Working in a
Customer Service
Culture

Customer Service
Skills

Student
Workbook

ExperienceWorks
Changing lives. Making a difference.
**Introduction:** Welcome to customer service skills training. Every job or position has some degree of customer interaction. This includes customers that come to a business or organization for a product or service, or customers within the business that rely on others to provide information, help or support. In this course we will explore different aspects of customer service.

**Objectives:** As a result of the completion of this course you will be able to:

- Define: what is a customer
- Identify customers, both external and internal
- Describe excellent customer service
- Explain your role as an employee or business owner in providing the best customer service possible
- Describe the steps to take when resolving customer issues and dealing with angry customers
Setting the Stage:

“What is a customer?”

• A customer includes any individual or group who has purchased/used, or is considering purchasing/using, a product or service from a company or organization.

• The term customer also includes anyone that uses or experiences the services of another.

Every customer has their own expectations. Here is some recent data that sheds a light on what customers are saying is important to them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>% most important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledgeable staff</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly staff</td>
<td>14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readily available staff</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service after a sale</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible policies for merchandise exchanges/returns</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None: product is all that matters</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure/Other</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Zogby International*

The top four responses comprise almost 87 percent of what is most important. Those top four “most important features” are all dependent on how they – the customers, are treated by staff. Each of those top four most important features is one hundred percent controllable by each and every one of us in our daily customer interactions.
Notice that in this listing of the top companies that are noted for outstanding customer service, the same companies are showing up on the list year after year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Amazon</td>
<td>1. Amazon</td>
<td>1. Amazon</td>
<td>1. USAA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are other companies not on this list that sell the exact same products and provide the same kinds of services. What differentiates these companies? It is how they treat their customers. Customer service is not an add-on to their job; it is their job and part of their organization’s culture.

It was once estimated that a dis-satisfied customer would relate their bad experience to 15 other people. We now live in an age with the Internet, blogs, tweets, Craigslist, Angie’s List and other ways in which dissatisfied customers can reach out to thousands of people at a time.
External Customers:

Can you answer the following questions about your current host agency assignment?

• How well do you know the products or services that your host agency provides?
• Who are the host agency’s customers?
• What are their expectations?
• What is your role in meeting those expectations?
• How does your role impact the customer?

Use the space below to write down your answers:
Customer Service Skills

External Customers - These are the customers outside of the business or organization that rely on that business or organization to provide them with a product or service. They are the reason that a business or organization exists. The business or organization is there to serve customers. Customers are not there to serve the business.

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Internal Customers:

It is also important that we look at customer service from inside a business or an organization.

Here are some questions to consider:

• Do you provide a product or service to others in your host agency?
• Do others rely on you for work, support or help?
• Does your supervisor or co-workers have expectations that you need to meet?
• Is customer service in your training plan on your Individual Employment Plan or IEP?
• Do other parts of the organization provide products or services to you?
• How you feel about the internal customer service you receive?
Use the space below to write down your answers:

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

Customer service not only extends outside of a business or organization to external customers, but inside as well. Some examples of internal customer relationships that you may have might include:

- Information Technology
- Reception
- Payroll
- Management or Supervision
- Janitorial or Environmental services
- Security

Who are your internal customers?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
What is internal customer service?
It is the process where individuals and departments in an organization work to give each other excellent and considerable service. While serving customers and clients is an essential part of a company’s survival, internal customer relations plays a fundamental role in ensuring that external consumer relations is possible.

This table highlights some of the differences when dealing with internal customers versus external customers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Internal Customers</th>
<th>External Customers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objectives:</td>
<td>Facilitation of the workflow</td>
<td>Customer Retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processes:</td>
<td>Cooperation</td>
<td>Customer Satisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Productivity</td>
<td>Customer Loyalty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The way we encourage and grow an internal customer service culture is to:
- Promote buy-in
- Encourage initiative
- Design information sharing mechanisms
- Create a collaborative culture
- Recognize excellence

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Customer Service Skills

Customer Service Approach:

Excellent customer service is the process by which employees deliver services or products for their organization in a way that allows the customer to access them in the most efficient, fair, cost effective, and humanly satisfying and pleasurable manner possible.

With a customer service approach everyone wins. Customers win, organizations win and employees win.

To develop the most satisfying customer service experience:

• Try to establish what a customer wants and what would best suit their particular needs
• Treat each customer with respect and dignity
• Always act ethically and professionally

Here are some specific issues that create a customer service approach.

• Friendly responses - Customers appreciate a personable, friendly, professional exchange regardless of the situation. It conveys a sense of individualized attention.
• Product or service knowledge - Although some customers may already possess basic knowledge about the product or service they are interested in, they will often need you to provide additional details and information.
• Honesty and integrity: Customers want to feel that they can trust you regarding the quality and products or services you are offering.
• Recovery from mistakes - Customers will often judge the quality of your service by the way you recover after a mistake has been made, and by the solutions you offer. Generally, customers are very forgiving of mistakes if the situation is ultimately corrected to their satisfaction.

Here is a quote that summarizes this customer service approach:

“Everyone has an invisible sign hanging from his or her neck that reads, ‘Make me feel important.’ Never forget this message when dealing with people.”

When dealing with customers we have a choice. By our actions, we choose to make that experience either a positive one, or a negative one. Here are some items to consider:
Customer Service Skills

• First impressions – nonverbal cues that include:
  ✓ Attitude – people pick up on this instantly
  ✓ Posture – standing tall, head straight are signals of confidence and competence
  ✓ A smile – a sign of welcome
  ✓ Eye Contact – transmits interest and openness
  ✓ Raised eyebrows – a sign of recognition
  ✓ Shaking hands – quickest way to establish rapport
  ✓ Leaning in slightly – shows engagement and interest

A professional appearance and, neat organized offices also create that first impression. It is estimated that you have about seven seconds when meeting someone for the first time to make that critical first impression!

• Enthusiasm – Have you ever dealt with a salesperson that gave you the impression that you were an interruption? An inconvenience? Demonstrate to your customers that the work you do for them is meaningful, important and you are glad that they came to you to do it.

• Helpfulness – go the extra the mile; take the extra step to help our customers. Exceed their expectations.

• Your word – don’t make promises or commitments that you cannot keep. Set efficient and reasonable expectations.

• Personal Connection – connect directly to your customers on a personal level. People want to deal with a person and not an impersonal business or system.

With effective customer service skills we can:
• Demonstrate an appreciation for customers
• Properly handle customers’ questions and concerns
• Increase customer satisfaction
• Acquire and maintain customer loyalty
What is a customer service culture?

The organization focuses on the attention to quality customer service as a primary and essential business goal. Good customer service is the right thing to do, and it’s good for business.

- Customers are:
  - Never considered an interruption to other workplace tasks
  - Appreciated as the ultimate reason for one’s work
  - Always viewed as a top priority
- Personal Service – everyone who seeks out our organization is a unique person with unique needs
- Customer Feedback - we need feedback to continuously improve our services.
- Recognition of Customer Service Excellence – recognizes and reward employees for providing the best customer service possible.
- Continuous Learning – look for new and improved ways to provide service to customers.

Customer Satisfaction and the Resolution of Issues:

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”.

Most issues arise from misunderstanding or miscommunication. It’s important that any business or organization clearly communicate policies, procedures, and expectations regarding products or services to their customers to prevent future misunderstandings and unpleasant surprises.
Despite best efforts, issues will arise. Using the following steps will help you when trying to resolve customer issues.

- **Listen** – Listen to your customer to find out what his/her problem is and more importantly what he/she thinks would be a satisfactory resolution.
- **Apologize** – Even if the complaint does not seem legitimate it is always useful to establish an understanding by apologizing.
- **Inform** - Share with the customer the knowledge you have regarding the situation and what potential remedies are available.
- **Satisfy, compromise, and resolve** – Not all customer issues can be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties but making the sincere effort to resolve it goes a long way.

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**The Angry Customer:**

Even with the best efforts and intentions, there may still be times when a customer is unhappy or dissatisfied with something you or the business or organization you work for has done, or failed to do.

Learning how to handle these situations professionally and effectively is very important to your success in a customer service environment.
Guidelines for dealing with angry customers:

• **Remain Calm** - use a serious but positive and helpful tone of voice, and focus on hearing the customer’s perspective on the problem.

• **Don’t take it personally** - In most cases, a customer’s complaint will not be with you personally, they are just seeking to be heard.

• **Focus on acknowledging the feelings and upset of the customer** - Once the customer starts to calm down THEN move to solving the problem. This will save you a lot of time and energy.

• **Empathize** - Let the customer know that you can identify with their feelings of disappointment or frustration.

• **Be an Active Listener** - Asking open-ended questions can be useful in acquiring information, or to clarify the specifics of the problem.

• **Apologize** - Even if you are not directly to blame, apologize for the situation, and clearly state that you are sorry the customer is unhappy.

• **Accept Responsibility for Finding a Solution** - Communicate with the customer that you intend to take whatever action is necessary and appropriate for finding a solution.

• **Work to the Customer's Satisfaction-Not Yours** - Try to establish what it would take to meet the customer’s terms for a satisfactory outcome.

• **Take Action** - Once you have established a reasonable resolution to a customer’s problem, communicate this to the customer, and act on your intentions-immediately.

• **Try to Keep the Customer** - Most customers simply want a solution. In many cases, once you have successfully resolved their problem they will still be committed to you as a customer

• **Know that you've Done All You Can** - There may be times when you cannot offer any practical solution that will satisfy an unhappy customer-no matter how hard you try.

**NOTES:**
Remember it’s not always what you say:

Person to person communications occur through 3 main ways. The words we use, the tone of voice in which we say them, and our body language which includes posture and facial expressions. The further away from face-to-face communication, the easier it becomes to mis-understand what is being communicated. This is especially true when dealing an angry customer. Here is what the experts say about different forms of person-to-person communications.

With face-to-face communication our message is conveyed by:
• 55% body language
• 38% tone of voice
• 7% words used

With telephone communication it is:
• 82% tone of voice
• 18% words used

With email:
• There are no verbal cues
• No face-to-face cues
• No body language cues
• The communication can occur at different times
• Correspondence can be sent (.cc’d- carbon copied) to many people

If email is your only option for dealing with an angry customer here are some tips:
• Restate the issue – show that you are aware of it
• Ask for clarification in how would they would like the issue be resolved
• Personalize the response with customer's name and your signature
• Tell them how and when you will respond to the problem. Make sure you get back to them when you said you would.
• If resolving the issue is taking more time than you anticipated, provide the customer with periodic updates – keep them in the loop.
• Use a polite positive tone
• Use “I” and “We” rather than “You”
• Apologize when you are at fault

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TOPIC SUMMARY: