

Receptionist Skills Training Course

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1 - Introduction

Staff who work in the 'front office' are vital members of any corporate team. Your performance is a major contributor to your organisation's success.

You are the first person to greet clients as they enter the office or call on the telephone. Therefore it is your impression which forms the basis of their overall impression of the whole company.

It's a big responsibility. Added to that all the other duties which receptionists invariably have to perform, from secretarial tasks to the ordering of couriers and it can be a very busy and stressful position.

Multi-tasking takes practice to perfect but with careful planning and monitoring your workload can be managed in a professional and efficient manner and also make your position more enjoyable. You must first realise your own importance within the organisation and then learn to improve your existing skills and gain new ones.



2 - Managing the Telephone

The telephone is one of the most important tools of communication available to you. Each call must be dealt with in an efficient and pleasant manner.

- Identify your place of work. Greet the caller and offer to help.
- Listen and find out what the caller wants.
- Jot down the caller's name and main points of the conversation:
 - Be sure to keep a pencil and paper (or message pad) close to the telephone, as well as the information, manuals, price lists, or whatever you will need to answer the most common telephone enquiries.
- Repeat the important points of the conversation back to the caller:
 - "So what you are looking for is..."
- When transferring a call explain where the call is going:
 - Announce the caller to the person/department to which you are transferring and explain why you are transferring the call. Do not make the caller have to repeat the enquiry all over again.
- When putting the caller on hold, check back regularly to see whether the caller still wants to hold:
 - Do not banish your caller to the telephone limbo!
- Offer to ring back if there is a long delay or if information is not immediately to hand:
 - Make sure you get the correct number and call back promptly
- Finish the call politely and use the caller's name if possible.
- Follow up on the call.
- One of the most important points about handling enquiries is to anticipate them. If you know the answers to most of the questions people are likely to ask, you will not feel defensive or unsure of yourself.



When answering the telephone always remember:

- A** You are aiming to make the caller pleased that they chose to call your company
- B** You are aiming to impress the caller with your courtesy and helpfulness
- C** Answer the telephone with identification

Do:

- 1** Let your opening greeting identify you and your organisation.
Speak into the mouthpiece
- 2** Get your caller's name and use it. Try to recognise the voices of regular callers and other people in the company.
- 3** Let your tone be warm, friendly and interested.
- 4** If you have to ask the caller to wait - explain why.
- 5** Service your call on hold every 30 seconds - thank the caller for waiting.
- 6** Make the caller feel that you are anxious and willing to help
- 7** If you agree to call back at a specific time, call - even if you have been as yet unable to attend to the query or request.
- 8** Attend to a query NOW or you will forget. If there are other priorities, write down the query.
- 9** Let your caller hang up first and say "Thank you for calling"

Remember that the caller can not see your face and so the warmth and enthusiasm, which are normally conveyed in a smile, must be heard in your voice.



Do not ever:

- 1 Answer the telephone saying "hello" only.
- 2 Be familiar or let personalities intrude.
- 3 Sound bored, impatient or lose your temper.
- 4 Say "hold on" and leave the caller holding.
- 5 Contradict or argue - use the words "yes, however..".
- 6 Say "I don't know".
- 7 Forget to telephone someone back.
- 8 Make the caller feel as if they are in the wrong.
- 9 Bang the telephone down whilst the caller is still speaking.
- 10 Carry on a conversation with someone else while on the telephone.
- 11 Shout across the room to someone wanted on the telephone.
- 12 Answer the telephone with something in your mouth.
- 13 Wait for the caller to call back if disconnected, always be the one to try to get back to them.



3 - Customer Service Skills

What is a customer?

- A customer is the most important person ever in the office - in person or on the phone.
- A customer is not dependant on us - we are dependant on them.
- A customer is not an interruption of our work - they are the purpose of it. We are not doing them a favour by serving them - they are doing us a favour by giving us the opportunity to do so.
- A customer is not someone to argue or match wits with.
- A customer is a person who brings us our wants. It is our job to handle them profitably for both for the benefit of them and ourselves.

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, and indeed not a lot could happen without this technical knowledge, 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.



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.

The ten most popular answers to the question of why they would return to a particular shop or business from a group of people were:

- Friendly staff
- Good atmosphere
- Quick service
- Prices/Value
- To be known by the staff
- Comfort
- Facilities
- Professional advice
- Clean premises
- Little waiting time

Seven of these answers relate to customer service.

As a receptionist, you are the first member of your company to offer people an outstanding service - and that is what it is all about.



4 - The Determinants of a Quality Service

1 Reliability

Reliability involves a consistency of performance and a dependability of service. Specifically this involves that you must:

- Be accurate in information given
- Keep records correctly
- Perform 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 as if it was the first of the day. Specifically this involves you:

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

3 Courtesy

Dealing with people in a courteous manner is what quality 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 what the customer is looking for.



5 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. This is also important when dealing with internal staff. Never repeat who is calling who and always be discreet with the knowledge that may be open to you.

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



5 - Communication skills

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

Most everyday tasks require communication. We go through this process subconsciously and generally successfully. Sometimes however, with a little consideration and thought many situations can 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 important 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 colleague 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, or what it is that we are supposed to be doing, for someone else?

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.

The 10 golden rules of speaking

Remember the following golden rules of speaking and you will capture your listeners attention and keep it:

- 1 Think before you speak.**
- 2 Speak clearly and attractively.**
- 3 Choose the best words - not the first words that spring to mind.**
- 4 Avoid ugly and lazy pronunciations.**
- 5 Don't slur or distort words.**
- 6 Use variations in pitch and rhythm to achieve emphasis and interest.**
- 7 Avoid irritating speech mannerisms.**
- 8 Don't rely on clichés.**
- 9 Make sure that your listener is following what you say.**
- 10 Know when to stop and allow others to have their say.**



6 - Assertiveness Techniques

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

Assertiveness has two components:

- (1) 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.

It assumes an ability to be able to put forward our case in a polite but firm manner. While acting assertively we can make demands and 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.

- (2) Whether the other party experiences our behaviour as being non-assertive, aggressive or assertive is very much affected by our mode of expression.

Non verbal behaviour is a major determinant of assertiveness. The primary sources of non-verbal communication are eye contact, facial expressions, body posture, gestures, tone of voice and timing.

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 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 out for other persons' needs and try to meet those as well as your own.



7 - Handling Complaints

No matter how excellent a service you provide, giving callers 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 caller
- 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 Caller

- Ensure that the action is carried out
- Follow up



8 - Conclusion

- Every position is different, just as every call or encounter is different, but if you use the basic communication techniques along with an increased awareness as to the importance of your position within the company you will find your skills improving, both at work and socially.
- You are important and your position is important - this should never be forgotten.
- Think of the following final checklist when answering the phone:
 - 1 BE PROMPT - answer the telephone promptly and smile**
 - 2 BE POLITE - and friendly, and cheery**
 - 3 BE PREPARED - have all the information to hand that you may need**
 - 4 BE PRACTICAL - in your ideas, approach and manner**
 - 5 BE POSITIVE - create confidence in yourself**
 - 6 BE PROFESSIONAL - to fellow colleagues as well as clients**
 - 7 BE PRECISE - speak clearly and simply - do not mumble**

