

The King of Complainers

Clive Zietman loves complaining – but not shouting in hotel lobbies, or angrily telling a shop assistant to call the manager, or making a waitress cry. He loves complaining properly and in writing. Over the last 20 years he has written over 5,000 letters of complaint. His successes include refunded holidays, countless free meals, and complimentary theatre tickets.



So how has he achieved this? ‘Screaming and shouting is a complete waste of time and is usually directed at a person who is not in a position to do anything,’ he says. ‘I like to write a polite letter to the company. People won’t want to help you if you are aggressive, they respond much better to good manners.’

It all started many years ago, on a boring train journey home to West London. The train passed by the McVitie’s biscuit factory, and the smell of the biscuits made Clive feel hungry. He wrote a letter to the managing director to complain, in a humorous way, about the fumes coming through the carriage window. The result? Some free packets of biscuits. But since then there have been more serious victories as well. On one occasion he managed to get a Volkswagen Golf GTI within 24 hours for a friend who had been complaining for almost a year (without any success) about his faulty vehicle. On another occasion he got a travel agent to refund the cost of a holiday worth £2,000, after Clive’s wife Bettina broke her leg when she slipped in a puddle of water in their holiday apartment in Spain.



These days, there is almost nothing he won't complain about. After Clive was served mouldy strawberries on a British Airways flight, he used a courier service to send the fruit to the airline's chief executive. To compensate, BA invited his daughters, Nina and Zoë, to Heathrow to personally inspect the airline's catering facilities. 'I just can't bear bad service,' says Clive. 'We have a right to good service, and should expect it and demand it. In fact, what irritates me more than anything is that, unlike Americans, we British are hopeless at complaining.'

So how do Bettina, his wife, and daughters Nina, 22, Zoë, 18, and 12-year-old son Joe cope with living with Britain's biggest complainer? Surely he must be a nightmare to live with? Has he ever asked Bettina to explain why a meal she made is badly cooked? 'Oh no, of course not,' says Clive. It seems there are some things even he knows you should never complain about!

Adapted from the Daily Mail website

How to complain successfully: Clive's top tips

1

Never shout and **swear** – it achieves nothing. Don't **spoil** your meal or your holiday by getting into an argument with a waiter or customer services call centre operator. Make a mental note of the circumstances and write a letter later.

2

Don't send emails, or standard, printed-out complaints forms. Companies may not read these but they probably will read a letter. And unless you are particularly fond of Vivaldi, don't **waste your time** ringing a customer complaints line! Your letter should be short and to the point and should fit on one side of A4 paper. And type it. Reading other people's handwriting is hard work.



3

Write to the company's marketing director or finance director, as they're probably the least busy. Find their name on the internet, or by phoning. Writing *Dear Sir / Madam* is lazy. Taking the time to find a person's name and title shows initiative.

4

If your complaint is serious enough, **make it clear** you will not **hesitate** to change to another bank / mobile phone company. Smart companies know that changing an angry customer into a satisfied one will make the customer more loyal.

5

Don't say exactly what you expect to receive as compensation. Leave it to the company.

6

Use phrases like 'I can only imagine this is an unusual departure from your usual high standards,' and 'I would love to shop with you again if you can demonstrate to me that you are still as good as I know you used to be'.

Glossary

lose your temper

become angry

threaten verb

warn that you may punish sb if they do not do what you want

flattery noun

saying good things about sb that you may not mean