

Flip It

turning complaints into conversations

When someone brings you a complaint, your response in the next few minutes will determine whether the conversation escalates into conflict or transforms into genuine connection and resolution. Most of us instinctively defend, explain, or rush to fix the problem—all of which can backfire by making the other person feel unheard. This five-step process gives you a clear roadmap for navigating complaint conversations with confidence. Remember to pause!

01

ACKNOWLEDGE WITHOUT AGREEING

Acknowledge their experience without taking blame or agreeing
Create safety for them to express themselves
Allow them to let their guard down
You are not saying, "You are right" or "I'm sorry"

"I hear you"
"Thank you for bringing this to my attention"

Recognize their feelings as real and understandable
You can validate feelings even when you disagree
Sometimes validation alone is enough
Most people just want to be heard

02

VALIDATE THE EMOTION

"That makes sense"
Name it to tame it: "This sounds hard/stressful"
"I understand why you feel that way"

03

EXPLORE THE UNDERLYING NEED

Distinguish between the surface complaint (what they are saying) versus the underlying need (what they actually need or want)
Common underlying needs: respect, trust, fairness, recognition, practical solution

Repeat what you heard but as a question
"Help me understand"
"Tell me more"

Curiosity is the antidote to defensiveness
Questions invite thinking, not just venting and signal you value their input

04

CREATE DIALOGUE BY GETTING CURIOUS

"What would make this right for you"
"What are you most concerned about right now?"

05

CO-CREATE SOLUTIONS

Sometimes people just want to vent -- let them
Co-creation builds partnerships and makes people more invested
Avoids offering something they really don't want

"What do you think would be a fair way to make this right?"
"Based on what you've shared, I have some options for you."
"I wish I could do X but I can't because (reason). Here is what I can do"