



The Complaint Triangle: The System Behind Every Guest Issue

Most hospitality managers think they have a guest complaint problem.

But they don't.

They have a system problem that shows up as a guest complaint.

After 25+ years in hospitality operations, I created a simple model that explains 99% of all complaints: The Complaint Triangle.

Every guest issue comes from one of these three sources:

1. **SYSTEM FAILURE** — Not staff. Not guests. The system.

This includes:

- unclear procedures
- missing handovers
- broken workflows
- no cleaning or prep standards
- inconsistent shift routines
- no escalation rules

When the system is broken, people can't succeed — even if they want to.



2. SKILL FAILURE — The team never learned how to do it.

Not bad intentions. Not laziness. Just missing skills.

Common examples:

- conflict handling
- prioritization
- technical service skills
- decision-making
- communication under pressure

Skills don't grow on their own.

They must be trained, reinforced and supported.

3. WILL FAILURE — A motivation or attitude breakdown.

This is the one most managers immediately blame.

But in reality, will failure usually comes from:

- unclear expectations
- inconsistent leadership
- burnout
- overwhelming pressure
- lack of feedback
- no recognition

People rarely “don't care”.

They stop caring when the environment stops supporting them.



HOW STRONGHOLD USES THE COMPLAINT TRIANGLE

When I enter an operation, we analyze complaints like this:

Is it a **SYSTEM** issue?

Is it a **SKILL** issue?

Is it a **WILL** issue?

The moment you identify which point of the triangle is failing, the solution becomes simple and direct.

And most importantly:

80% of guest complaints disappear when the system is fixed.

Not through “motivating staff”.

Not through “better attitude”. Through structure.

IF YOU LEAD A HOSPITALITY OPERATION, TRY THIS:

Next time a complaint comes in, ask:

7. What system allowed this to happen?

8. Does the team have the skill to prevent it?

9. Does the team have the will — and if not, why?

Your entire approach to operations will change.



Hospitality doesn't fail because of guests.

It fails because of missing structure.

Fix the system ➤ the symptoms disappear.

**If you want to implement the Complaint Triangle in
your operation,
I'm here to help.**