



PROACTIVE  
COMPLAINTS  
MANAGEMENT

TRAINING • COACHING • CASE MANAGEMENT

## Responding to unreasonable complainant conduct

When confronted with an unreasonable complainant we may feel threatened, angry, aggrieved and in most instances we just want nothing to do with them, this is a natural human response.

No one goes to work expecting to be threatened or demeaned nor should they therefore what strategies can we employ to deal with such an event?

The following strategies may provide some assistance if there comes a time (we hope there won't!), that you may need to deal with an unreasonable complainant.

### ***1. Recognise the danger signals and review your risk strategies***

- Recognise the signs of a customer's anger/aggression e.g. raised voice, threatening stance, verbal abuse.
- Ask yourself - *"Am I or my staff in any danger?"*
- If "Yes", immediately remove yourself and your staff from harm's way.
- Inform the complainant as you're leaving the meeting or the area that the meeting is taking place that the meeting is now over e.g. *"I cannot continue with the meeting/interview while you are behaving in an angry way or making threats"*
- If the complainants behaviour improves then consider reconvening the meeting therefore the meeting is based on conduct rules i.e. code of conduct.

### ***2. Repeating***

- Clarify any threats e.g. *"Did you just say"* – ensure that the complainant takes ownership of any threat and ensure that you use the complainants words as far as possible
- Ask the client if this is what they meant when they made their statement e.g. *"Is this what you meant by this statement?"*, *"Are you threatening me?"*

### **3. Reacting**

- Any threat should be acknowledged, irrespective whether the threat is overt or covert towards yourself or others.
- Always show some reaction to a threat even if minimal – *“I will need a 5 minute break to process the threat you just made against me or against ...”*
- Do not over react or mirror the threatening language or threatening behaviour.
- Continue to show respect even when the person is being rude or threatening – DO NOT MIRROR THEIR BEHAVIOUR – DO NOT ENGAGE IN AN EXCHANGE OF ANGER!!!

### **4. Responding**

- Ask the customer to stop/cease any unreasonable behaviour e.g. *“Mr/Mrs stop shouting at me otherwise I will end this conversation”*
- Advise the other party very clearly what the consequences will be if they continue to display their behaviour e.g. *“If you continue shouting or being abusive I will end this meeting immediately or I may call the police”*.

### **5. Redirecting**

- Do not reward the behaviour, ensure that you use comments that are contained within your organisations code of conduct.
- Attempt to move the client towards their issues that they are complaining about e.g. *“You advised that you have a complaint about... can you please provide me with more information on this issue?”*
- Take a 5 minute break or offer the complainant time to regain your thoughts.

### **6. Refocusing**

- Attempt to assist the complainant to bring their emotions under control, this could be achieved by refocussing their attention on their current issues/complaint(s), e.g. *“Are you please able to explain to me what has occurred/happened?”*

### **7. Raising Concerns**

- If you feel threatened or are of the view that you are in any danger leave the room and/or call for assistance e.g. *“I need to get some paperwork I will be back in one minute”, “I am ending this meeting immediately I do not feel safe to continue”*

## **8. Record keeping**

- Ensure that you record as accurately as possible either immediately after the meeting or shortly afterwards any threats that may have been made against you or another person.

## **9. Reporting/Review Process**

- Report the matter to a supervisor/manager so that you can review your responses to the threatening behaviour and identify strategies to manage or control any future interactions with the party.
- Staff may require a formal debrief after the incident.

As a final point please be advised, that for some complainants they may be of the view that they haven't been heard even though they have raised their concerns on a number of occasions.

Be mindful not to label immediately as being aggressive – grief, guilt, distress and distrust may also be at the core of their behaviour

Here at Proactive Complaints Management we are able to tailor a training program to meet your organisational needs, for further information please contact Steve Aivaliotis on +61 418 313 303, via email [steve@proactivecm.com.au](mailto:steve@proactivecm.com.au) or check out our website [www.proactivecm.com.au](http://www.proactivecm.com.au)