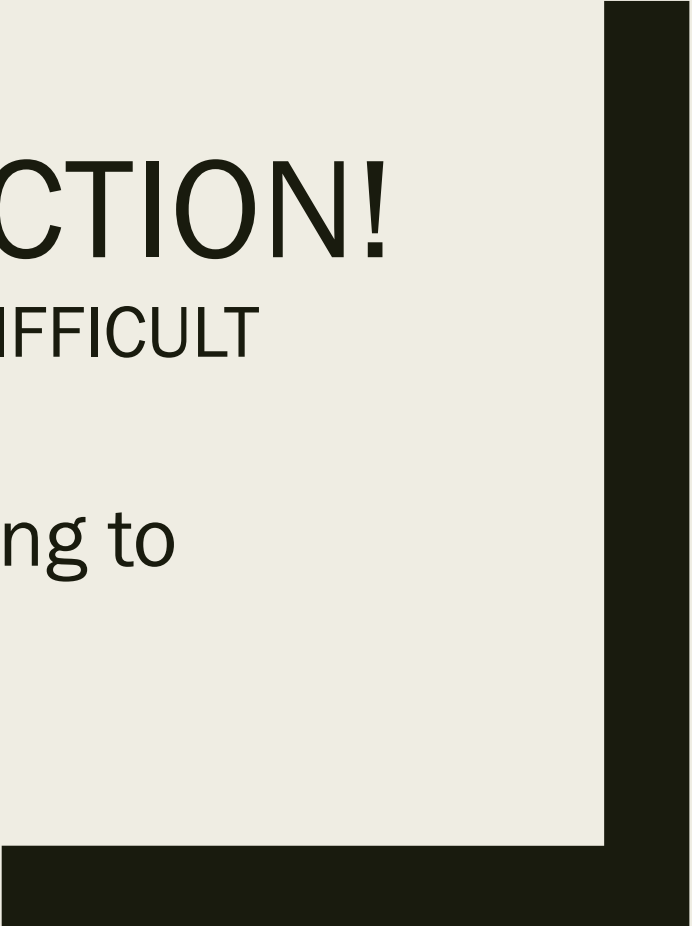




# DE-ESCALATION IN ACTION!

PREPARING FOR AND MANAGING DIFFICULT  
COMPLAINTS

You just **know** someone's going to  
complain...



# Why do we “have to” \*\* deal with complaints?

- \*\* Have to...
- Everybody has an...  
**ANGER BABY** inside of  
them!
- Our main “complainers”

# What will we accomplish today?

- Get to the REAL PROBLEM
- Explore our resources for dealing with the person's problem
- Create an arrow for your quiver – the BEST solution

- In 2024, Ontarians submitted 70,293 freedom of information requests, more than a 6% increase over the previous year
- The City of Ottawa experienced a 17% increase 2024 over 2023
- Historically, municipalities in Zone 5 have demonstrated strong administrative efficiency; for instance, only 4% of municipalities in this zone reported challenges recruiting staff, the lowest rate in Ontario, which typically supports consistent FOI processing times



THE BAD  
NEWS? WE  
OFTEN DON'T  
HEAR THE BAD  
NEWS.....

News of bad customer service reaches more than **twice as many** ears as praise for a good service experience.



### The Takeaway

Take the time to address unhappy customers and do everything in your power to remedy the situation. It's not only worth keeping their business, but also avoiding any negative word of mouth exposure.

Source: White House Office of Consumer Affairs



# Customer Service at it's best...

- <https://youtu.be/yZnCYtuZtoY?si=5smvml2n8suJW271>

# The Back Story

- In a Hollywood script – the back-story is the history behind the plot that the viewer doesn't see...
- Behind EVERY irate person... there is a back-story:
  - *You want to do something on your property*
  - *Your neighbour has done something on THEIR property that impacts you*
  - *Financial hardship – or potential*
  - *Family dynamic*

# Listen and Learn

- Radical listening! Soak up ALL you can about the circumstances
- LET THEM DUMP THEIR BUCKET UNTIL IT'S EMPTY
- Don't rush to react
- Don't offer solutions too early
- Let them VENT!

# Let the volcano blow!

- This person wouldn't be so upset if they weren't confident they were RIGHT!
- Resist the urge to self-defend and instead....
- LET THE VOLCANO BLOW!
  - Eventually.... It will run out of lava!

# RADICAL LISTENING

- Purposefully focusing on both the intent of the speaker and what's being said
- The goal of this interaction ISN'T to assign blame – the goal is to try to understand the origin of the problem
- Avoid becoming yet another part of the crisis

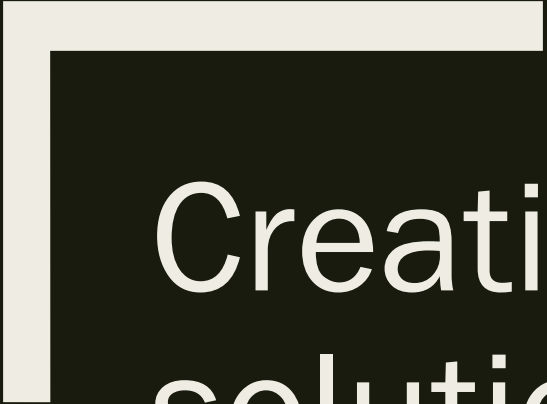
# Separate the problem from the person

- Chances are that the upset person isn't trying to upset YOU  
– but that is the impact you feel
- You must separate the impact (on you) from the facts
- Talk about “it” the problem and not about “you”
- Solutions can be determined through sources (by-laws, the Municipal Act, colleagues, historical process, etc) but only after you've discovered the source of the problem



# Preparing for the solution

- Being positive doesn't mean that you are oblivious to all "problems"
- Positive people have a great way of thinking and "seeing" things that will improve situations
- Don't rush to react – it took a while for this problem to percolate!



# Creating a solution

- Listen (radical listening!)
- Ask questions to confirm understanding
- State the root problem
- Tell the person what you are going to investigate and how you will do that
- Commit to a timeline
- Follow-up



**BRING IT ON!**

# Working Session!

- Table talk time! Appoint a “spokesperson”
- We are going to look at our TOP FOUR complaints/situations
- Select one person to be the “resident/colleague/Council member” with the complaint
- The group practices using the process

Here are our  
TOP four  
issues to  
tackle today!

Staff receive long, aggressive emails – usually after hours!

Residents put staff in the middle expecting support for one side

Multiple emails and calls demanding action – NOW!

Disrespectful Council members



# The Process!

- Listen (radical listening!)
- Ask questions to confirm understanding
- State the root problem
- Tell the person what you are going to investigate and how you will do that
- Commit to a timeline
- Follow-up

**DEBRIEF!!**

Switch  
*HAVE* to

*GET*.....

Why do we **HAVE** to  
deal with  
complaints?

I **GET** to deal with  
complaints!



NEWSFLASH!!! This is an election year!

Suggestion:

Explain your “*Complaint Management Process*”  
during your new Council orientation

You can't  
control the  
situation...  
but...

YOU are in control of how you think

YOU are in control of how you feel

YOU have access to the resources

And most importantly...

YOU are in control of how you react!



# AMCTO Principles:

Service Excellence

Sector engagement

Accountability and transparency

Accessibility and inclusion

Organizational sustainability

# What have we accomplished today:

- The importance of complaints
  - Listening
  - ACTION
  - A new arrow for your quiver!
- 
- Thank you!!!!