

Responding to Complaints

DO...

1. Listen for the complainant's interests – without rushing to judgments about the merits of his/her complaint
2. Convey your willingness to listen as objectively as possible.
3. Identify the role you are willing/able to play (first to yourself, then to the complainant):
 - A) arbitrator/decision-maker
 - B) mediator/facilitator
4. Identify the limits of your role – especially if you are being asked to do things you do not have the authority to do.
5. Entertain the possibility that the complaint, as you are hearing it, is the truth.
6. Remember, as you are listening, that there may be additional facts you have not yet heard or that the other party may interpret the same events differently.
7. Recognize and acknowledge any biases that might limit your objectivity. If necessary, make an appropriate referral for someone else to hear the complaint.
8. Ask the complainant what the ideal solution would “look like” to him/her.
9. Summarize with the complainant what each of you will do next.
10. Maintain confidentiality to the extent you can.
11. Consult or ask for help if you need it.

DON'T...

1. Convey to the complainant that you are skeptical about his/her complaint.
2. Interrupt the complainant while s/he is telling her/her story.
3. Make promises you may not be able to keep (including the promise of confidentiality).
4. Minimize the complaint (e.g., "This is no big deal.")
5. Respond to the complainant by defending, explaining, or interpreting the actions of the person about whom the complaint is being made. (e.g. "I'm sure you must've misunderstood. He would never have done that." Or "Do you realize how well-respected she is?")
6. Accuse or blame the complainant for the problem. (e.g., "You must've said something to cause her to act that way.")
7. Indicate that no one else has made a similar complaint, thus implying you are skeptical about the truth of this complaint.
8. Procrastinate if you promised to call someone, investigate, etc., hoping the complainant will forget about it.
9. Ignore phone calls or letters from people with whom you have spoken about complaints.