Jen is also the architect of the Ron and Jane Graham Centre for the Study of Communication. She serves on the Science Advisory Board to the Minister of Agriculture and Agrifood Canada, and has just completed the fifth edition of her book *Effective Business Communication*, soon to be published by Oxford University Press.



Communication Doctor

Customer Service 101: Handling Complaints

No matter how hard we try to eliminate error, we're all fallible, and sooner or later, something goes awry: wrong parts are sent, computer files erased, cheques lost. When the inevitable happens, how does your company respond?

All too often, the answer is not very well. Poor handling of customer complaints can even escalate small issues into major conflicts, creating permanent ill will. Dissatisfied customers are the worst advertising you can have, and you can bet they'll spread the news to everyone who will listen. Luckily, there are ways to handle complaints that will leave everyone feeling good about the encounter. Here are some tips that will help maintain good will when something goes wrong.

Hear the person out. Although complaints and negative feedback can be hard to hear, resolve to listen, as calmly as possible, and take the time to get the whole story. Ask questions to help clarify details, but avoid interrupting or challenging the person's point of view.

Assume, at least initially, that there is some merit to every complaint. Despite a few chronic complainers, most people don't make an issue unless something is really wrong. Even if the other person's position seems unreasonable at first, assume that the complaint is based on a reasonable position, and aim for understanding.

Don't take it personally. People who have been inconvenienced, who have a legitimate gripe about products or service, who have been waiting a long time to speak to someone in authority, or who are just plain frazzled or annoyed may take out those feelings on you. Although it's natural to react to someone else's rudeness by being rude in return, responding in kind will only aggravate the situation and create permanent unpleasantness. Be prepared to be friendly and helpful no matter what the client throws your way.

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Dr. Jen welcomes your questions and topic suggestions for future Communication Doctor columns. You can reach her at Dr-Jen@Stephensrivet.com



A New Partnership with Valley Fastener Group

We are delighted to announce that Stephens Rivet and Machine has been made **Canada's only Authorized Representative for Valley Fastener Group**, North America's largest rivet manufacturer.

Fastener diameters from .058 to .500 , and up to 4" long, are produced in Valley's state-of-the-art facilities, enabling Stephens Rivet to offer competitive pricing on a full line of cold-headed fastening products, including specials, as well as riveting equipment and automated work stations.

Enhancing Stephens Rivet's already outstanding customer service, this exciting new partnership enables us to respond to any request for commercial fastener products: **any style or material, in any size, at any time.** Check out our re-designed web site for details.

www.stephensrivet.com



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Empathize, don't patronize. Whatever the merits of a complaint, understand that the person's feelings of frustration or anger are genuine. You can calm the situation if you acknowledge those feelings, but avoid the temptation to issue directives. Saying 'I'd be annoyed, too, if that happened to me' is a better move than telling someone to 'Calm down' or declaring that 'I won't help you if you don't stop complaining.' Patronizing the person will only make matters worse.

Don't make excuses. Although it's natural to want to defend yourself and your company, making excuses will simply annoy a complaining customer. Instead, acknowledge the mistake and sincerely apologize for any inconvenience or aggravation it's caused.

Watch your mouth. Avoid antagonizing the client with insensitive or unsuitable language or a flippant attitude. It rarely helps to point fingers at anyone, and language that places blame can make an uncomfortable situation worse. Keep in mind that your most important goal -- always -- is maintaining good will.

Make it right. Wherever possible, fix the situation: offer to repair the damage, exchange or replace the items, or refund payment. If it's feasible, ask the client to suggest an appropriate solution, and then follow through.

Go the extra mile. Don't just cite company policy; instead, take personal responsibility for resolving the problem, and do whatever it takes to make the situation right.

When it comes to dealing with customer complaints, you must let go of the need to be right, and focus instead on getting the problem resolved. Make it a policy to listen with understanding and concern, and then follow up with appropriate action. Your customers will thank you, and so will your bottom line.

Stephens Rivet & Machine Inc.

6730 Invader Crescent, Mississauga, Ontario L5T 2B6
Tel: 905-795-8412 Fax: 905-795-8465 US & Canada Toll Free 1-800-858-9183
e-mail: info@stephensrivet.com