



northernireland  
tourist board

# Welcome to module 8

# Managing Difficult Customers

Sue Daly, Tourism Engineers

# NITB TIC training prospectus: the 8 modules

1. Understanding your customers
2. Maximise your visitor spend
3. Effective communication skills
4. Communicating online
5. Income generation
6. Managing stakeholders and marketing your TIC
7. Team building skills
8. Managing difficult customers

## Course content module 8

- Introductions
- Why people can be difficult
- The importance of feedback
- Managing behaviour and defusing emotion
- Resolving conflict
- Adapting to different personalities
- Recovering difficult situations

# Introductions

In pairs or threes, please discuss the following:

1. The most difficult customers you need to deal with at work
2. A difficult situation that had a positive outcome – what did you do to achieve that? (action on a post it)
3. What would you personally like to take away from today?

# Objectives

- recognise why customers can be difficult
- identify ways to reduce or avoid difficult situations
- develop a tool kit of techniques to manage behaviour, defuse emotion, and resolve conflict
- identify procedures to recover difficult situations and build customer relationships

# How does this relate to the project?

## Value of Tourism in NI today

- £3.3 million visitors
- £529 million
- 4.9% of GDP

## The Goal

- Double the income from tourism to £1 billion by 2020
- Support an additional 10,000 jobs

# What makes people difficult?



Consider a time when you have been the difficult customer – what was it that caused you to be upset or angry?

# Why people can be difficult

- Expectations or needs not met
- Perceived poor value
- Sense of injustice/unfair treatment
- To get attention
- Hurt pride
- Some people are not happy unless they are complaining!





## Customers' emotional needs

- To feel valued
- To feel in control
- To feel understood
- To be reassured
- To feel important/special
- To be remembered
- To feel good about being a customer



# The significance of feedback

- 50% of customers do not complain
- Between 68% and 90% of non-complainers will never buy from you again
- Between 82% and 95% of complainers who are well handled will return
- Complainers who receive a satisfactory response will talk about it positively to 5 other people

A complaint well handled is good for the customer and good for the company

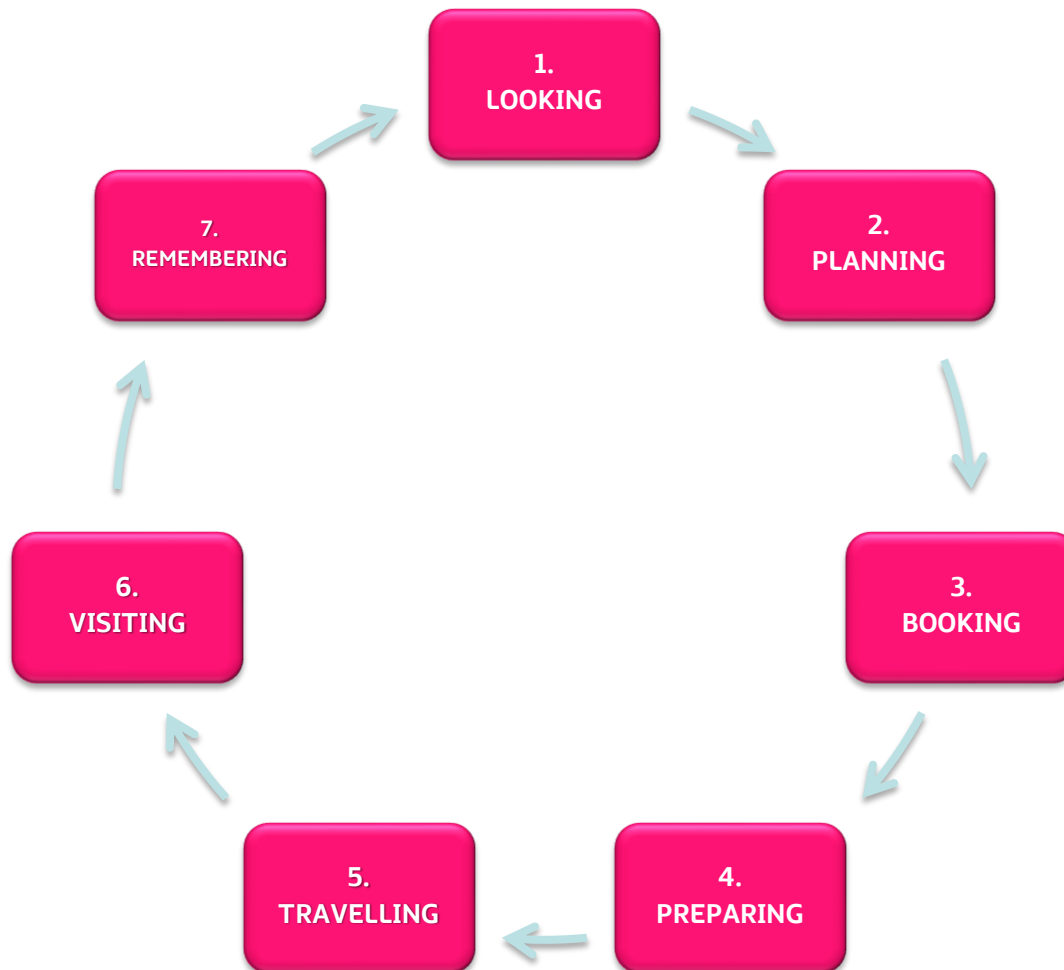
Why?

## Therefore .....

- Be **T**hankful for **all** feedback
- Pay **A**ttention to what people are telling you
- **C**apture it
- **C**ommunicate
- Take **A**ction

**TACCA!**

# The visitor journey



# Activity – relating to different stages of the Visitor Journey

In your groups please discuss and note on your handout:

- A How could you gather feedback to ensure customer satisfaction?
- B How can you manage expectations, or anticipate difficulties and prevent situations arising?

# Encouraging customer feedback

- Questionnaires and surveys
- Checking at key points of the customer visit
- Maintaining contact during the visit
- Approachability of all staff
- Showing that you value customer opinion





Behaviour

Motives

Feelings

Attitudes

Beliefs



# Emotions and complaints

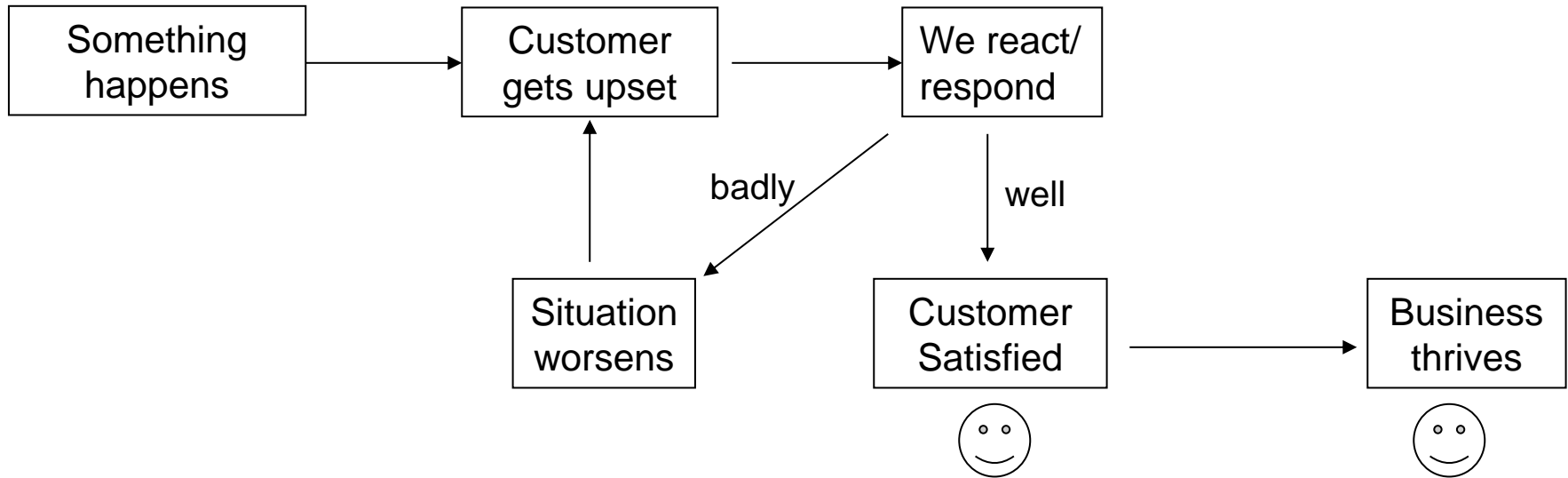
- Anger
- Frustration
- Anxiety
- Fear
- Embarrassment
- Guilt
- Shame
- Indignation



## Recap activity

What tools & techniques from previous workshops will help you to deal with difficult customers?

# Anatomy of a difficult situation



# React or respond?

There is a gap or space between stimulus and response, and ... the key to both our growth and happiness is how we use that space.

*Viktor Frankl*

# Handling difficult situations

Our approach is crucial to avoid

- creating an emotional situation or
- aggravating a situation that is already emotional

We need to ‘handle’

- a) our own emotions & reactions
- b) our customer’s reactions & behaviour

# Managing your own emotions

How can you manage your own emotional reactions to a difficult situation?





# Changing your thinking

- What assumptions am I making?
- How else can I think about this situation?
- What is the other person thinking, feeling, needing and wanting?



# Behaving assertively with difficult customers

Please discuss in your group how you would use ONE of the following aspects of assertive behaviour when dealing with a difficult customer:

- A. Body language
- B. Tone of voice
- C. Words used

# Handling a Difficult Customer or Situation

## Situation

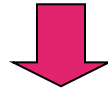
Pause and Evaluate

*Take ownership, decide how to handle*



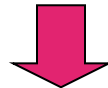
Deal with the emotion

*Empathy/Apology/Agreement*



Confirm understanding

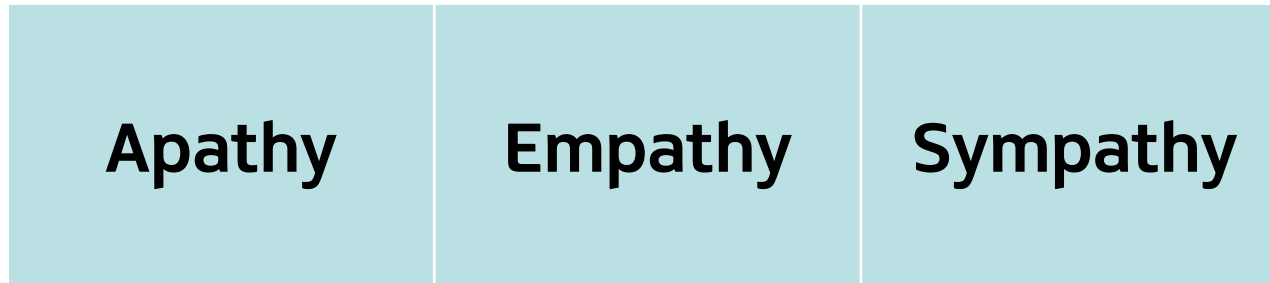
*Question and clarify*



Recovery

*Respond/Reassure/Build relationship*

# Empathy



‘I can see that....’

‘It sounds as if ...’

‘I can tell that you are worried / concerned / annoyed ....’

I recognise how important it is for you ...’

# Empathy

- Be careful with 'I appreciate ...' 'I understand ...'
- Tone of voice is important

Overdone empathy = sympathy (patronising)

Underdone empathy = mechanical or sarcastic

# Apology

- I'm sorry
- I'm sorry about this mistake
- I'm sorry that you haven't heard anything
- I'm sorry that you are feeling let down
- I'm sorry this isn't as you expected

# Interrupting politely & assertively

- Mrs Daly, I'm sorry to hear you're not happy with this. Let me see how I can help.
- Mr Curran, may I check my understanding so far. You're concerned that ....

# Selective agreement

‘This form doesn’t make sense.’

‘I agree the form could be clearer’

‘We’ve had to wait far too long’

‘15 minutes is a long time to be waiting’

# Fogging

‘Your organisation doesn’t know if it’s coming or going’

‘I realise it may seem like that sometimes’

‘This is hopeless. You don’t have any of the information I need’

‘It is frustrating when you can’t find what you need straight away’



# Activity – Selective Agreement and Fogging

Work out a response for the situations given.

Remember:

- Assertive and polite
- Partial or full agreement
- No explanation or justification

## Reassurance & Recovery

- ‘I’d like to help you with this. Let me take some more details ...’
- ‘I’m going to find out the next steps for you. Firstly, I need something from you ...’
- ‘I’m going to find the right person for you to talk to. Please let me check I have properly understood all the facts ...’

# Workable compromise

There are 3 solutions to any problem:

## Your solution

*'I can get the confirmation to you for Wednesday'*

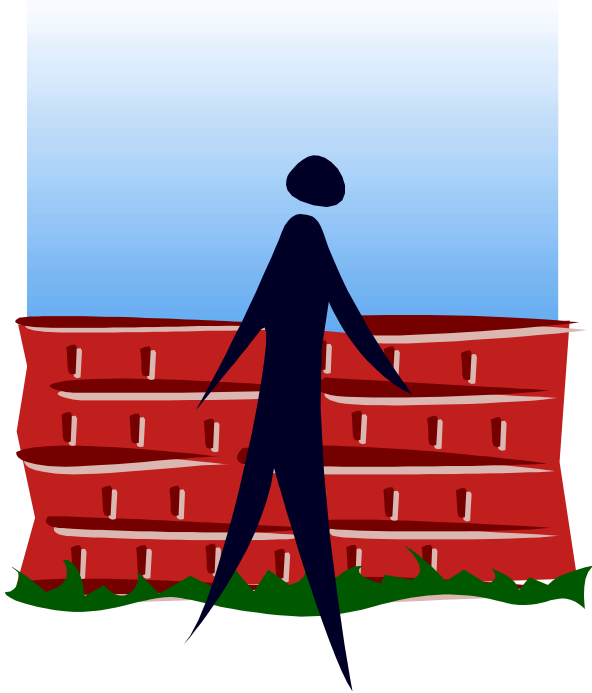
## Customer solution

*'I need it by Monday'*

## Joint solution – Workable Compromise

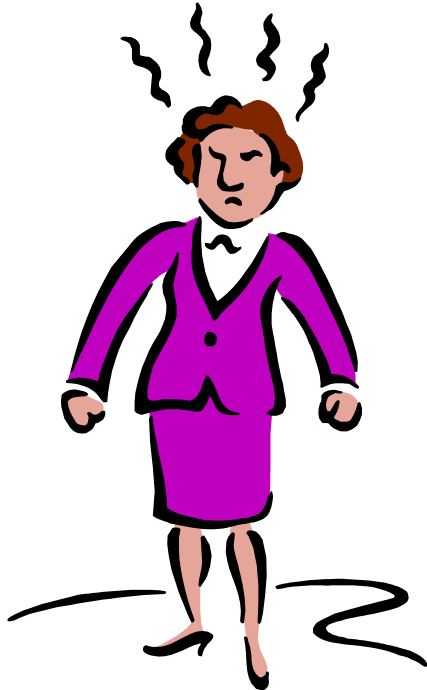
*'I suggest that I phone you on Monday and send the written confirmation by Wednesday'*

# Constructive



- Likes to help
- ‘I don’t like to complain but ...’
- ‘Have you ever thought of ...?’
- ‘Did you know that ...?’

# Aggressive



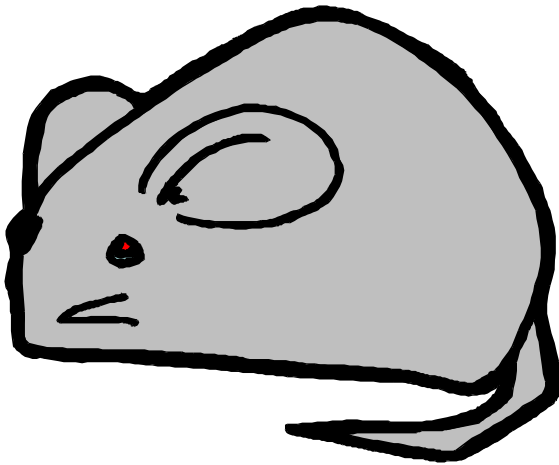
- Loud
- Not listening
- Temporarily out of control
- Possibly abusive
- Often defensive
- Often plays to an audience

# Professional



- Looking for financial gain
- Knows their rights
- Knows the law
- Knows the managing director
- Is a managing director/shareholder/expert

# Passive



- Prefers not to complain
- Will walk away from a situation rather than confront or challenge
- May open up if handled properly

## Difficult customers on the telephone

- Reassure that you want to help
- Write down their name
- Take notes, tell them what you are doing
- Repeat back your understanding of their problem
- Be clear what will happen next
- Tone of voice





# Written complaints

- Respond promptly
- Telephone to check understanding of the problem before sending written reply
- Check “tone” of your response - ask somebody else to read it
- Short and factual
- Invite complainer to contact you again if further information is needed



## Ending the conversation

**Step 1** – Ask the customer to stop - e.g. using the offensive language

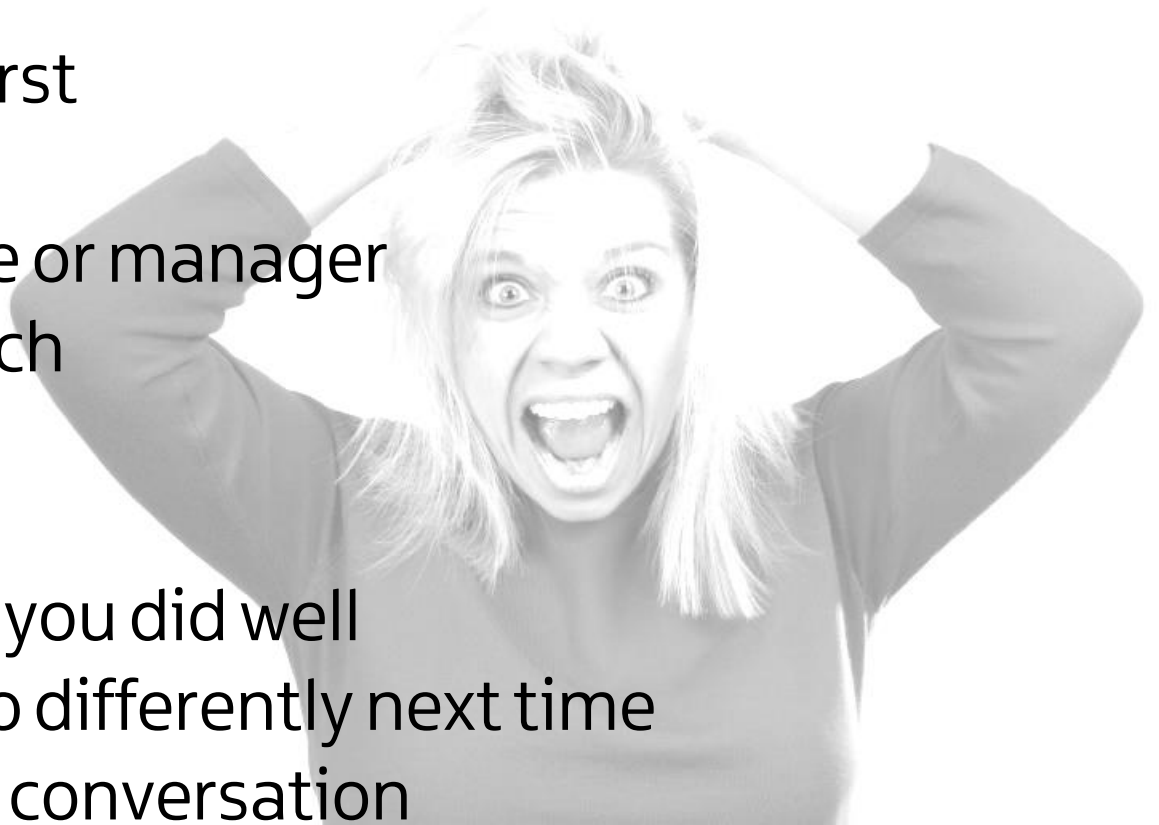
**Step 2** – Warn the customer that if they don't stop using the offensive language you will end the call/meeting

**Step 3** – end the call/meeting

**Follow up** – make notes and tell your manager

# Taking care of yourself

- Your own safety first
- Breathing
- Talk to a colleague or manager
- 5 minute leg stretch
- Fetch a drink .... or
- Chocolate!
- Think about what you did well
- What could you do differently next time
- Make notes of the conversation



## Case studies

- Discuss in your groups how you would handle the given situation
- Be ready to explain to the full group your situation and your ideas for managing it



# Sources of Support



Identify your sources of support - individuals or organisations who can help you deal with challenging situations

# References

Marilee G Adams

Change your questions, change your life  
Berrett Koehler Inc

Genie Z Laborde

Influencing with Integrity  
Crown House Publishing

Mike Leibling

How People Tick  
Kogan Page

Institute of Customer  
Service

[www.instituteofcustomerservice.com](http://www.instituteofcustomerservice.com)

# Action plans

What will you take away with you from today?



# Thank you

# Managing Difficult Customers

Sue Daly



# NITB TIC training prospectus: the 8 modules

