



## Customer Service & Complaint Handling Training Course

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# Contents

<b>1 - What is Customer Service</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 - The Determinants of a Quality Service</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3 - Customer Loyalty</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4 - The Importance of Communication</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>5 - Positive Assertiveness</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>6 - Handling Complaints</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>7 - Developing a Customer Service Plan for You</b>	<b>14</b>



## 1 - What is Customer Service?

In the eyes of the customer, when products and services appear the same, it is the personal service which they receive that determines whether or not they will return to the company to do future business.

Buyers return to where they feel important. Where they are not dealt with as just another customer, but the most important customer that the company has ever had.

Many organisations ignore the importance of customer service at their peril. While often they maintain policies of good customer service, in today's market the standards must not only be as good as the rest, it must be better. In fact it must not only reach satisfaction levels, but exceed them.

Many people consider themselves as predominantly technical specialists. However important this may be people skills can not be ignored. Dealing with people successfully is a real and tangible skill. It has to be learned and practised.

No matter what business you are in, it is the people business and working in the people business, we must recognise and work on the basis that the customer is the real boss, whom we all serve.



## 2 - The Determinants of a Quality Service

### 1 Reliability

Reliability involves a consistency of performance and a dependability of service. This means that your company delivers whatever it promises, each time, every time to the highest standard. The company always honours its promises and never moves the goal posts to confuse its client - no matter how small or large the deal is.

Specifically this involves:

- Accuracy in information
- Keeping records correctly
- Performing the requested service within the designated time period

### 2 Responsiveness

Responsiveness concerns the willingness or readiness of employees to provide service. However tedious, difficult or annoying your last task was must not be displayed to the next customer. Treat every call or appointment as if it was the first of the day.

Specifically this involves:

- Giving a prompt service
- Returning customer's calls quickly
- Showing interest in each customer

### 3 Courtesy

Dealing with people in a courteous manner is what customer service is all about. It involves politeness, respect, consideration and friendliness. But even if you are exercising all of the above, they mean nothing if not exercised with genuine intention. Smile with your eyes, not just your mouth when listening to people, and this includes dealing with people over the phone.



## 4 Competence

Competence means possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service required by the customer. A competent person will be more confident when relaying information to a customer than one who is searching for the information, at the same time as trying to assess what exactly the customer is looking for.

## 5 Access

However good a service may be, it must be easily accessible to clients. There must be a degree of ease of contact. You might offer the best service in the business, but if customers have to make a big effort to get in contact with you, these services will soon go to waste.

Specifically this involves:

- Service must be easily accessible by telephone
- Waiting time to receive service must not be extensive
- Convenient (for the client!) hours of operation
- Convenient location of service

## 6 Credibility

Credibility involves trustworthiness and honesty. You must always have your customers best interest at heart. Discretion is something which must be realised at all times. It is not only your reputation that could be damaged due to a lapse in credibility but that of your company. Confidentiality is also another important aspect of maintaining your credibility within the market place. No customer would return to a business where their last transaction had become public knowledge.

## 7 Understanding

Understanding and knowing your customer involves making the effort to understand and know their needs. Acknowledging previous customers and welcoming them back offers people a great sense of comfort and belonging.



Specifically this involves:

- Learning the customers exact requirements
- Providing individual attention
- Recognising the regular customer

## **8 Tangible determinants of Customer Service**

- Appearance of Personnel
- Attitude of Personnel
- Equipment used to provide services
- Physical representation of the service  
e.g. information leaflets



## 3 - Customer Loyalty

In your company you recognise that customers stop buying or switch their buying because of what you do, or don't do, to make the buying experience a pleasant one.

Market research has consistently shown that customers judge organisations based on the people they meet within those organisations. We ourselves know that when we visit shops, pubs, restaurants etc., we form opinions based on the service we get and the people we meet. Should we suffer the inconvenience or the discourtesy of one particular member of staff, we judge the whole organisation based on that meeting. Every time a member of staff meets a customer you have the opportunity to create an impression of your company - you have the power to build customer loyalty or destroy it.

Let us consider customer service from the customer's point of view:

- Every contact we make with a customer leaves us with an impression. Most of the time we hardly notice that impression; it is neutral. What has happened at that point of contact is unremarkable.
- However, when the customer is treated at a level which falls below that of their expectations, then they will emerge with negative impressions.
- If a customer is ignored, treated rudely, somehow cheated or dealt with unfairly they in turn will develop feelings of anger, frustration or disappointment. Would you be keen to do business again with someone who has made you feel that way?
- On other occasions customers are treated as someone special. The person dealing with them is warm, friendly and attentive. S/he takes some trouble on the customers behalf, is courteous and appears knowledgeable about the product/service. After the experience the customer feels pleased, appreciative and will return again for more of the same. Wouldn't you?



## Developing Customer Loyalty

If we increase the number of enjoyable experiences and decrease the number of unpleasant experiences our customers receive, we will influence their buying decision very strongly.

### What are the benefits?

- Professional customer service builds customer loyalty and customer loyalty makes sound business sense for four reasons:-
  - It is five times more expensive to get a new customer than to keep an existing one
  - Loyal customers advertise for us
  - Loyal customers buy more
  - Loyal customers make allowances for us on the odd occasions when things go wrong and co operate with us.

**Remember** - As customers ourselves, we would rather change than argue. We switch our buying because we encounter rudeness, impatience or insensitivity. We return to the same places again and again if their service meets and exceeds our expectations.



## 4 - The Importance of Communication

Communication is a fundamental 'people' skill which we use to get things done and to develop relationships with customers and colleagues.

Communication also means keeping customers informed in language they can understand, and listening to what they say. It may mean that your company has to adjust its language for different customers - increasing the level of sophistication with a knowledgeable customer, and speaking simply and plainly with a novice.

Most everyday tasks require communication. We go through this process subconsciously and generally successfully. Sometimes however, with a little consideration and thought many situations could be improved if better communication was possible.

There are four fundamental communication skills:

- **Reading**
- **Writing**
- **Speaking**
- **Listening**

Surprisingly, out of this list, the two most important communication tools are Speaking and Listening.

Some points to note when speaking are:

**Clarity** - Speak clearly, don't mumble

**Tone** - Sound friendly and interested

**Modulation** - Vary your voice so that it sounds interesting



For most people Listening is their weakest communication skill. Better listening comes from doing the following:

**Concentrate**

**Don't interrupt**

**Don't judge**

**Clarify understanding by asking questions**

**Reflect back**

Try some of these points next time you are having a conversation - be it with a customer or a friend - you might be surprised how much more interesting it may be.

## Questions

Another important communication skill is the ability to ask questions.

Their purpose is to get and clarify information - and without information how could we ever find out what we can do for our customers?

In general, you should start with open questions; continue with probing questions; ask closed questions to establish critical facts and then summarise that point.

Always be clear about the purpose of your question before you ask them.

Concentrate on using open and probe questions ('How do you feel about...') - but remember not to ask too many closed questions ('Are you.....'), unless the situation really calls for it.



## 5 - Positive Assertiveness

There are three ways with which we can behave towards others. These are:

- (1) **Non-Assertive**
- (2) **Assertive**
- (3) **Aggressive**

Assertive is the only *considered* behavioural response in this list, the others tend to be *reactive*, exercised without much thought. Let us examine Assertiveness in more detail.....

Assertive behaviour **enhances our self image, improves decisiveness** and **increases the positive impact** we make on others.

Assertiveness helps to produce more open, healthy relationships and helps in goal achievement. It has a positive effect on all situations and helps in conflict resolution.

What does being **Assertive** actually mean?

- A positive attitude towards coping with issues that concern us and a capacity to deal with those issues in an expressive manner, conscious of our own rights, while being respectful to others.
- Assuming an ability to be able to put forward our case in a polite but firm manner. While acting assertively we can make demands, express anger, or assert our rights without attacking or weakening the other person.
- Assertiveness also involves an ability to be sensitive to others needs and an ability to listen with understanding and empathy.
- Non verbal behaviour is also a major determinant of Assertiveness - Eye contact, facial expression body posture and tone of voice must mimic rather than contradict what you are saying and feeling.



## Benefits of **Groups** Being Assertive:

- Improved decision -making: Half baked ideas are critically screened
- More initiatives: People push ideas
- Better use of resources: The loudest voice does not shadow everyone else

## Benefits of **Individuals** Being Assertive:

- It gives you energy and helps you feel stronger
- It really works! You get important things done
- It improves your relationships - Important issues are opened up
- It is therapeutic as you constructively express tensions

## Techniques for Effective Assertion:

- (a) Avoid emotional presentation. Being angry or hurt can take away your energy and confuse the issue and the goal. Stick to a clear straightforward message.
- (b) Deal with one issue at a time. Be clear about the point you want to make and work on it until you resolve the matter. Only retreat when you are sure further progress is impossible.
- (c) Be clear and direct. Lay the issue on the table fairly and squarely without pussyfooting or cancelling.
- (d) Convey your feelings. Let the other person know how strongly you feel. Be honest and avoid exaggeration or false humility.
- (e) Watch out for flack: Other people may try to side track or divert you. They may feel under pressure so let them have their say and then return to your point.
- (f) Don't steam roll. Others will have a viewpoint so accept the truth in what they say, then return to your point.
- (g) Openly admit error. If you are wrong, say this openly and directly.
- (h) Go for a workable compromise. Watch for other persons' needs and try to meet these as well as your own.



## 6 - Handling Complaints

No matter how excellent a service you provide, giving customers exactly what they want, in the way that they want it, when they want it and in a positively assertive way, there will always be a certain amount of complaints.

This is a part of normal life and should not be taken to heart - just dealt with in the same efficient, courteous manner with which you would deal with other queries. This step by step guide should help you:

### 1. Understand the problem

- Listen actively
- Empathise with the customer
- Avoid justifying
- Get the full facts
- Confirm your understanding of the problem

### 2. Find a Solution

- Explain the situation
- Give alternative solutions where possible
- Agree a course of action

### 3. Satisfy the Customer

- Ensure that the action is carried out
- Follow up



## 7 - Developing a Customer Service Plan for You

While everyone in your organisation may be skilled and committed to customer service, that doesn't make it happen.

Different customers have different needs and represent different opportunities. It is not possible to satisfy all types of customer with a single service, it is up to *you* to determine what they want and expect and exceed these expectations.

- **Listen to your customers**
- **Take pride in your work**
- **Represent your company as you would like to be represented yourself**
- **Never forget your own importance**

