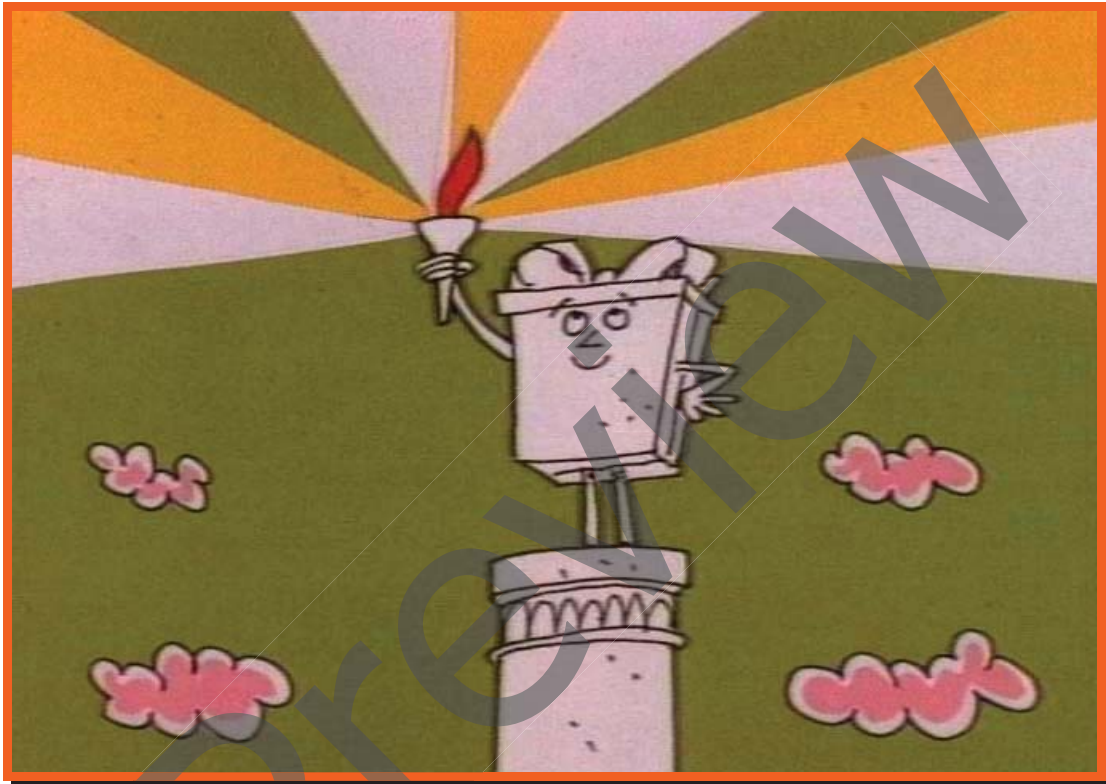


A Complaint is a Gift

Using Customer Feedback as a Strategic Tool



Assessing Your Organization's Complaint Friendliness

An Enterprise Media Release

A Complaint is a Gift Profile

**by Barbara “BJ” Hateley
Janelle Barlow
& Claus Möller**



illustrations by Sam Weiss

INTRODUCTION



This organizational assessment instrument has been designed from concepts and information presented in the book, *A Complaint is a Gift: Using Customer Feedback as a Strategic Tool*,* by Janelle Barlow and Claus Møller, and from the animated training video *A Complaint Is A Gift*,* written by Barbara “BJ” Hateley and Sam Weiss, and produced by Excellence in Training Corporation (ETC). This assessment tool is designed to help managers, supervisors, and employees evaluate the “customer complaint friendliness” of their own organizations.

Customer complaints are a valuable source of information for companies — complaints provide insight into ways in which customer expectations are not being met, as well as what needs to be done to retain valuable customers, keeping them from defecting to competitors. Complaints can also give organizations ideas for *new* products and services!

This instrument gives respondents an opportunity to take a careful look at their own department’s (or organization’s) complaint-handling capabilities — to assess what’s working well, and to pinpoint areas that need improvement.

DIRECTIONS

On the following three pages are twenty-five statements describing organizational complaint handling and complaint management effectiveness. For each statement, circle one number on the scale from **1 (Strongly Disagree)** to **5 (Strongly Agree)** to indicate how well that statement describes *your* department or organization. **Be sure to answer all items.**

Important: Focus of Your Responses

This assessment tool can be used to evaluate your department, a division of your company, or the whole organization. You may have quite different views about each of these. It is important that you clearly focus on only **one** group you are describing. Stay focused on that same group as you respond to all 25 statements. Indicate below which group you are evaluating:

- ☐ my department
- ☐ my division
- ☐ my entire organization
- ☐ other _____

A Complaint is a Gift Profile

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
21. Management understands that our organization's future depends on satisfied, loyal customers, and that complaints can help develop both our organization and our employees.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Our practice is that customers who complain in writing are thanked within two days, and receive a final reply within two weeks.	1	2	3	4	5
23. We learn from our mistakes within our organization — we correct them — and we work hard to avoid making them again.	1	2	3	4	5
24. We believe our customers when they describe their complaints to us.	1	2	3	4	5
25. We view customers who complain as friends who should be thanked for bringing us gifts.	1	2	3	4	5

SCORING YOUR COMPLAINT IS A GIFT PROFILE



Directions

Please detach this page along the perforation. On the reverse side of this page, you will find a tally page. Write in the numbers that you circled for the 25 statements — making sure there is a number in each box corresponding to each statement.

Total each of the five columns of numbers to determine your five subscores (Organization's Complaint Philosophy; Complaint Handling by Employees; Internal Complaints; Policies and Procedures; Management Practices) — then add these five subscores together to determine your total "Complaint is a Gift" score.

Next, transfer all five of your subscores, as well as your total scores, from the page 6 tally sheet to the "Complaint Handling" chart on page 7.

The following pages provide a framework for interpreting and understanding your scores. A series of discussion questions will help you and others in your group look at possibilities for improving complaint handling and building customer loyalty. A final section includes strategies for managers, as well as suggestions for employees.

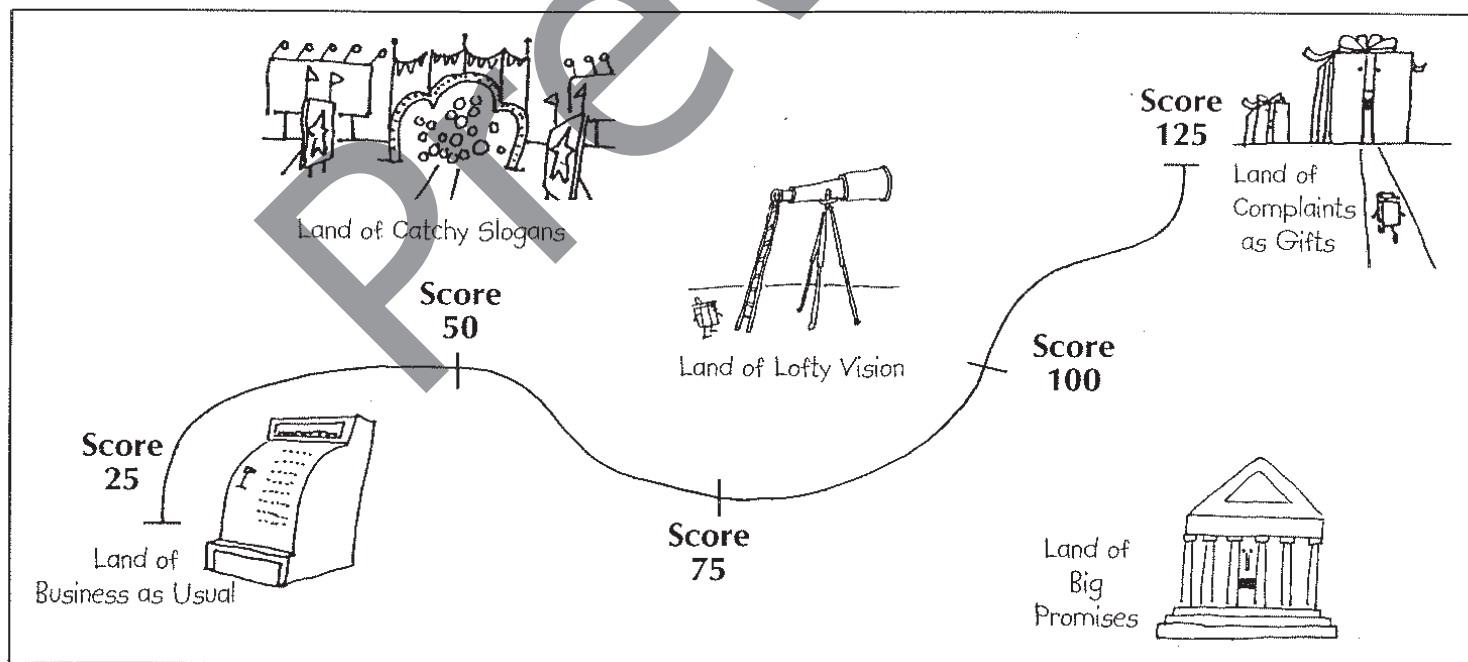
NOTE: If you are using this assessment tool in a seminar, or as part of a customer service survey in your organization, you may be asked to provide your scores to someone so that they can be compiled into an overall evaluation of your department, division, or organization. This combined data can provide a good "snapshot" of how effectively customer complaints are currently being handled, and whether or not you might be losing valuable customers without even knowing it.

HOW DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION OPERATE?

... like the "Land of Business as Usual" ...
or, like the "Land of Complaints as Gifts"?

In the animated video, *A Complaint Is A Gift*, the hero of the story is a little character named Complaint. Complaint lived in the "Land of Business as Usual," where he wasn't treated very well. He was ignored, passed from person to person, made to wait in long lines, made to fill out endless forms, and endured numerous other frustrating experiences. Finally, fed up with the "Land of Business as Usual," Complaint leaves in search of a place that will listen to him and treat him well. He visits the "Land of Catchy Slogans," which sounds good — but turns out to be nothing but hot air. He then travels to the "Land of Big Promises," where he believes their assurances that he'll be treated right — only to find out that their promises have many loopholes. From there, he journeys to the "Land of Lofty Vision," sure that this time he has found the right place — only to be disappointed one more time. Finally, he arrives in the "Land of Complaints," where, much to his surprise and delight, he is treated well, listened to, and appreciated. In this land, everyone knows that "A Complaint Is A Gift!"

How does *your* organization operate? Would our hero Complaint be welcomed and treated well where you work? On the path below, please make an X marking the spot that represents the **Total Score** you gave your organization on this assessment.



Has your organization gotten sidetracked, or taken a detour to one of the other "Lands"? Have you gotten so caught up in "catchy slogans" that buttons are more important than fixing customer problems? Are your "promises" good only so long as your customers don't try to utilize them? Have you been so focused on your "envisioned future" that you have no time for today's complaints? Continue reading the next section of this booklet for further discussion of your organization.

ANALYZING YOUR ORGANIZATION'S SCORE



TOTAL SCORE:

It is doubtful that any department, division, or organization scores a perfect 125 on this assessment of "Complaint Friendliness." It is perhaps where we would *like* to be — but few are there yet. There is probably still some room for improvement, no matter how good an organization is at complaint handling and complaint management.

The important thing to focus on is: "How big is the distance between the score you gave your organization and a perfect score of 125?"

If your organization scored somewhere in the middle, then there is still some work to be done in terms of making your organization more complaint friendly. Maybe policies and procedures need to be streamlined. Front line employees may need more training in handling complaints. Perhaps management needs to address systemic issues that keep the same problems recurring again and again. It could also be that your external customers' complaints are handled well, but internal customers could use some attention.

If your total organizational score is low, then you probably have some serious concerns about your management's true commitment to customer satisfaction. Some organizations say all the right things, but their actions do not support what they say in their mission statements or promote in their advertising. As an individual, you can play a useful role in helping by pointing out the need for change and always working to increase the satisfaction of the customers that *you* deal with personally.

As you review the total score you have given to your department, division, or organization, you may want to discuss the questions on the following pages with others in your group as you consider options for making positive change.

How big is the gap between your organization's score and a perfect score of 125? What role should management play in closing the gap? What role do **you** want to play in helping to close the gap?

-
-
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-

How much do your scores agree with the scores that your co-workers gave the organization? Are your perceptions very similar or very different? Why do you think this is so?

-
-
-
-

If you had filled out this instrument a year or two ago, would your scores have been the same or different? Higher or lower? What factors make your organization complaint friendly? What factors get in the way of being complaint friendly?

-
-
-
-

Are there people in your organization who "shoot messengers"? That is, are customer complaints and employee complaints actively **discouraged** by management? Why do you think this is so?

-
-
-
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Barbara “BJ” Hateley is an accomplished management consultant and workshop leader, as well as a successful author and filmmaker. Her areas of expertise include: customer service, sales training, teambuilding, valuing diversity, success skills, communication, motivation, and management development. She has worked with many corporate clients, as well as professional associations, nonprofit groups, and government agencies. Her impressive client list includes: Chrysler Corporation, Southern California Edison, *The Los Angeles Times*, American Press Institute, Butterworth Hospital, American Lung Association, City of Santa Monica, U.S. Immigration & Naturalization Service, Baxter Pharmaseal, ReadyPac Produce, among others.

Prior to starting her own training company in 1991, she served as the Manager of Training and Development for *The Los Angeles Times*; before that, she was the Director of Staff Training and Professional Development for the University of Southern California. She has published articles in *The Los Angeles Times*, *Training Magazine*, and *Training and Development Journal*. She is the co-author (with Warren H. Schmidt) of the book, *A Peacock in the Land of Penguins: A Tale of Diversity and Discovery* (Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco, 1995 & 1997) which is currently published in eleven languages worldwide. Hateley and Schmidt adapted their book into CRM’s best-selling animated training video, *A Peacock in the Land of Penguins*. Ms. Hateley is also the screenwriter and producer of the animated video *A Complaint Is A Gift*, produced and distributed by Excellence in Training Corporation (ETC).

Ms. Hateley graduated Phi Beta Kappa and Summa Cum Laude from USC, with a B.A. in Sociology, and she has completed the course work for a doctorate in Social Ethics, also at USC.

Janelle Barlow, Ph.D., is the co-author (with Claus Møller) of the book, *A Complaint is a Gift: Using Customer Feedback as a Strategic Tool* (Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco, 1996), upon which the video by the same name is based. She is an international business consultant and seminar leader, public speaker, and published author, who has worked extensively in Europe and Asia, as well as the United States. She is the president of TMI USA, a division of the highly respected and well-known European training and consulting company, TMI, International. TMI is probably best known as the training company that worked with Jan Carlzon in “turning around” SAS — transforming it into a phenomenal success story — emulated by many other companies as the epitome of service excellence, front-line empowerment, and “moments of truth” for customers. TMI USA’s customers include: America West Airlines, AT&T, Chevron, Black & Decker, and many other Fortune 500 companies.

Dr. Barlow also authored *The Stress Manager*, a book used in the popular TMI course by the same name. In addition, she developed a management training program, *Unbind Your Mind: The Freedom to be Creative*, designed to teach business people to be more creative.

Dr. Barlow earned her Ph.D. in political science and education at U.C. Berkeley. She has a master's degree in international relations from the University of Pittsburgh, and a second master's degree in psychology from Sonoma State, in California.

Claus Møller is the founder and chairman of TMI International, one of the world's largest training and consulting companies, with representatives in 48 countries. Claus Møller is a Danish business economist, who acts as a senior level advisor to numerous European governments and companies, as well as maintaining an international speaking career. He is the best-selling author of several TMI-published books, including *Putting People First*, *Personal Quality*, *Employeeeship*, and *My Life Tree*. The British Broadcasting Company (BBC) has produced a popular television program about Claus Møller and his consulting work, and in 1991 he was named "European Quality Guru" by the British Department of Trade and Industry.

He oversees a world-wide training organization, with over 150 subject matter experts presenting TMI programs in 24 different languages. Each year more than 250,000 people from large and small organizations all over the world attend TMI programs to learn how to better manage time, people, and performance; to deliver exceptional service and quality; to manage culture change; and to treat customer complaints as gifts.

Claus Møller is a graduate of the Copenhagen School of Economics and Business Administration, and worked as a senior executive of operations and marketing with an international service company until 1975, when he founded TMI.