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# **Complaint management – how do you tackle unhappy clients? Interactive workshop with role-plays and drafting your private guideline**

Oliver Biernat

# Agenda



- **Presentation of workshop attendees** (10 minutes)
- **Introduction into the topic/ YouTube films** (5 minutes)
- **Brainstorming on possible problems/ Role Play / Brainstorming on possible solutions/ discussion/ Take down your favorite match:**
  - Case A: Complaints of potential clients (45 minutes)
  - Case B: Complaints of existing clients (45 minutes)
  - COFFEE BREAK
  - Case C: Client leaves (If time allows: 30 minutes)
- **Recommendations** (10 minutes)
- **More Role Plays (if time allows)**

# Presentation of workshop attendees



- Person's name
- Company's name
- Country you are from
- Profession (chartered accountant, lawyer, ...)
- Why did you choose this workshop?

# Introduction into the topic

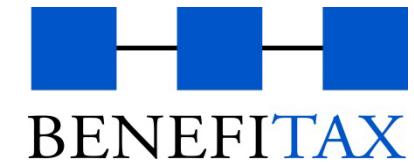


We all know that situation: a client complains

Maybe someone in your firm did something wrong or too late.  
Maybe you are too expensive, have too much staff fluctuation or did not communicate enough with the client beforehand.  
Or maybe the client is just difficult or does not fit into your market approach.

What is the best way to approach such a situation?  
Are there different approaches to different problems?  
Do you have a kind of guideline in case it happens or do you react spontaneously?  
What about your staff? Do they have a guideline of what to do when you are not around?

# Introduction into the topic

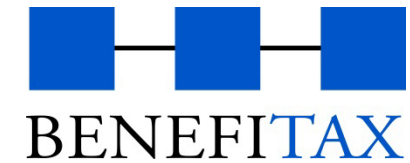


Film about how to complain:

## **Customer Service Complaint**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNxaDIIhMyg&feature=youtu.be>

# Case A: Complaints of potential clients



## Brainstorming:

Which situations with potential clients complaining after having received your proposal have you come across so far?

Which other situations with potential clients complaining can you imagine to happen in the future?

Write down as many ideas as you have.

Time: 5 minutes.

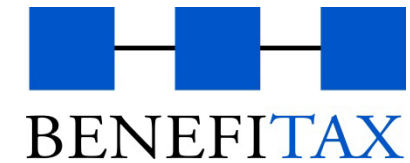
# Case A: Complaints of potential clients



## Results from Brainstorming (please add if you have others):

1. Client says your offer is too expensive - more details required re fees
2. Client says the appearance of your company on the market is not professional enough (compared to Big4)
3. Client says your website is not impressive/up to date
4. Client says that he doubts you come up to his quality expectancy
5. Client wants you to change the terms in the engagement letter
6. Client says you did not react fast enough on his request
7. Client says he wants one single contact partner with offices in more than 50 countries
8. Charge out rates
9. Want to cover a lot more than original brief
10. More languages
11. Big brand important
12. Value added service
13. Proposal not as briefed
14. USP
15. Timing issues
16. Misleading initial brief
17. More flexibility
18. Exact fee and exact timing

# Case A: Complaints of potential clients



## Role Play:

Form two groups. Group A is the potential client. Group B is the advisor

A member of group A will complain about something.

The respective partner from group B has to respond in a way he feels appropriate.

Please assume that the client does not lie to you. Time to respond: 1 minute.

Form a different couples and do the same with s.b. else four more times.



# Case A: Complaints of potential clients



## Role Play:

Now Group B is the potential client. Group A is the advisor. Play the same game for 5 times.

# Case A: Complaints of potential clients



**Possible Solutions how to react:**

**Brainstorming:**

Write down as many ideas as you have.

Time: 5 minutes.

# Case A: Complaints of potential clients



## Possible Solutions how to react:

- A) Tell the client you will reduce your fees
- B) Tell the client he will get a one-time fee reduction
- C) Tell the client you will reduce the fees under certain conditions (he provides data in electronic form, well-prepared, in time..., does not exceed a certain size)
- D) Tell the client you are so good that you will not change any fees or rates
- E) Tell the client: If you think compliance is expensive, try to be in compliant“
- F) Tell the client about the hourly rates of the Big4
- G) Tell the client that you cannot be compared to the low-profile advisors that make cheap offers
- H) Do not accept the client because he does not fit into your (new) market approach (e.g. small company, poor private individual)
- I) Do not accept the client because you believe he is a trouble maker
- J) Show more size (GGI, co-operations, etc.)
- K) Show more quality (freelancers, co-operation partners, publications, rankings, titles)
- L) Tell the client you spend more money on ongoing training of your staff than on marketing
- M) Change the way of working
- N) Binding contracts
- O) Thanking the client
- P) Re-sell and understand
- Q) Update as you go along
- R) Ask the client if he has a solution
- S) Make the client understand your problem
- T) Communicate beforehand
- U) Make the client feel important and take time to see them

# Case A: Complaints of potential clients



## Find your own favorite match for each complaint (enter the letters)

1. Client says your offer is too expensive - more details required re fees
2. Client says the appearance of your company on the market is not professional enough (compared to Big4)
3. Client says your website is not impressive/up to date
4. Client says that he doubts you come up to his quality expectancy
5. Client wants you to change the terms in the engagement letter
6. Client says you did not react fast enough on his request
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## Your favorite match (letters):

## Case B: Complaints of existing clients



### Brainstorming:

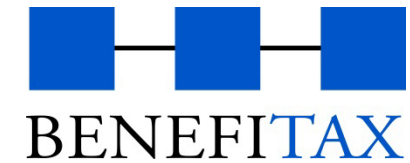
Which situations with existing clients complaining have you come across so far?

Which other situations with clients complaining can you imagine to happen in the future?

Write down as many ideas as you have.

Time: 5 minutes.

# Case B: Complaints of existing clients



## Results from Brainstorming (please add if you have others):

1. Someone in your firm did something wrong
2. Someone in your firm did something too late
3. Client says you are too expensive
4. Client says you have too much staff fluctuation
5. Client is surprised about your invoice and says you should have told him before
6. Client is surprised about an unexpected rule in the fine-print of your engagement letter (e.g. termination of contract only after one year, automatic increase of fees...)
7. Client thinks the quality of the advise of your firm was bad
8. Client tells you another advisor gave him better advice
9. Client tells you another advisor provides the same services for less fees
10. Client tells you he needs a real expert in a specific field and has the impression that you are not that person
11. Client tells you confidential information was disclosed by s.b. of your firm
12. Client tells you he wants to hide money/ evade taxes and you don't give him proper advice
13. You meet a colleague who tells you that your client told him he is unhappy with your services
14. Lack of availability
15. Need a local advisor
16. Need one point of contact – their preferred person
17. Third party recommendations
18. Trust building
19. Quality of the team
20. Personality and cultural clash

## Case B: Complaints of existing clients



### Role Play:

Form two groups. Group A is the client. Group B is the advisor

A member of group A will complain about something.

The respective partner from group B has to respond in a way he feels appropriate.

Please assume that the client does not lie to you. Time to respond: 1 minute.

Form a different couples and do the same with s.b. else four more times.

## Case B: Complaints of existing clients



### Role Play:

Now Group B is the client. Group A is the advisor. Play the same game for 5 times.



## Case B: Complaints of existing clients



**Possible Solutions how to react:**

**Brainstorming:**

Write down as many ideas as you have.

Time: 5 minutes.

# Case B: Complaints of existing clients



## Possible Solutions how to react:

- A) Tell the client you are sorry
- B) Tell the client he will get a one-time reduction
- C) Tell the client you will not raise the fees
- D) Tell the client you will reduce your fees on a regular base
- E) Tell the client you will not reduce your fees. Either he accepts or leaves.
- F) Tell the client if he does not agree you will terminate the agreement with him
- G) Terminate the agreement with the client
- H) Tell the client that he does not fit into your market approach (small company, poor private individual,...)
- I) Tell the client you will ask your staff and come back to him
- J) Have a meeting together with the client and the staff member who caused the trouble
- K) You give reasons why the problem happened and promise it will not happen again
- L) You optimize the organization in your firm so that this mistake does not happen again or install procedures to speed up processes
- M) You ignore the complaint and don't do anything
- N) You offer him a one-time reduction and plan to bill him a few hours more on the next project
- O) You fire the staff member who caused the problem and tell the client
- P) You call your lawyer
- Q) You call your insurance company and inform them about the case
- R) You call your local chamber of chartered accountants/lawyers and inform them
- S) You inform the public prosecutor
- T) Regain their confidence
- U) Improve communication and fix deadline
- V) Make the process more efficient going forward
- W) Take matters in your own hands
- X) Respond before close of business
- Y) Face to face meetings

## Case B: Complaints of existing clients



**Find your own favorite match for each complaint (enter the letters)**

**Your favorite match (letters):**

1. Someone in your firm did something wrong
2. Someone in your firm did something too late
3. Client says you are too expensive
4. Client says you have too much staff fluctuation
5. Client is surprised about your invoice and says you should have told him before
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13. You meet a colleague who tells you that your client told him he is unhappy with your services
14. Lack of availability
15. Need a local advisor
16. Need one point of contact – their preferred person
17. Third party recommendations
18. Trust building
19. Quality of the team
20. Personality and cultural clash

**Coffee break**



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**Please be back at 11.30**

**and I promise two funny videos and more  
about complaint management**

## Case B: Complaints of existing clients



Film about how to complain:

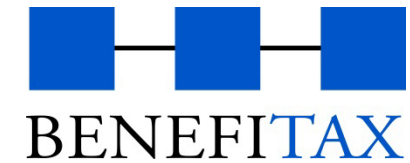
### **How to deal with complaints effectively**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pGQ6Yu6Kn7A&feature=youtu.be>

### **Customer service training video -- Complaints: Five tactics for handling complaints effectively**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsErCieYmxE&feature=youtu.be>

## Case C: Client leaves



### Brainstorming:

Which situations with former clients who terminated the engagement with you have you gone through? How did they inform you about the termination?

Which other situations with clients terminating your engagement can you imagine to happen in the future?

Write down as many ideas as you have.

Time: 5 minutes.

## Case C: Client leaves



### Results from Brainstorming (please add if you have others):

1. Client sends you termination letter (end of engagement) without warning
2. Client calls you and informs you that he will send you a termination letter
3. Client meets you and tells you that he will send you a termination letter
4. You meet a colleague who tells you that your client signed an engagement letter with him
5. You receive a letter from your clients' lawyer that he plans to sue you

## Case C: Client leaves



### Role Play:

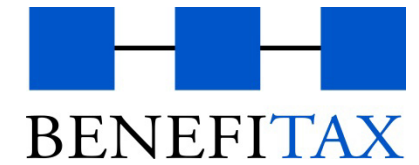
Form two groups. Group A is the client. Group B is the advisor

A member of group A will communicate termination of the engagement.  
The respective partner from group B has to respond in a way he feels appropriate.  
Please assume that the client does not lie to you. Time to respond: 1 minute.

Form a different couples and do the same with s.b. else four more times.



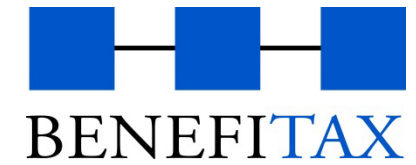
## Case C: Client leaves



### Role Play:

Now Group B is the client. Group A is the advisor. Play the same game for 5 times.

## Case C: Client leaves



**Possible Solutions how to react:**

**Brainstorming:**

Write down as many ideas as you have.

Time: 5 minutes.

## Case C: Client leaves



### Possible Solutions how to react:

- A) Try to get him back
- B) Never contact him again
- C) Promise to do better
- D) Offer reduced fees
- E) Offer better services
- F) Offer something else to him
- G) Wish him all the best and give/send him a present as reward for all the time he has been a client of yours
- H) Contact him again after some time to see how he is doing
- I) Try to find the reason why he left and learn from it. Change processes/approaches/fees/staff etc.
- J) Go home for the rest of the day
- K) Do something nice to get this out of your head
- L) Mention it in a partner's meeting and try to find out what went wrong and what can be done better next time
- M) Adapt your staff plan (you need less staff now)
- N) Retire
- O) Start a 12 month burn-out absence from the office
- P) Allocate a more suitable member of staff to deal with them
- Q) Leave on a good note
- R) Referring clients

## Case C: Client leaves



**Find your own favorite match for each complaint (enter the letters)**

1. Client sends you termination letter (end of engagement) without warning
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**Your favorite match (letters):**

# Recommendations



## Systematically handling complaints

- Consequent collection of mistakes
- Regular evaluation of flaws
- Documentation of mistakes and the consequences
- Documentation of the fault recovery measures
- Familiarisation in operating instructions and checklists
- Determine who has to be informed of which kind of failure (team leader, management)
- Derivation of failure prevention measures (organisational changes, identification of demand for education)
- Surveillance of the efficacy of failure prevention measures
- Inform all affected employees about the failure

# Recommendations



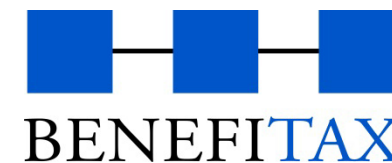
## Complaint Management

A systematic complaint management makes a contribution to failure prevention and thereby to increase the clients satisfaction.

A complaint management should include the following measures:

- Open communication that complaints are welcome
- Arrangements for the transfer of complaints
- Documentation of incoming complaints by a survey form
- Office norm for the association with the person complaining
- Contemporary reaction to the complaint.

# Recommendations



## Complaints and liability issues

Incoming complaints have to be differentiated whether it is „only“ a complaint about an employee’s behaviour, or if it is about the type of cooperation between the client and the office, or if the complaint could result in a client’s claim for compensation towards the office. In case a complaint might result in a liability claim do not acknowledge the claim.

# Recommendations



## Example of how to tackle client complaints

- => Give the client the time to let off the steam
- => Thank the client for mentioning the complaint
- => Express your understanding / sorrow (apologise if necessary)
- => Offer a solution
- => Record the complaint and the solution
- => Solve the problem
- => Enquire the client's satisfaction (after solving the problem)
- => Letter of excuse and „gift of amend“ (if required)



# Role-Play



Form two groups:

Group A is the client. Group B is the advisor

A member of group A will complain about something.

The respective partner from group B has to respond in a way he feels appropriate.

Please assume that the client does not lie to you. Time to respond: 1 minute.

Form a different couples and do the same with s.b. else four more times.

Now Group B is the client. Group A is the advisor. Play the same game for 5 times.

# Thank you for your attention !



**Oliver Biernat**

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Oliver Biernat: Complaint Management Workshop, Warsaw, April 21st, 2016