

Customer Service



TEXAS
WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

Customer Service

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CUSTOMER SERVICE

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Purpose and Objectives

Purpose of the Training

The purpose of this training is to:

- encourage staff at all levels to treat every customer as a most-valued customer
 - actively seek input and feedback from both external and internal customers
 - learn and apply effective communication and listening skills with the customer
 - actively demonstrate how to effectively enhance your current customer service process.
-

Objectives

By the end of this session, you will be able to:

- identify why the “moments of truth” are critical to customer service
 - recognize the effect that a positive mental attitude has on customer service
 - list key concepts of effective customer service
 - demonstrate effective customer service in a small group setting
 - create an action plan that includes at least two ideas to improve the quality of your current customer service process.
-

Structure

This training is divided into five chapters:

- Introduction to the Training
 - Quality Customer Service
 - Keys to Enhancing your Customer Service
 - Working with Difficult Customers
 - Reviewing Your Current Customer Service Process.
-

Chapter 2: Quality Customer Service

Customer Service Basics

What is Customer Service?

What is customer service? We often hear the phrase used, but seldom do we consider what it means.

It is difficult to find and agree on a simple and single definition of customer service. Customer service means different things to different people. According to the online e-magazine, *CustomerServiceManager.com*, some of the definitions of customer service in use today include:

"Customer service is the ability to provide a service or product in the way that it has been promised."

"Customer service is about treating others as you would like to be treated yourself."

"Customer service is an organization's ability to supply their customers' wants and needs."

"Customer Service is a phrase that is used to describe the process of taking care of our customers in a positive manner."

"Customer Service is any contact between a customer and a company that causes a negative or positive perception by a customer."

What is Customer Service?
(continued)

"Customer service is a process for providing competitive advantage and adding benefits in order to maximize the total value to the customer."

"Customer Service is the commitment to providing value added services to external and internal customers, including attitude, knowledge, technical support and quality of service in a timely manner."

These are just a few of the definitions of customer service. Without a clear understanding of what constitutes customer service, it will be difficult to explore how to enhance your current customer service process. Does your organization currently have a definition of customer service?

Now that we have begun to explore what customer service is, let us look at why it is important.



Why Customer Service is Important

Customer service is important for three reasons:

1. it helps the organization
2. it helps the employee, and
3. it helps the customer.

Customer service helps the organization because organizations that focus on providing quality customer service achieve a higher level of customer satisfaction. Customers who receive exceptional service are more likely to use the available services and tell others how valuable the services are.

Unsatisfied customers will look for another resource that can offer them the help they need. Employers and job seekers in our communities should have positive experiences and not experience frustration or dead-ends when they come to us for information, services, and resources to help them achieve their workforce development, education, or career objectives.

Whether our customers are large chemical plants, small grocery stores, recent college graduates, Choices clients, Food Stamp recipients, dislocated workers, or high school students, they are the reason we are here. We must care enough about their needs to do the best we can to guarantee their success and satisfaction.

"If you work just for money, you'll never make it, but if you love what you're doing and you always put the customer first, success will be yours."

Ray Kroc, Founder, McDonald's



***Why Customer Service
is Important
(continued)***

Customer service helps Workforce Center employees because it fosters job satisfaction. Quality customer service allows employees to take pride in their work. When employees take pride in their work, it increases their job satisfaction.

Customer service can help provide purpose and meaning to your work. Real value comes from our relationships with people, not from our relationships with things or possessions. The focus of quality customer service is on developing relationships with people. Therefore, quality customer service is one of the best ways we can bring value and meaning to our job.

Last, **customer service helps the customer**. When customers contact you or come into your Workforce Center, they are looking for help. When we provide customer service, we are helping to meet the customer needs. We are providing services, direction, information, a word of encouragement, and sometimes, hope that can affect another person.

Who is the Customer?

Now that we have a basic understanding of customer service and its importance, we need to explore the question: "Who is the customer?"

In the simplest terms, the customer is:

"Anyone who is not me."

This definition of customer includes all the people inside and outside your organization, both internal and external customers. When we think of customers we usually group them into categories such as:

- Employers
- Job seekers
- WIA youth
- Choices clients
- Workforce Board staff, or
- Co-workers.

Sometimes, we view the customer as a chore or burden. We may have a smile on our face, but deep down we wish that the customer would just leave us alone so we can finish all our paperwork.



**Who is the Customer?
(continued)**

If we begin to see the customer as **"Anyone who is not me,"** we can see our customers as ordinary people. Viewing them like us makes us consider how we would like to be treated. No longer is the customer just a burden. The customer becomes an individual, no longer lumped into a category. When we see customers as people, it is easier to relate to them as individuals and establish relationships.

"The purpose of business is to create and keep a customer."

Peter Drucker, Writer and, management consultant

**What Do We Provide
Our Customer?**

Every enterprise, business, or organization exists to provide a service or product. Microsoft creates software, Dell sells computers, and FedEx delivers packages.

What does the Workforce Center do? What is the service or product it creates? The Texas Workforce Commission and Workforce Centers have a unique role.

In fulfilling our unique role, customer service comes into play in three areas:

1. We may provide a product, for example, when we charge an employer a fee to conduct background checks.
2. We may provide a service, such as when a job seeker needs help with resume preparation.
3. We may apply laws and enforce regulations, for example, when we certify a person for the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

The most crucial issue with respect to our customers is this: How can we help the customer, regardless of whether we provide services, products, or apply laws and enforce regulations?

***What Do We Provide
our Customer?
(continued)***

Helping the customer is easier when it involves services and products but not so easy when it pertains to regulation and law application. So how do we make it easier? We need to rethink the way we provide services.

The conventional approach to regulation and enforcement is to ensure that people comply with the rules. We, sometimes, reduce those we regulate to adversaries. Is there a different way? Yes, there is! In regulation contexts, we can rethink our relationship with the customer. Our role is to help customers comply with the regulations or laws, to minimize their inconvenience. This does not mean we can eliminate all inconvenience. What it does mean is that we try to make it as easy as possible for the customers to understand the rules and regulations. Making it easier does not mean that the customer can choose not to follow the rules. It means that we help the customer comply with the rules and laws. By shifting our role to a *helping* mindset, we make the customer central.



Customer Service Quiz

Now that we have looked at the basics of customer service, let's take a short quiz. For each question, circle the answer you think is correct. Circle only one answer for each question.

Think about customer service in general, for instance in banks, restaurants, retail stores, etc., not necessarily the context in which you provide customer service.

1. What is the biggest single reason why businesses lose customers?
 - a. new competition
 - b. indifference of one employee
 - c. word of mouth
 - d. dissatisfaction with the product.
2. What percent of dissatisfied customers do not complain to you about discourteous or indifferent customer service?
 - a. 48%
 - b. 65%
 - c. 78%
 - d. 96%.
3. Of those customers who do complain, what percent is likely to return to that business?
 - a. 50%
 - b. 70%
 - c. 80%
 - d. 90%.
4. For the average business, what percent of annual sales comes from existing satisfied customers?
 - a. 30%
 - b. 10%
 - c. 65%
 - d. 50%.

**Customer Service Quiz
(continued)**

5. How much more money does it take to find a new customer instead of getting more business from an existing one?
 - a. twice as much
 - b. three times as much
 - c. four times as much
 - d. over five times as much.

6. How many people outside of the company will a dissatisfied customer tell about the poor service they received?
 - a. two or three people
 - b. four to six people
 - c. seven to eight people
 - d. over nine people, but as many as 20.

The answers and a brief explanation of each are on the following pages.



Why Customers Leave

Question 1: The correct answer is “b.”

The primary reason businesses lose customers is the indifference of one employee, according to 68 percent of responders.

Other reasons customers choose to take their business elsewhere are:

- Dissatisfaction with the product – 14%
- New competition – 9%
- Word of mouth – 5%.

This research was based on answers from customers who were asked:

“What was the factor that influenced your decision not to use this product or service again?”

At the point of interaction between the customer and the service provider, the indifference of one employee is the major reason customers chose to take their business elsewhere.



Who Complains

Question 2: The correct answer is "d."

Ninety-six percent of dissatisfied customers do not complain about discourteous or indifferent customer service. The conclusion we can draw is that we only hear from four percent of our dissatisfied customers. This means that for every complaint received, there are, in fact, 96 other customers with problems, four of which are serious issues. The rest do not return, or they complain to anyone else outside the company who will listen. Only when we know about the problems are we able to resolve them.

After Complaining, Who Returns?

Question 3: The correct answer is "d."

Interestingly enough, complainers are more likely than non-complainers to do business with the company that upset them, even if the problem is not satisfactorily resolved. However, this question has another correct answer. Poorly handled complaints decrease customer repeat business by 50 percent. If the complaint was resolved quickly and successfully, over 95 percent of customers would return. Effective recovery is an incredibly important service management tool. The successful resolution of complaints is such a novel experience that achieving results in this area can drastically affect customer loyalty.

"Statistics suggest that when customers complain, business owners and managers ought to get excited about it. The complaining customer represents a huge opportunity for more business."

Zig Ziglar, Motivational speaker

Service and Sales

Question 4: The correct answer is "c."

The most conservative data implies that more than 65 percent of annual sales come from existing satisfied customers. The figures are even higher in some service businesses and when adding the factor of referrals.

"We see our customers as invited guests to a party, and we are the hosts. It's our job every day to make every important aspect of the customer experience a little bit better."

Jeff Bezos, Founder Amazon.com

Cost of Generating New Business

Question 5: The correct answer is "d."

Research in this area has produced different results. Companies continue to invest large amounts of promotional money to encourage new customers to try their service or product and then ruin the experience at the service delivery point! An alternative strategy would be to invest the money used for promotion to improve the overall service delivery process—a more economical and long-term option.

Spreading the Word

Question 6: The correct answer is “d.”

The “average” customer who is dissatisfied tells nine or ten people about it. Approximately 13 percent of dissatisfied customers tell more than 20 people about the problem. Of the people they tell, each one will tell two or three more people. This means that 200–300 people may hear about every negative service experience.

Conversely, good news does not travel as fast as bad news. On average, a satisfied customer tells only three to five people about the experience. Estimates show it costs five to ten times as much to generate business from new customers as it does to get more business from existing customers. Some businesses receive almost 100 percent of their new business from existing satisfied customers and the referrals they make to others.

(Gathered from TARP, Inc. research conducted by the White House Office of Consumer Affairs and quoted in *How to Win Customers and Keep Them for Life* by Michael Le Boeuf.)



Moments of Truth

In 1981, Jan Carlzon took over as CEO of one of Europe's most poorly rated airlines, Scandinavian Airline Systems (SAS). He found that the problems stemmed from poor customer service.

Jan Carlzon used the term "Moments of Truth" to explain the customer interaction process. He used the term to illustrate those moments in which impressions form and where there is opportunity for good or bad impressions to develop.

In 1986, Carlzon wrote the book *Moments of Truth*. In his book, he defines the moment of truth in business as:

"Anytime a customer comes into contact with any aspect of a business, however remote, is an opportunity to form an impression."

Jan Carlzon took SAS from a failing enterprise and turned it around to be one of the most profitable airlines in the industry.

Listed below are some examples of SAS moments of truth:

- when you call to make a reservation
- when you arrive at the airport and check your bags
- when you go inside and pick up your ticket
- when you are greeted at the gate
- when you are taken care of by the flight attendants onboard the plane, and
- when you are greeted at your destination.

Every juncture is an opportunity for the customer to form an opinion of the service or lack thereof.

Now that we have explained the concept of “Moments of Truth,” let us see how it works in practice. Take a moment to think back to your last regular workday. Place an “x” in the box below for every interaction (in person, phone, or e-mail) that you had with a customer.

Moments of Truth Visualized

Count your total interactions

“The purpose of business is to create and keep a customer.”

Peter Drucker, Writer and, mangement consultant

***Moments of Misery
and Moments of Magic***

Jan Carlzon said there are “good moments of truth and bad moments of truth.” Carlzon referred to the bad ones as “moments of misery” and the good ones as “moments of magic.”

Our goal should be to turn every customer contact into a great moment of magic, even if it starts out as a moment of misery. Sometimes a customer may have an easily-fixed complaint. However, we need to not only fix problems and complaints, we also need to give customers a reason to come back and do business with us.

Even if we fix a problem, it does not mean the customer will come back. At times, these moments of misery may not even be our fault. A customer using the resource room may be having a bad day and be in a bad mood. It is not the Workforce Center staff’s fault the customer is unhappy. However, the person who is helping in the resource room has the opportunity to start to turn the customer’s mood around. This can be an opportunity to take someone else’s moment of misery and turn it into the Workforce Center’s moment of magic.



***Moments of Truth at
the Magic Kingdom®***

The Walt Disney corporation has taken the small moments of truth to an even higher level. They understand the importance these small moments of truth have on their customers. The Walt Disney Corporation trains their cast members (Disney's term for employees) to acknowledge the guest (Disney's term for a customer) with a smile or welcoming facial expression if within ten feet of the guest. If the cast member gets within five feet of the guest, they are to acknowledge them verbally. That is what contributes to the image of the "Magic Kingdom." In your organization, all the little "moments of truth," combined with the major ones and the addition of the product or service your organization is providing, add up to the overall level of a customer's satisfaction.

So, manage your "moments of truth." Seize every one of them, even if they begin as moments of misery, as opportunities to show how good you and your organization are. This will go a long way in building customer satisfaction.



Chapter 3: Keys to Enhancing Your Customer Service

A Positive Attitude

A Positive Attitude

What does the word "attitude" mean? Dictionary.com defines attitude as:

manner, disposition, feeling, position, etc., with regard to a person or thing; tendency or orientation, especially of the mind...

A positive attitude is extremely important to personal and professional success. It colors our vision of how we see the world and other people. A positive attitude affects our behavior. It affects teamwork, customer relations, motivation, and the ability to deal with change. A positive attitude can make the difference between a pleasant working environment and a place we dread to go.

A positive attitude is critical to delivering customer service. As we mentioned in Chapter 2, every interaction with a customer is a "moment of truth." In every encounter, we have an opportunity to create a positive or negative impression with our customers. It is easier to create a positive impression if we have a positive attitude.

"Our attitudes control our lives. Attitudes are a secret power working twenty-four hours a day, for good or bad. It is of paramount importance that we know how to harness and control this great force."

Tom Blandi, 1907 French literary theorist author

Self-Assessment

Assessing your attitude at work will help you create a plan to become more positive and productive. Complete the following questionnaire as honestly as you can.

For each of the statements below, circle the number that most closely reflects your present outlook:

- 0 = The statement is never true
- 1 = The statement is rarely true.
- 2 = The statement is somewhat true.
- 3 = The statement is often true.
- 4 = The statement is always true.

- | | | |
|-----|---|-----------|
| 1. | I wake up in a good mood. | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 2. | I look forward to going to work. | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 3. | I enjoy my job and the work I do. | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 4. | I feel like I am contributing at work. | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 5. | I like the people I work with and am a team player. | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 6. | I look at the bright side of situations and people. | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 7. | I feel secure and confident about my technical and people skills. | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 8. | I learn from criticism and know when to let it roll off my back. | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 9. | I can express my emotions without losing control. | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 10. | I get along well with most people. | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 11. | I am enthusiastic. | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 12. | I am eager to grow, but comfortable with who I am. | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 13. | I am able to laugh at my mistakes, learn from them, and then let them go. | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 14. | I am supportive and happy when others get promoted. | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 15. | I communicate in a direct, honest, kind, and assertive manner. | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 16. | I respect myself; I also respect others. | 0 1 2 3 4 |

Self-Assessment (continued)

- | | | |
|-----|--|-----------|
| 17. | I am comfortable around my superiors. | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 18. | I am good at creatively solving problems and using critical thinking. | 0 1 2 3 4 |
| 19. | I look forward to learning new skills and taking on more responsibilities at work. | 0 1 2 3 4 |

Total _____

Add up your total score. If you scored 61 or above, you have a positive attitude. If your score is under 49, you may want to look at ways to improve your attitude. Your attitude sets the tone for your department and influences your productivity. Taken from *Positive Attitudes at Work* by Sharon K. Ferrett



"Take charge of your attitude. Don't let someone else choose it for you."

Anonymous

How to Create a Positive Attitude

Your attitude, either positive or negative, affects the customer service you provide. Attitude refers to your state of mind— a manner, disposition, or emotion. Your attitude is not set in stone: you can change it. Let us look briefly at ways to create a positive attitude. Listed below are ten steps to change a negative attitude into a positive attitude.

1. Be willing to acknowledge that you have a negative attitude.
2. Take responsibility for your own attitude.
3. Acknowledge underlying causes for a negative attitude.
4. Clarify your goals and what you want to achieve.
5. Appreciate the good in yourself and others.
6. Replace old reactions with new actions.
7. Practice new responses.
8. Address situations that cause stress.
9. Believe in yourself.
10. Believe you can make a difference.

Remember that you choose your attitude, either positive or negative. Studies show that the way you think about your customer is usually how you will treat them. One way to create a positive attitude toward your customer is to think:

“I like you!”

It may sound silly, but try it.

Understanding Your Customers' Needs

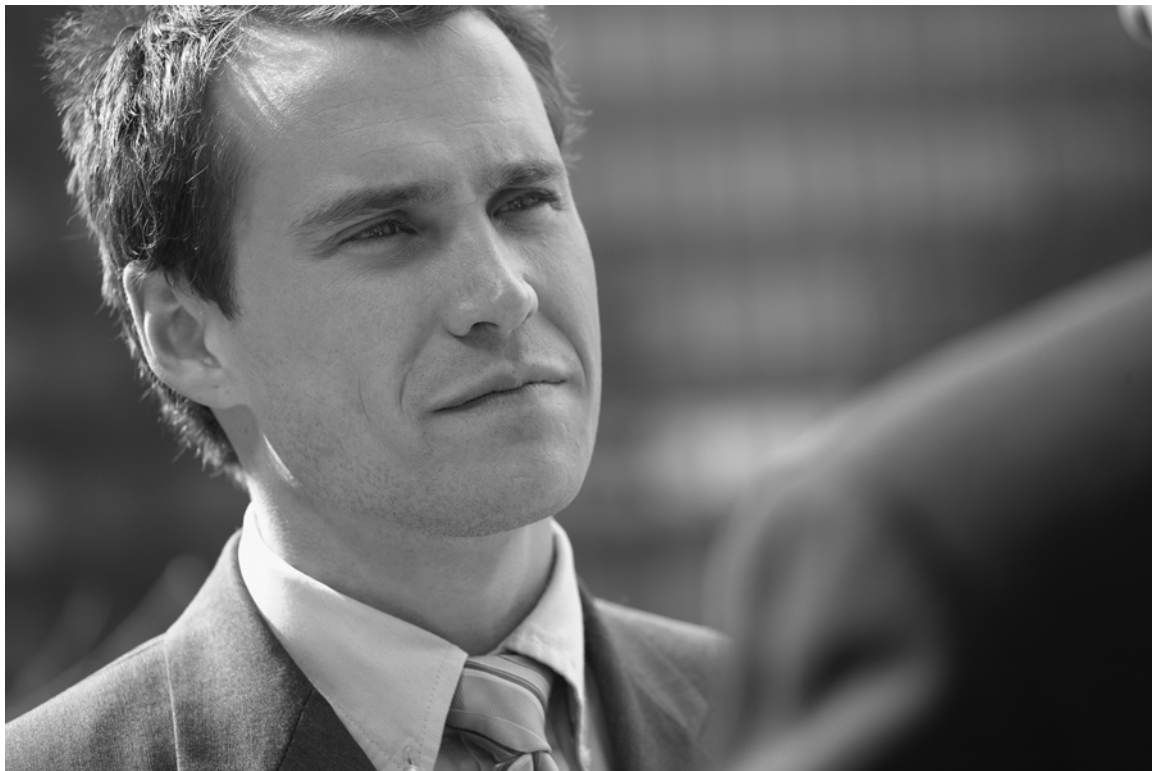
Identify with the Customer

To understand your customer, you must have empathy toward the person. Empathy is:

“the intellectual identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, or attitudes of another.”

Each person we meet is a unique individual with different experiences. We may not be able to understand the customer's experience unless we have had the same experiences. However, we can usually empathize with the customer and imagine how we would feel in a similar situation.

Once we empathize with our customer, we can begin to listen to what he or she really needs and wants from our organization.



Verify and Clarify Needs

One-way to make sure that you have met your customer's needs are to *verify and clarify the facts*. When we verify and clarify facts, we restate details such as:

- spelling of names
- phone numbers
- timelines
- directions.

By verifying and clarifying the facts, we are demonstrating to the customer that we are working hard to understand and meet their needs.

Obstacles to Problem Solving

Problem solving is not without obstacles.

One obstacle in problem solving may be your customer's attitude. For example, the customer may not:

- respect your abilities
- trust your intentions
- want to work with you.

These situations can make it difficult to work with a customer. The best solution is to focus on helping the customer. Once you focus on helping the customer, his or her attitude may no longer be the issue. Often we do not know why the customer has a negative attitude, and we need to avoid taking these situations personally. Our task is to offer solutions, not create more problems.

Another obstacle occurs when we fail to take responsibility for helping the customer. The customer may be confused and unsure of the available options. We must be patient and work with the customer to explore their options. The customer is depending on us to offer solutions. Taking responsibility involves making sure that we have addressed the customers needs. We must consider each of these "moments of magic" an opportunity to shine and show what we can do.

Communicating with Your Customer

Effective Communication Techniques

Face-to-face communication in a Workforce Center is a process of exchanging information using a combination of:

- words
- tone
- gestures
- listening.

Let us consider some methods for using each of these elements to ensure effective communication.

Don't Let Words Get in the Way

Avoid work-related jargon and acronyms that have no meaning to customers. Example: Advising job seekers that they may be eligible for WIA funds may have no meaning to them and may confuse them.

Use open-ended and closed-ended questions appropriately. Ask open-ended questions to get detailed information. Ask close-ended questions to assess needs quickly. Example: "What kinds of skills have you required of past employees?" is an open-ended question. "Have you filed for Unemployment Insurance?" is a closed-ended question.

Summarize what the customer is saying, to:

- show the customer you are listening
- ensure you understand what the customer wants

"The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said."

Peter Drucker, Writer and, mangement consultant

***Don't Let Words
Get in the Way
(continued)***

Avoid the phrase "I can't" whenever possible. Instead of saying, "I can't," when you absolutely can't do what the customer is requesting, tell the customer what you *can* do. Example: Instead of telling an employer you can't fill the job posting right away, say that you *can* enter the job posting into the computer for public access right away.

Instead of telling job seekers you can't excuse them from participating in a workshop, tell them you *can* find a more appropriate activity in which they can become involved.

Instead of working independently, **work *with* the customer** to develop solutions or action plans when possible. Use phrases like, "What do you think of ...?" "How about ...?" "Can we ...?" "Would ... work for you?" Avoid phrases that sound controlling or condescending. "Will you?" is much more effective than "You have to."

Use words of encouragement and acknowledgment to promote open communication. Examples: "I see." "Tell me more." "I understand." "Of course." "Sure, no problem."

Use "May I help you?" instead of "Can I help you?" Using the word "may" is asking for permission, while using the word "can" refers to physical ability, which is improper usage.

Use magic phrases like "What can I do to solve this problem?" "I can help you." "I'll find out for you." "I'll do my best to take care of this." "This won't take long."

COMMUNICATION IMPROVEMENT EXERCISE

Instead of:	#	Change to:
After you attend the WOA, I will sign your 2588.	1	
I can't possibly enter this job posting until next week.	2	
Tell me the kind of work you're interested in.	3	
Can I help you?	4	
I'm sorry. I don't have the number to the UI Call Center.	5	
We don't have a record of your past employment.	6	
I'm not sure what services you are eligible for.	7	
I think you need to attend a job search workshop.	8	
Do you need childcare?	9	
We don't handle child labor.	10	
If you will fill out this IDP, we can figure out if you are eligible for WIA.	11	
You can look for a job on the computers over there.	12	

What's in a Tone?

Experts say there are five components that control expression in your voice: *pace*, *volume*, *inflection*, *intensity*, and *attitude*. All five of these elements in your voice can send the wrong message or the right message to your customers.

Pace

When your pace is too fast, customers may feel you are rushing them; too slow, and you may frustrate them. How do you know the right pace? A good rule of thumb is to match your pace to your customer's pace. The goal is to communicate at the same rate.

Volume

Speak too loudly and you may embarrass the customer or reveal confidential information to those nearby. Speak too softly and your customer may misunderstand or not hear what you are saying. Use different levels of volume to reinforce your words, show enthusiasm, or get attention.

Inflection

Inflection is one of the ways we, as individuals, customize our voices. Have you ever noticed you can sometimes tell what others are talking about even when you can't speak their language? That's inflection. Speech without inflection is boring. Try saying, "I am so happy to meet you," placing the same tone and emphasis on every word. Does it sound like you are very happy?

Intensity

Sometimes you need to match your level of intensity to the customer's. If the customer is *upset*, then you should be *concerned*. Notice we are not saying you should match the emotion—just the intensity.

Attitude

The pace, volume, inflection, and intensity in the tone of your voice reflect your true attitude. Attitude will make or break your efforts to provide quality customer service. Maintaining a good attitude may seem difficult, yet it comes from a belief that what you do and the way you do it can make a profound difference in someone's life.

***What's That
Supposed to
Mean?***

What's the best gesture we can make when a customer comes into the Workforce Center? A **smile**, of course! A smile says so many things: "Welcome." "You're not alone." "We care." "You're in the right place." "We will help." "We're not going to give you a hard time." "This might even be fun."

All that, and we never said a word!

Conversely, there are several nonverbal behaviors to avoid when a customer enters the Workforce Center. They are:

- frowning
- failing to make eye contact
- folding your arms across your chest
- tapping fingers or pencils
- leaning away
- turning aside
- rolling your eyes
- failure to acknowledge the customer.

Nonverbal communication can play a critical role in our efforts to provide quality customer service.



***Could You Repeat
That Please?***

Well-developed listening skills allow us to assess quickly the needs of our customers while assuring customers that we are willing to help. Active listening techniques include:

- paraphrasing or restating to clarify
- drawing people out to get the whole picture
- gathering information to show credibility
- encouraging to complete the picture
- listening for common ground to build rapport
- being silent to allow further clarification
- showing respect by not interrupting.

Nonverbal active listening techniques include:

- eye contact
- leaning in
- nodding.



Relationship Building

Relationship Building

Customers remember your organization from the relationship they have with the employees. Building and maintaining ongoing relationships is critical to effective customer service. When we work with our customers, we begin to build relationships. Listed below are the six steps of relationship building with your customers.

1. Establish rapport
 2. Interact positively
 3. Make the customer feel valued
 4. Maintain ongoing relationships
 5. Recognize different types of customers
 6. Relate positively to customers with disabilities.
-

Establish Rapport

The first step to building a relationship with your customer is to **establish rapport**. Establishing rapport can be broken down to five steps:

1. Be friendly
2. Be interested
3. Be sensitive
4. Be trustful
5. Find common ground.

When you put a smile on your face and greet the customer in a friendly manner, you create a positive atmosphere. When you ask questions, listen, and show concern, you build trust. When you show empathy and compassion, you build understanding. When you strive to act with integrity, you reflect your honesty and commitment. When you listen to your customer and try to find common ground, you build connection.

"The golden rule for every businessman is this: 'Put yourself in your customer's place.'"

Orison Swett Marden, Author, motivational speaker

Interact Positively

The second step to building relationships with your customer is to have **positive interactions**. Five steps help you interact with your customers positively. The five steps are:

1. Believe in your product
2. Be knowledgeable
3. Be committed
4. Be helpful
5. Be a problem solver.

If you do not believe in the services and products your organization provides, your customer will not either. If you do not know everything about the products and services your Workforce Center provides, ask for additional training and support. Look for ways to give 110 percent in everything you do for your organization and your customer. When you help your customer, it shows you care, and it makes you feel good about the job you do. It is always better to be part of the solution than to be part of the problem.

Make the Customer Feel Valued

The third step to building relationships with your customer is to make the customer feel valued using these three steps:

1. Give the customer your best effort
2. Validate the customer's decisions when possible
3. Encourage positive feelings.

By giving customers your best effort, they will feel valued and will be glad you made the effort. If you disagree with a decision your customer has made, support the decision anyway when possible. By supporting the decision, you help the customer feel valued. By supporting the customer in the decision, you encourage the customer's positive feelings.

Maintain Ongoing Relationships

Once you have built a relationship with the customer, the next step is to maintain the relationship. The key word to maintaining ongoing relationships is “remember.”

When you remember and acknowledge your customers, you make them feel special. When you remember your customer’s name, it empowers them. There is something magical when people speak your name in a positive context. When you remember something about the customer, he or she values the relationship with you. When you take the time to learn the customer’s preference, it reflects positively on you.

“Be everywhere, do everything, and never fail to astonish the customer.”
Macy’s Motto

Recognize Different Types of Customers

Most of the customers you meet will be easy to work with. However, some customers will require more patience and skill than others will. Always maintain a professional demeanor, and focus on the opportunity to help your customer.

If the customer is aggressive or obnoxious, remain calm. Speak softly, and be aware of your nonverbal body language. Our natural tendency is to react negatively in these types of situations. When you stay calm, you can usually remain in control of the situation.

If the customer is shy or indecisive, be patient. Ask open-ended questions to draw the customer out. Some people need extra time to consider their options and make their decision. Customers, like everyone else, don’t like to be rushed.

If the customer is excessively friendly, be professional. Stay focused on business. The customer may not be aware that his or her behavior is out of line.

***Recognize Different
Types of Customers
(continued)***

If the customer is culturally different, recognize and appreciate their diversity. People are more mobile today than ever before. You may interact with customers of many different cultures. Regardless of the culture, a smile is universal.



***Relate Positively to
Customers with
Disabilities***

Customers with disabilities deserve the same positive treatment that customers without disabilities receive. Focus on the customers' needs in each situation. Make eye contact, and use a normal tone of voice. Do not be embarrassed if you make a mistake; remember, you are human too.

Other interactive ideas:

- Offer to shake hands if this is your normal protocol.
- If the customer indicates they require assistance, offer to help.
- If you don't know how to help, ask.

For customers who use wheelchairs:

- Place yourself at eye level if possible.
- Never touch or lean on the wheelchair.
- Focus on the customer, not his or her companion, should one be present.

For customers with developmental or cognitive disabilities:

- Speak clearly and use short easy-to-understand words when needed.
- Avoid completing the customer's sentences.

Relate Positively to Customers with Disabilities (continued)

- Give additional time for the customer to complete paperwork when needed.

For customers with visual impairments:

- Never touch a service dog without asking permission.
- Tell the customer about any obstacles in his or her path.
- Verbalize what you are doing to help the person.

For customers with hearing impairments:

- Look at them and speak clearly.
- Use simple words and short sentences.

For customers with speech impairments:

- Ask the person to repeat if you don't understand.
- Once you understand what is said, repeat the information to the customer to make sure you understood correctly.
- Use closed-ended questions that require short answers.

The key to working with all customers is to remember to treat others as you would like them to treat you.



Checking Understanding

Customer Expectations

When we check for understanding with our customer, we should be restating our planned actions. We need to make sure we have communicated with our customer and met their expectations. We should explain the solutions that we've developed with their input and avoid the tendency to restate the problem.

The customer should have a clear picture of the following:

- **cost**—if there is a cost involved
- **time**—how long the project or task will take
- **target**—what the outcome will look like
- **benefit**—what the purpose of the project or task is.

We want to ensure that we have met the expectations of the customer. This helps avoid problems. We all have had situations where we thought everyone agreed to the solution only to have everything fall apart at the end. By addressing customers' expectations before starting a project, we can avoid wasted time and effort.

Wrap-up

Once you are sure you have met the expectations of the customer, it is time to "wrap up." During the wrap-up, we reassure the customer about the process and our help.

When we wrap up, we accept responsibility. For example, we might say: "Let me know if you have any other questions," or "Please call me if you have any problems."

It is also a good idea to end on a positive note if possible. For example, you might say: "Thanks so much for coming in."

"Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves."

Carl Jung, Founder of analytical psychology

Taking Action

Ongoing Customer Service

Taking care of the ongoing responsibilities of customer service is a big part of meeting our customer's needs.

Listed below are the ongoing duties of customer service.

- Stay in touch with your customers by means of regular updates and progress reports when possible.
- Communicate delays or setbacks promptly.
- Help your customers be proactive by letting them know about updates.
- Thank your customers when they advise you of problems.
- Reassure your customers that you are working actively for them.



Value-Added Customer Service

Building on Satisfaction

Meeting the expectations of your customer should be just the beginning. In Chapter 2, we learned that a satisfied customer would tell only three to five people about their positive experience. However, about 13 percent of unsatisfied customers will tell more than 20 people about their experience. When you provide good customer service and go the extra mile to not only satisfy the customer, but also to gain their appreciation and “Wow!” them, it helps publicize the positive work you do.

The following list provides a good starting point for building on customer satisfaction:

- Make a strong first impression.
- Connect with your customer.
- Always try to exceed customer expectations.
- Anticipate your customer needs.
- Be accessible, approachable, and responsive.
- Look for ways to delight your customer.
- Solicit input from other frontline staff.

Great customer service is about ordinary people doing ordinary things extraordinarily well.

Chapter 4: Working with Difficult Customers

Determine the Problem and Underlying Issue

Difficult Customer

We have learned the basics of customer service and the keys to enhancing your customer service, all of which will provide valuable skills in working with your customers. However, no matter how hard you try there will always be situations where you will encounter a difficult customer. A difficult customer can discourage even the most dedicated employee. Working effectively with a difficult customer will enhance your ability to provide quality customer service to all of your customers.

Listed below are the four steps that will help you work with customers in any situation.

1. Calm the customer.
 2. Determine the problem.
 3. Solve the problem.
 4. Recognize issues you cannot resolve.
-

Calm the Customer

Sometimes, a customer presents a complaint. In dealing with an unhappy customer, we should look at the process as an opportunity to improve our customer service. The first step when a customer presents us with a problem is to calm the customer.

The following steps are useful in calming a customer.

Assure the customer you are going to help. In your opening statement, assure your customer that you are going to help them resolve the issue if possible. When you give your assurance upfront, it helps to calm the customer down.

Restate the customers opening statement. Upset customers may not be able to communicate effectively. Restating their opening statement will help ensure that you are on the right track.

Listen carefully. After assuring the customer, listen to them without interruption. Try actively listening to what the customer is saying rather than focusing on the delivery of his or her message.

Write down key details. Make note of things that will help you solve your customer's issue. Don't rely on your memory, write down key facts.

Display empathy. Try to put yourself in the customer's situation. The customer may be upset and may take out their frustration on you. When you empathize with the customer, it will be easier to understand their point of view.

Remain composed. When you remain calm, it helps your customer to calm down. By maintaining self-control, you will give yourself time to analyze the cause of the customer's anger.

Determine the Problem

Once the customer calms down, you need to determine the cause of the problem. The first step is to investigate the situation. The investigation is a critical step; try to get all the facts. You need to determine whether the customer has a valid complaint. When you complete the investigation, apologize, and explain to the customer what happened.

Solve the Problem

When you have completed the investigation and determined the cause of the problem, offer a solution. Often we offer solutions before the customer has a chance to vent his or her frustration. Always make sure the customer is calm before you offer a solution. Be clear about the steps you are taking to solve the problem before you present it to the customer.

Listed below is a suggested process you can follow to resolve the problem.

- Tell the customer what you are going to do to solve the problem.
- Tell the customer what you can do.
- Offer your best solution.
- Never assign blame.
- Display empathy.
- Offer an alternative solution if your first solution is not acceptable when possible.

The solution may not be beneficial to the customer, but the process should always be the same.

Recognize Issues You Cannot Resolve

There may be times when, no matter what you offer, you cannot resolve the situation to the customer's satisfaction. It is important to be aware of your organizations complaint process and complaint forms.

Listed below are suggestions for actions to take when you can't satisfy the customer.

- Tell the customer there is nothing more you can do and give him or her the option to speak to your supervisor or file a formal complaint.
- Follow your organization's complaint process if you have one in place.

Handling Customer Complaints

There are various ways to handle a customers' complaint. Yum! Brands, Inc. (Parent company of KFC, Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, A&W, and Long John Silvers) trains their employees in the basics of handling customer complaints by using the acronym **B.L.A.S.T.** The acronym stands for:

Believe
Listen
Apologize
Satisfy
Thank

Believe

It is important to understand that your customer believes or perceives your organization has mistreated them in some way.

Handling Customer Complaints (continued)

Listen

Stop—Take a second, relax, and listen to your customer's complaint.

Apologize

Always apologize, even if you did nothing wrong. From your customers' perspective, he or she has a legitimate complaint, and he or she expects an apology.

Satisfy

Make it right. Ask the customer "What can I do to make this right for you?"

Thank

At the beginning, at the end, in the middle—it does not matter when you do it, but **thank** the customer for calling and making you aware of their complaint.



Handling an Angry Customer

Dealing with an angry customer can create a difficult situation. It is important to remember that if a customer is angry, you should never respond the same way. Doing so can turn an unpleasant little incident into an unpleasant big incident. The best way to deal with an angry customer is to apologize for the specific inconvenience, and take immediate action to make it right.

If you have an angry customer, you still have an opportunity to turn the unhappy customer into a satisfied customer. Try to solve the problem, because if the customer storms out of the office, never comes back, and tells all their friends, that is a problem.

Handling a Chatterbox

On occasion you have a customer who is a chatterbox and who seems to talk nonstop. While it is difficult to deal with a chatterbox, never show your boredom or frustration. It will offend other people and the chatterbox. Never bully or rush any customer, interrupt rudely, or shut them up by visibly trying to dominate them. When dealing with a compulsive talker, use every conversational gap to guide the conversation toward a satisfactory conclusion.

Handling a Rude Customer

Do not get personally upset by the rudeness of an offensive customer. The way to deal with the offensive customer is to stay cool, keep your professional detachment, stay polite, and keep offering possible solutions in strictly factual terms. Learn to ignore rudeness. Remember that the offensive customer is probably offensive to everyone who deals with him or her, not just you. Do not take it personally.

The Very Difficult Customer

Sometimes you do everything right. You have put all the right techniques into practice, but the customer remains difficult. Difficult people are usually difficult for a reason. Some people who are scared and anxious are likely to be difficult and may remain difficult until their problems are resolved. Anxious people can become childlike and have "tantrums." Treating them like children encourages them to act like a child, while treating them like responsible adults encourages them to act rationally. Remain calm, and offer understanding and reassurance.

You can say, "I understand your problem, and I assure you I'm trying to help."

Key Points in Dealing with Difficult Customers

Put yourself in the customers' shoes and try to see things from their perspective.

Remember the customer is not angry at you.

Focus on the problem, not the person's attitude or behavior.

Display empathy towards the customer situation.

Be part of the solutions.

Take pride in turning an upset customer into a satisfied one.

Never interrupt when customers are telling their side of things.

Chapter 5: Reviewing Your Current Customer Service Process

- 1. Does your organization currently have a definition of customer service? If so, write it down here. If your organization does not have a definition of customer service, how do you begin to develop one?**

- 2. Does your organization currently recognize the importance of the "Moments of Truth"? If it does not, how could you suggest the idea?**

- 3. Is your current attitude positive or negative regarding customer service? What could you do to make your attitude more positive?**

- 4. What could you do to improve your communication with your customers?**

5. What could you do to improve your listening skills?

6. What could you do to improve your ability to establish rapport with your customers?

7. Is there anything you could do differently to make the customer feel valued?

8. What could you do to provide value added customer service?

9. What changes would your organization need to make to provide additional value added customer service? How would you begin the process?

- 10. Does your organization currently have a written complaint process? Are you aware of the steps involved in the process? If you are not familiar with the complaint process, who would you ask?**

- 11. When you are handling complaints, do you have any latitude or discretion in how to work with customers?**

- 12. When you feel threatened by an angry customer, do you have a prearranged signal or code to let others know?**

- 13. Is your organization willing to review its current customer service process? If not, what can you do to suggest possible changes or improvements?**

Effective Communication Tips

Saying What You Mean

- Consider your words
- Consider your tone
- Use welcoming words

Nonverbal Communication

- Actions speak louder than words
- Smile often
- Make eye contact
- Maintain good posture
- Get enough rest
- Keep your energy level steady

Grammar Usage

- Reflect your company's personality
- Speak clearly
- Use everyday language
- Avoid jargon and technical language

Asking and Answering Questions

- Keep your questions simple
- Ask open questions when you need information
- Ask closed questions to control the conversation
- Before you answer a customer's question, make sure you understand what the customer is asking
- Try to give more than a one-word answer



Negative and Positive Language

Negative phrasing and language often have the following characteristics:

- tell the recipient what cannot be done
- have a subtle tone of blame
- include words like can't, won't, unable to, that tell the recipient what the sending agency cannot do
- do not stress positive actions that would be appropriate, or positive consequences.

Positive phrasing and language have the following qualities:

- tell the recipient what can be done
- suggest alternatives and choices available to the recipient
- sound helpful and encouraging rather than bureaucratic
- stress positive actions and positive consequences

Common Negative Language and Phrasing

Listed below are some common negative phrasing that you should avoid when possible.

1. Expressions that suggest carelessness:

- "You neglected to specify..."
- "You failed to include..."
- "You overlooked enclosing..."

2. Phrases that suggest the person might be lying:

- "You claim that..."
- "You say that..."
- "You state that..."

3. Demanding phrases that imply coercion or pressure:

- "You should..."
- "You ought to..."
- "You must..."

4. Phrases that a person might interpret as sarcastic or patronizing:

- "No doubt..."
- "We will thank you to..."
- "You understand, of course..."

Strategies for Maintaining a Positive Attitude

Attitude is everything, so avoid negativity. Your attitude affects the way you see things, and it can affect how you experience your reality. Consider your attitude. Are you negative? Do you color everything with fear, need or negativity? How will your life change if you change your attitude?

Treat people with kindness and respect. You should value the person you encounter and treat that person with courtesy. Acknowledge that the person has feelings and a unique perspective on life; it may be different from yours, but it is also valid.

Take responsibility for your work, actions, and life. Don't pass the buck. Don't make excuses. Take responsibility: acknowledge a mistake, fix it, and learn from it. Don't beat yourself up about the mistake or hang on to past mistakes. Resolve them, own them, and move forward.

Respect other peoples' time and boundaries. If you are having a bad day, feeling stuck, or just enjoying procrastinating, make sure you don't use that as an excuse to waste other peoples' time or cross their boundaries. Time is the most valuable thing we have.

Make a what-I-have-accomplished list. Too often, people make huge to-do lists, and then beat themselves up when they have accomplished only a few things on the list. Each day, keep a specific list of all the things you did and how much time you spent on each thing. You'll know where the day went, feel good about what you did accomplish, and see where you need to focus to do what's most important to you.

Take notice of the people around you. Acknowledge what co-workers, customers, clients, vendors, and other people are contributing, and don't take them for granted.

Enjoy the little things that happen in your day. Relish the compliment someone gave you on the insight you shared at the staff meeting or the big smile the customer gave you. By recognizing your accomplishments, even if they seem small or routine, you are acknowledging a job well done.

Try to maintain a positive attitude and perspective, and you will feel more in control. Consider each job and interaction as your best performance, rather than just running them together as part of your day. You will see the impact you have and the value you offer. Others will also notice your efforts, and will respect you for your contributions.



General Strategies for Dealing with Others' Negative Attitudes

Assess and face each situation directly. Determine whether the difficult situation represents a pattern of behavior or is an isolated incident. Try to understand what attitude it reflects. Acknowledge and accept the person rather than hope for change, excuse the behavior, or ignore the problem.

Actively listen to the other person. Don't interrupt or get angry. Pause, and listen to the other person's viewpoint. Paraphrase what the other person said.

Express your feelings from your own point of view. Use "I" statements when describing your feelings. For example, "I feel resentful when you don't contribute your ideas..." rather than, "You make me feel..."

Describe the situation in a clear, concise manner. Try to describe the other person's behavior in a sentence or two. Focus on the behavior and the attitude, not the person. For example, "Brenda, that was a hurtful remark," rather than "Brenda, you are so rude."

State what you want. In a direct and assertive manner, state what you want from the other person. For example, "John, I want you to follow up on your commitment and complete part one of the report."

Practice. Rehearse your response, and mentally see yourself behaving in a calm, direct, and assertive manner. If you do not respond with integrity, review the situation and practice responding correctly. You cannot change other people; you can only change yourself. Your goal is to act honestly, with integrity and respect.

When your best efforts to defuse a difficult attitude fail and you must work with a difficult person, try some of these suggestions:

- **Inquire**—Get him or her talking.
- **Express your feelings**—Explain how you feel.
- **Reflect**—Is there some truth in what the person is saying?
- **Stand your ground**—Focus on the facts.
- **Take a break**—Talk about something neutral.
- **Gain perspective**—Does the person have a reputation for being difficult?

