1. **Introduction**

Hi! I’m Chris Nuttall. Welcome to this NCAB Academy session!

Now first of all, I want to thank you for making the time to participate in this NCAB Academy session. I know you are very busy, so thank you.

Now, this course is not a course where you will be graded at the end of the session. Because you have started this course, my thank you to you, is to give your grade at the very start. The grade I’ll give you is not an A, B or C… that is just too straightforward and too simple. Today I’ll give you an ‘O’. Why an ‘O’? Well that’s because you are all **outstanding**. I mean, if you can do your daily jobs as well as you do, then this course should be a walk in the park.

This course is about dealing with complaints. That seems negative right? Well actually, no. There is an opportunity in every furious customer, **if** (and that’s a big if) you handle the situation in an **outstanding** way.

You work hard every day to do things right – as you should. But – I’m not going to lie to you – here at NCAB, where so many moving parts need to come together perfectly in order to provide that perfect PCB, you will experience problems at some time. So, turn it to your advantage.

Anyone can do a good job when all goes well, so it’s hard to prove your worth under good conditions. Therefore, dealing with complaints may be a negative activity for some suppliers, but for **you**, it’s an opportunity to show your customers how **outstanding** we are here at NCAB. Doing hard things well builds trust, and it’s such a **relief** for customers to have a supplier that they can trust during the hard times.

So do **not** waste time trying to explain or justify why this is not your fault. It’s traders that blame… NCAB does not. It’s about **Full responsibility.** Remember, you have what it takes to find solutions for the customer, and to achieve this you must **lean into** the problem.

**Don’t shy away – lean in.**

1. **The Mindset**

We are all human, and all humans have a remaining piece of dinosaur brain that absolutely wants to avoid problems. Nowadays, this is shown in a civilized way by not answering the phone, or blaming others (the factory, the weather, the customer – anybody). This behavior is very common; even competent people may sometimes do it.

But, when you set your mind to **outstanding**, it means something beyond just being just competent. Competence is not a bad thing – I’m sure we achieve that every day – but just being **just** competent may not be enough to handle a frustrated customer.

Sometimes, it is obvious that a problem is caused either by our actions, or those of the customer. But quite often it’s somewhere in between*.* This determines who will eventually own the liability, and therefore perhaps the costs, and as businesspeople (and dinosaurs) it is tempting to focus on pushing the blame over to the customer as soon as possible. That is a very bad idea.

The first part of being outstanding is this: **when you see the problem, own it**. Switch off your problem avoiding-instincts and switch on your outstanding instincts, so that you start working at this problem with a mindset that you are going to win a gold star.

Any complaint will have twoelements: a **problem** and a **person**. It never **starts** on a personal level, but when a customer sees a problem, he or she will start worrying about what impact this may have on them. The longer we let them worry, the more personal it gets. So if you leave them alone in their worrying, the personal element will grow.

The supplier who is just competent, will deal with the problem while thinking it’s very annoying how the customer’s emotions make his work harder. So, a worried and angry customer is now also personally insulted by this supplier’s lack of empathy and lack of responsibility.

The best advice I can give you here is to ALWAYS separate the person and the problem, and to **ALWAYS deal with the person FIRST**. **Lean in** to the person. This gives you a chance – not just to fix the problem - but to come out ahead, with **a stronger relationship** with the customer than what you had before. The **outstanding** supplier – and hey, I’m talking about you here now – realizes that even when the **problem** may be the customer’s fault, you can take responsibility for the **person**. When the customer sees that you are helpful, that you are supporting them to fix the problem, they become easier to work with. And in doing that, now both of you can focus on what the priorities are, what can be done, where you should start.

**Don’t shy away – lean in – to the person.**

1. **Lean in**

OK, now I hope that you all agree that the outstanding way to handle complaints is to **lean into** the customer, to get close to them.

There are five steps in LEANING IN to the customer, and I’ll take them one at a time:

1. **CALL THEM**
Yes, CALL them… Not an e-mail, but an actual call. And you have to prepare for the call, for example: you might need to call factory management, or the factory, to understand best possible lead times in a recovery order. Or it might involve preparing and lining up technicians to be part of the call.
Now of course, a **competent** person might first send a well phrased e-mail.
The **outstanding** approach is to connect personally. This may involve letting the customer vent, or talk rather loudly, if they need to. At this point, don’t defend, explain, or try to argue – your job **at this point** is to understand the customer’s perspective.
2. **HOW DOES THIS IMPACT THEM?**The more we know, the better conclusions we can draw. Wouldn’t it be great if we had a good technique for asking questions… Wait, we do! Remember **open questions**, and **SPIN**? Now it’s time to put them to the test.
A **competent** person would start by referring to the contract by a way of protection.
The **outstanding** approach is to ask questions like:

*How exactly is the problem being seen?
What do they perceive as the problem?*

*What problems is this causing to production or to the finished product? (Again, the more we know – the more we can start work on correcting it.)*

*What is the impact to the project, and how is this impacting your production needs and your relationship with your customer?*

*What is the immediate quantity you need to get things moving?*

1. **RECOGNIZE THEIR PERSPECTIVE**This is about **confirming** your understanding of what the customer is telling you. For example, “Let me check that I got this right…”, and then go through the points to ensure that you are aligned.
A **competent** person would start to explain **his/her** views.
The **outstanding** approach is to make sure the customer knows that you are interested, that you understand, and that you want to help them fix this.
2. **“I GOT THIS**”
This is where we show the customer that we have already started working towards a solution. For example, it may be that you’ve already contacted the factory to book or reserve material for any remakes, or that we’ve already started engaging with the technicians to work towards the solution.
A **competent** person would want to start with terms and conditions, and asked the customer that they’ve got to sign documents before we can start to do anything.
The **outstanding** approach is to **lean in**. You show that you **want** to take **Full Responsibility**, regardless of whose fault this is, or even if it is not a board fault, YOU want to help them find the best solution to their problem.
3. **SOLUTIONS**This is a big subject, so I’m going to talk about this in a little bit more detail in the next session.

Now, there are five steps that we’ve gone through. And quite incidentally, this process spells **CHRIS**. What an amazing coincidence! Easy to remember, isn’t it? Well, at least I think it is.

1. **Solutions**

Sometimes, complaint handling is quite difficult, even with an **outstanding** mindset. There WILL be times when you and the customer do not agree on the ‘facts’. For example, boards that are late against the REQUESTED date, yet on time against the CONFIRMED date. Or, when the board meets the technical specification, but is perhaps not in line with what the customer WISHED was in the technical specification.

And when this happens, step 4 in the CHRIS-process – the “I GOT THIS”-step – becomes a bit tricky. You can LEAN IN, but you do not want to take full **financial** responsibility if it’s obvious that we have fulfilled the obligations of the purchase order.

For the **just competent** person, this type of situation is a huge relief; “Well, call me if I can help you. Good luck solving your problem!” With an **outstanding** mindset, you can’t do that. You don’t **want** to do that.

You *will* need to manage the gap between what you believe you have agreed to work to, and what the customer perceived (or wished) you had agreed upon. To do this, and move into the Solutions-stage, you have to discuss each person’s perspective. Documenting and focusing upon the ***facts***.

It’s important here that you don’t downplay or shy away from the differences – because this is where you form the solution. As always: **lean in** – be clear that you still want to work with them on solutions. When doing this, it’s important to remember that you’re not arguing about perception – you’re working towards preventing similar problems from arising in the future.

Once you have agreed on the facts, you can focus on the solutions – even if the fact is that we have **not** caused the problem. With your **outstanding** mindset, you can still help to find a solution for the customer based on their needs. Remember, we’ve got some really good techniques for getting to what are the needs of the customer [HEED the NEED, open questions & SPIN].

There are some points that I really want you to remember:

* **Never over commit** or agree to something you are not sure about. Do not be afraid to tell the customer that we need a little bit more time to check some facts/elements before we can fully commit. And if you need to – get help from your colleagues. But it’s important that we always under promise & over deliver.
* **Always use positive language**.
Example (without positive language): “I can't get you that part number until WAY into next month; lead times are currently running really really long.”

Example (**with** positive language): “I can get if from the factory next month. I will arrange our customer service team contact you and see what we can do about arranging that order and getting it into production as quick as we can.
Now, which one, as the customer, would you be happier with?

* **Always be happy to negotiate** on solutions. And remember – if you‘ve got to give something away, get something back in return.
* **And always be bold.** If we are not at fault, then don’t be afraid to keep that in mind when working on the solutions. Of course, be supportive, absolutely – but do not be afraid to stand your ground.

Doing this, and leaning in to the customer and we can see that a complaint becomes an opportunity to earn a gold star back.

1. **Summary**

OK, it’s time to summarize everything we’ve covered today.

**Call the customer**

The competent approach: “I really don’t want to deal with claims. I wish someone else would pick up this claim, if not… I will mail them tomorrow.”

The outstanding approach: “The **customer** is the most important element in this problem, so I am going to call them immediately and get this process started.”

**How does it impact you?**

The competent approach: “I need to focus on the **problem** first, so the customer can wait until I have gathered as much information as I can. I’ll talk to them tomorrow.”

The outstanding approach: “This a chance to **help** the customer. They need **my** support, and they need to hear from me now.”

**Recognize the customer’s perspective**

The competent approach: “In my view, this can’t be a board problem. This is what the **specification** calls for, so this is what you get.”

The outstanding approach: “I **understand** this is causing you problems, so I want to work with you on fixing the problem, and **preventing** it from happening again.”

**I got this**

The competent approach: “This is a **stupid factory**! I will mail the customer and tell them exactly how stupid this stupid factory is!”

The outstanding approach: “Let the customer know I am going to **own** the problem, and work **with** them on achieving the best solution.”

**Solutions**

The competent approach: “This is all we can do. It’s company policy – I can’t do any more.”

The outstanding approach: “Be **positive**. Be happy to **negotiate** on what we can do and what we need to look into before committing. And be brave enough to ask for a second opinion from a colleague.

Now, if you remember all this then… **OUTSTANDING!**