

Lesson Objectives

Welcome to Lesson 15: Customer Service

After this lesson, you should be able to:

- Provide a clear statement of customer service philosophy.
- Demonstrate barriers to effective listening during customer interactions.
- Demonstrate ways to build rapport with customers.
- Identify personality and attitude through body language.
- Identify responses for handling difficult customer behaviors.



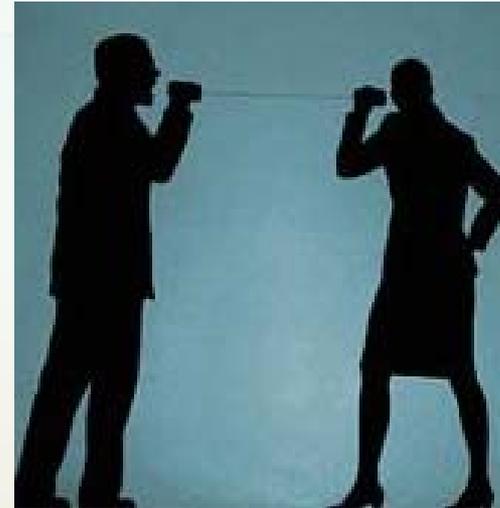
Customer Service

- The customer is not always right ... but the customer is always the customer!
- This fundamental attitude is the beginning of success in customer service at any level, in any industry.
- The goal is a positive outcome to every interaction—every communication.



Listening Skills

- **Barriers to effective listening:**
 - Background noise
 - Talking speed
 - Listening “filters”
 - Acronyms
 - Criticism of delivery
 - Assumptions
 - Labeling
 - Defensiveness
 - Conversational stoppers



Background noise

- Noise surrounds us: faxes, ringing phones, tidbits of passing conversation, piped-in music, traffic in the street and the hallway.
- Noise can drown out the tiniest word, resulting in you hearing a totally different message.



Talking speed

- Some customers talk too fast.
 - The average talking speed is 140 to 160 words per minute, but we all know people who talk with gusts of up to 400 words per minute.
- Never be afraid to politely ask customers to slow down their speech “so that you can understand completely.”
 - Phrasing, in this case, is everything.



Listening “filters”

- We tend to hear what we want to hear or expect to hear and tend to ignore what we don't want to hear.
 - For example, many people hear “I'll try to be home for dinner at 7p.m.” and translate it “I'll be home for dinner at 7p.m.”
 - Other people hear an elderly woman shabbily dressed say, “I'd like to buy a ticket” and automatically translate that to mean “she wants the lowest price ticket available.”
- Be aware of such filters or attitudes that affect your own listening.



Acronyms

- For words and phrases you use daily you tend to use acronyms.
- Our customers may not be familiar with these acronyms and feel lost by the message you are trying to convey.
- Be aware of acronyms and make an effort to avoid them.



Criticism of Delivery

- Other people miss what a customer says because they focus too strongly on how the customer is speaking, not what is being said.
- For example, they focus on the accent, the slang terms used, mispronunciation of words, or the stammering sentence pattern and stumble over the real message.



Assumptions

- Assumptions also play a role in many misunderstandings.
- You may have heard a general inquiry so many times that you assume all the particulars about a case without really hearing why a customer is asking for help.



Labeling

- Closely related to false assumptions is the habit of labeling what you see/hear.
- Labels—yours or those offered to you by colleagues—may limit your thinking so that you don't understand or see the complete situation or need.



Defensiveness

- Another big barrier to listening for a complete message is defensiveness.
- A defensive reaction to what the customer is saying causes us to tune out many of the details, especially when customers attack you personally.
- A typical reaction is to challenge what they're saying.
- If customers' remarks are lengthy, sometimes you begin to plan an entire response while you're waiting for them to finish speaking.
- If while a customer is speaking, your mind is screaming "wrong, wrong, wrong!" you will not hear the entire message.
- Your defensiveness will block other key facts and feelings that you'll need to respond to so that you can sort out the situation.



Conversational stoppers

- **The worst ending to such a negative situation would be to deliver a conversational “stopper.”**
- **That is not to say that stoppers will end a conversation, but that they may end the conversation prematurely—before you’ve had the opportunity to gather all the facts, investigate all the alternatives, and solve the problem.**
- **Stoppers include words and statements that stop the speaker immediately:**
 - “That’s not true.”
 - “You’re wrong.”
 - “Someone told you incorrectly.”
 - “You can’t do that.”



2. Building Rapport

- **Use names**
- **Avoid jargon**
- **Is the customer always right?**
- **Your role**
- **Respond to personal comments**
- **Avoid being overly familiar**
- **Agree selectively**
- **Empathize**
- **Avoid discounting**
- **Accept responsibility, don't blame or complain**
- **Explain, give status reports, and follow through**



Use Names

- Survey after survey shows that the single most important thing you can do to build relationships is to use a customer's name.
- An individual's name is music to his or her ears.
- Keep in mind that being a military organization, we must remain cognizant of proper protocol regarding rank. It is appropriate to refer to a beneficiary by rank followed by his or her last name. For example, "Good morning Colonel Jones; Sergeant Davis, please come forward."



Avoid Jargon



- Jargon is a form of shorthand for those familiar with terms, procedures, policies, documents, and equipment.
- Many people are so caught up in the lingo of their industry that they don't realize that they're not communicating with such jargon-filled statements and explanations.
- Jargon irritates those who don't understand it.



Is the customer always right?

- The customer isn't always right, especially when it comes to using your products and services in the way they were designed.
- Customers create their own problems sometimes with the help of service representatives.
- That is, many times when customers approach you with a problem, they don't fully understand the product or service we provide.
- But you can't blame customers for not knowing all about our products and services.



Your Role

- Familiarizing customers about how to use their products and your services is your responsibility.
- You, as a service representative, are a customer's main source of "help" and information
- Accept that task as a big part of providing effective customer service.
- Learn to give instructions willingly, clearly, and logically.
- Even though you may have given the information/instructions 82 times in any given day, your current customer has heard the instructions only once.



Respond to personal comments

- When customers share personal information within your hearing, you can assume they want you to hear it.
- They may make comments like, “My father has just had a heart attack. I need to get all this paperwork taken care of for him because he’s unable to do it himself.”
- To ignore such comments with no response at all means to a customer, “Don’t bother me; I don’t care.”
- React to such personal comments with an appropriate response that lets customers know you have heard and that you identify with the feeling or situation.



Avoid being overly familiar

- There's a fine line between responding to personal comments shared by customers and being too familiar by responding with a remark inappropriate for use in a business relationship.
- For example, if a customer mentions a death in the family, you don't want to respond with something so personal as to bring on tears.
- Even habits such as calling all customers by their first name or dropping titles such as "Mr." or "Dr." may offend customers who consider your interaction a business relationship rather than a personal one.



Agree selectively

- People like others to agree with them.
- Find something about a situation or a comment with which you can agree.
- Obviously, if a customer says, “The directions are ridiculous—you are totally incompetent,” you shouldn’t agree that you are incompetent.
- But you may agree that the directions are confusing to many people.
- Rather than clash with a customer’s statement, look for some part of a comment to respond to positively.
- Affirm that customer by agreeing with a limited part of the comment, even if it is an implied statement or feeling.



Empathize

- Customers want to know that you identify with their feelings.
- They need a personal response from you.
- Look for ways to show or state you understand their needs, frustrations, or disappointments.



Avoid discounting

- **Customers feel discounted when you do the following:**
 - Ignore them, their feelings, or their comments.
 - Reject, question or put down what they say as incorrect.
 - Give a judgmental, sarcastic, or flippant response to what they considered a serious issue.
 - “Over-explain” or act impatient as if they are stupid.
 - Treat them as children in need of constant supervision.
 - Reject a compliment rather than accept it.
 - Instead, respond to feelings and facts offered.
 - Assume customers are telling the truth.
 - Give a serious, nonjudgmental response to a serious issue or question.
 - Take your cue from customers about how much explanation they want or need.
 - Avoid treating them as children with constant orders and reminders about what they can and can't do.
 - And finally, accept compliments in the spirit they're offered.
 - To do otherwise implies that the customer was foolish or off base in offering the compliment.



Accept responsibility, don't blame or complain

- Nothing spoils communication with customers faster than having customers tell you about a situation which you then indicate is not your responsibility or worse, you blame or complain about others.



Explain, give status reports, and follow through: 1 of 3

- Many customer complaints revolve around the frustration of not knowing what's happening behind the scenes.
- And it doesn't take a customer long to grow uncomfortable with a wait even if left holding on the telephone for only a few moments while someone "checks on something."
- Customers cannot see the action going on to solve their problems, which leads them to fear that their needs are being ignored.
- Aim to keep your customer informed every step of the way.
- Explain what actions you are taking or planning to take.
- Give status reports when the action takes longer than routine.



Explain, give status reports, and follow through: 2 of 3

- Follow up to see that your coworkers have completed all promised action for the customer.
- Make sure that your customer considers the transaction completed.
- Control the interaction without giving orders
- Yes, time is money. Customers, as well as your own management, want you to be aware of time and productivity.
- Customers become victims when they have to stand by silently and wait their turn while watching service providers act helpless in complex or disappointing situations.
- Customers want you to spend as much time as necessary to help them complete their business, without wasting their time in the process.
- They expect you to know your own process and to lead them through it efficiently.



Explain, give status reports, and follow through: 3 of 3

- They also expect that you know enough about handling people not to let one or two difficult customers waste everyone's time.
- If they're the customer with a problem, they don't like to be shoved to the side as if they themselves are the problem that is holding everybody else up.
- You, as the service representative, have to control the interaction without controlling people.
- In other words, you want to be efficient without sounding like a drill sergeant or even a well-meaning parent.
- Yes, lead your customers through the necessary action steps, but try to avoid giving orders like these:
 - "Stand there."
 - "Wait a moment."
 - "Take these forms to the service rep at the next station."
 - "Sign in."
- Instead, try wording such directions with courtesy words and in question form:
 - "If you'll stand on the white line, someone will come by in a few minutes."
 - "Would you please wait a moment?"
 - "A service rep at the next counter will help you with those forms."
 - "Would you please step over there?"



3. Coping with Difficult Customers

- **Adopt the exception, not the rule mindset**
- **Passive, unresponsive, or non-vocal**
- **Know-it all**
- **Irate**
- **Dishonest**
- **Pseudo-helpless**
- **Demanding**
- **Complainer**
- **Confused**



Adopt the exception, not the rule mindset

- Research shows that dishonest, difficult customers represent a very small percentage of the entire customer population.
 - However, some organizations fall into the trap of setting all their policies and procedures to catch or prevent such customers from taking advantage of them.
 - By doing that, these organizations let such rules get in the way of helping the majority of honest, agreeable customers.
- Every customer is an individual with their own mindset, personality, quirks, talents, and tantrums.
- It is up to you to read individuals correctly and then access your bag of tricks for coping with the behaviors that surface when you meet these people.
- Don't let customers bait and hook you into their own behavior patterns.



Passive, unresponsive, or non-vocal

- Ask open-ended questions to gather information.
- Ask closed questions to gain agreement.
- Comment on body language (“You’re frowning. Are you distressed?”) to get the problem in the open so you can deal with it.
- Be direct, “Are you upset about something?”



Know-it-all

- Collect all the data to verify the situation.
- Respect and use the customer's knowledge.
- Lead customer to re-examine their own information, assumptions, questions, and conclusions.
- Express an “alternative” approach and suggest they “think it over” and get back to you.



Irate

- Allow them to ventilate their emotions, and listen actively to them.
- State your wish to be a problem-solving partner.
- Dig for the real issue, not the symptom.
- Accept their views and then state your own in a matter-of-fact tone.
- Use closed questions to manage the conversation.
- Use the broken-record (repeat, repeat) technique.



Dishonest

- Assume honesty.
- Ask open-ended questions to gather information.
- State the alternatives open to the customer.
- Do not accuse the customer of dishonesty.
- Keep records of claims/actions that you consider dishonest and refer to them in making decisions on subsequent encounters.



Pseudo-helpless

- Reassure and give confidence.
- Give instructions and a pep talk.
- Mention other resources such as people or written references.
- Help them to be specific. (Example: “What exactly is it that you don’t understand?” “Which step is difficult?”)
- Start the process for them.
- Compliment on things well done



Demanding

- Listen empathetically.
- Ask: “What do you think would be fair in this situation?”
- State: “I think X would be fair because...”
- Use the broken-record (repeat, repeat) technique.



Complainer

- Suggest that they offer a specific improvement or change.
- Offer to take action for them and pass on their complaint.
- Give credit for what they have “suffered.”
- Accept what they say, neither agreeing nor disagreeing.



Confused

- Repeat your directions.
- Ask them to verify what they have heard you say.
- Ask if someone nearby can assist/help them.
- Give them specific examples or illustrations.
- Start the process for them.



Summary

**Congratulations, you've finished
Lesson 15: Customer Service!**

You should now be able to:

- Provide a clear statement of customer service philosophy.
- Demonstrate barriers to effective listening during customer interactions.
- Demonstrate ways to build rapport with customers.
- Identify personality and attitude through body language.
- Identify responses for handling difficult customer behaviors.

