Avanti | Academy

AVANTI ACADEMY IN PRACTICE

Put It Right

Complaints and apology in practice

Workbook

Dr Jonathan Huish & Dr Amanda Milliner

© Avanti Change Ltd 2026. All rights reserved.

How to use this workbook

Each part of Put It Right includes a short Try it activity. When the narration invites you to pause, turn to the matching sheet here and take ten minutes or so to work through it for your own role. There are no right answers. The point is to leave with something you will actually do. Keep your completed sheets: they make a useful record for supervision, appraisal or your personal development plan.

Part 1 · Why Complaints Matter

Find the complaints hiding in your week

Choose five recent contacts from your own work. For each, decide whether the person was unhappy with something your service did or did not do, and what happened next. Then choose one habit you will change, and the words you will use.

Contacts one to five: what did each person say, in their own words?
Was there dissatisfaction, even without the word complaint?
Was it recorded, linked to previous contacts and answered?
The words I will use next time someone sounds unhappy:

To reflect on: *Think of the last time someone was unhappy with your service but never used the word complaint. What happened to what they told you?*

Is what they told us honoured?

Choose one person you deal with often, or who has complained. Check their record for what they have told you about their needs, check whether their recent contacts honoured it, and put one thing right.

What has this person told us about their needs or preferences?
Is it recorded in plain words where the next person will see it?
Were their last contacts made the way they asked? If not, where did it get lost?
The one thing I will put right, and who needs to know:

To reflect on: *When did you last say back what someone told you before answering? What difference did it make, or might it have made?*

Test a response against the code

Take a recent complaint response you wrote or signed off, and your organisation's complaints procedure. Check the floor, check it from the person's side, and check the route to the ombudsman. Note one change for next time.

When was the complaint first raised, and when was it logged?
Were the stages and timescales met, or were delays explained?
What did the person actually ask, and did we answer it?
Is the route to the ombudsman clear and easy to find?
One change I will make to my next response:

To reflect on: *Think of a complaint your team handled on time that still left the person unhappy. What would have made the difference?*

Rewrite one apology

Find a real apology from your work: a letter, an email, a template paragraph or the words you use on the phone. Read it aloud, mark what weakens it, then rewrite it so that it names what happened, owns it and puts it right.

The original apology, as it stands:
Who did what, to whom, and what happens now? Is each clear?
Passive voice, buts and ifs I found:
My rewrite, naming the action, the impact and the remedy:
What a colleague said when they read it:

To reflect on: *Think of an apology you received that really landed. What did it do that a stock reply does not?*

Find the failure demand

Take the contacts you or your team handled in one recent day, or a week's complaints. Sort them into value demand and failure demand, find the biggest pile, and name one cause in the system and who could change it.

Value demand I saw, meaning what the service exists for:
Failure demand I saw, in people's own words:
The biggest pile, and what made it likely:
Who could change it, and when I will take it to them:

To reflect on: *Which complaint does your team keep closing, only for it to come back from someone else? What might be making it likely?*

My practice plan

Write a short plan for your own complaint handling in five parts: hear, put right, say sorry, learn and tell. Keep each part to a line or two, set a date to review it, and share it with one person you trust.

Hear: my habit for the first minute, and how I will spot repeats
Put right: what I can fix on the spot, and who I call when I cannot
Say sorry: my own apology wording
Learn: one cause I will chase, who can change it and when
Tell: who I will go back to, and the date I will review this plan

To reflect on: *Where might a concern in your service be raised several times before anyone joins it up? What would help you spot it sooner?*

© Avanti Change Ltd 2026. For the personal use of the participant. Composite examples in this programme are invented and do not describe any real person or organisation.