

# Customer Service Skills

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How We Can All Improve



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## Slide Show Notes

- Without our customers, we wouldn't be in business, and none of us would have jobs.
- Whether you work directly with customers, produce the products we sell, or provide support for those who perform these essential functions, the ultimate goal for us all is to help keep our customers satisfied and coming back for more. Unless we meet and exceed customer expectations every day, the organization can't grow and prosper—and that's bad for everyone.
- That's why it is so important for every employee in every department to develop a customer-oriented focus and always provide excellent service.

## Session Objectives

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You will be able to:

- Recognize that we all have customers and share responsibility for customer satisfaction
- Understand what customers expect from you
- Handle customers' problems effectively
- Help improve overall customer satisfaction

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### Slide Show Notes

The main objective of this session is to suggest ways we can all help improve the service we provide to our customers. By the time this session is over, you should be able to:

- Recognize that we all have customers and share responsibility for customer satisfaction;
- Understand what customers expect from you;
- Handle customers' problems effectively; *and*
- Help improve overall customer satisfaction.

## What You Need to Know

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- What internal customers need
- What external customers expect
- How to determine customer needs
- How to turn complaints into opportunities
- How to deal with upset customers
- How to encourage customer feedback and promote positive customer relationships

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### Slide Show Notes

During the session, we will discuss:

- What internal customers need;
- What external customers expect;
- How to determine customer needs;
- How to turn complaints into opportunities;
- How to deal with upset customers; *and*
- How to encourage customer feedback and promote positive customer relationships.

# Who Are Your Customers?

- External customers
- Internal customers



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Everyone in the organization has customers, even if you don't work in customer service or deal directly with the company's customers. That's because there are two kinds of customers.

- External customers are the businesses and individuals who buy products and services from our company.
- Internal customers are people in our organization. These people depend on you in one way or another.

In other words, either you have internal customers or external customers—or both. That makes providing excellent customer service an important part of your job. And that's why we make serving customers a priority in this organization.

Think about the organization's customer service program and how it affects how you interact with your customers.

*Review the organization's customer service policy briefly with trainees, emphasizing the importance of providing excellent service to all customers.*

# Who Are Your Internal Customers?

- Within the department
- In other departments



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Because the smooth operation of any organization depends on the interaction of its people, you might have internal customers in many different parts of the company.

- To start with, you have internal customers right in your own department. For example, one of your most important internal customers is your supervisor. You have to provide your boss with information, services, and support. Your co-workers usually need the same services from you.
- You probably also have internal customers in other departments. These are people who depend on information, work product, and so on from from you in order to perform their jobs. For example, the internal customers of someone who works in the billing department are those who work in accounts receivable and manage the books. An assembly worker's internal customers are all those who test, pack, and ship products. A maintenance worker has internal customers all over the building.

Can you identify all of your internal customers?

*Ask trainees to identify their internal customers.*

# What Do Internal Customers Need?

- Timely service
- Complete, clear, and accurate information
- Support for their efforts



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Internal customers—whoever they are—have certain basic needs that you have to meet.

- They require timely service, which means you need to respond promptly to their requests;
- They want complete, clear, and accurate information; *and*
- They need support for their efforts so that they can perform their jobs and discharge their responsibilities effectively.

Think about the needs of your internal customers. What kind of services do you have to provide for them?

*Ask trainees to discuss the services they provide for their internal customers.*

# Serving Internal Customers

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- Courtesy
- Respect
- Cooperation

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Providing excellent service to internal customers goes beyond the basic needs to include three other key aspects of customer service.

- Internal customers should always be treated courteously—no matter who they are or where they sit on the organizational chart.
- Internal customers should also be treated with respect—respect for their needs and their time.
- And you also need to cooperate with internal customers. That means doing everything possible to make sure that internal customers get exactly what they need, when they need it. After all, the ultimate goal of your internal customers is the same as yours—to ensure the success and prosperity of the organization, which in turn ensures the success and prosperity of each employee.

Think about the kind of service you provide your internal customers. Do you do all of the things we've discussed in this and the previous slide every time they deal with an internal customer?

*Discuss the issues highlighted in this and the previous slide, and ask trainees if the service they provide internal customers meets these standards.*

# What All Customers Really Want

- Needs and expectations met
- What they were promised
- Knowledgeable assistance
- Prompt, willing attention
- Polite, interested, and respectful treatment



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Now let's talk about what customers—internal or external—really want. Basically, they all want one thing—a positive experience. External customers want positive experiences with our company and its products, services, and people. Internal customers want positive experiences with their co-workers and people in other departments.

- In practical terms, this means that customers want their needs and expectations met every time they deal with you.
- They want what was promised to them—no “ifs,” “ands,” or “buts.”
- Customers also want knowledgeable assistance. In other words, you have to really know your job inside out and be familiar with all relevant policies and procedures that affect customer service.
- Customers want prompt, willing attention. They want to deal with people who will respond efficiently to their requests and problems, and do so in a positive, professional way.
- In addition, customers want polite, interested, and respectful treatment from you every time you deal with them—even when you're having a bad day.

Think about yourself as a customer. What kind of service do you want?

*Ask trainees to identify the kind of service they expect as customers.*

# Determining Customer Needs

- Listen
- Ask
- Repeat
- Inquire
- Present



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To provide the highest quality service, you have to be able to determine customers' needs—whether those customers are internal or external.

- The first step is to listen closely to what the customer is saying. Customers will usually define their own needs if you just take the time to listen.
- If needs are not clearly expressed, then you have to ask questions to find out what the customer really wants.
- Once the customer's needs are clear, repeat the customer's stated need to make sure that you've understood correctly.
- Next, inquire if the customer needs anything else at this time. And the final step is to present the product or service that best meets the customer's needs.
- Do you always take these steps to determine internal and/or external customers' needs? Can you think of an instance when you failed to correctly determine a customer's needs? What happened?

*Ask trainees to describe how they determine customers' needs. How successful are they at getting the information they need to provide the necessary service?*

# Exceeding Expectations

- Provide prompt, accurate service
- Deliver more than promised
- Resolve problems
- Go the extra mile



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## Slide Show Notes

Good customer service meets a customer's needs and fulfills the customer's expectations. Excellent customer service exceeds the customer's expectations.

- To exceed expectations, you have to provide prompt, accurate service.
- Whenever possible, you should try to deliver more than you promised. The rule of thumb here is to *underpromise* and *overdeliver*.
- You also have to know how to resolve customers' problems successfully in order to exceed expectations. Customers appreciate a genuine effort to handle a problem, even when it can't be resolved completely to their satisfaction. Solving an external customer's problem will usually increase loyalty to the organization. Failing to solve customers' problems could well cause those customers to take their business elsewhere.
- One final point. To exceed customer expectations, you must always be willing to "go the extra mile" for your customers. This means you must be prepared to do whatever it takes within your power to satisfy customers. When you do this, you will usually exceed expectations and provide truly excellent service.

# Treasure Our Loyal Customers

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- Repeat customers are the heart of the business
- Loyal customers provide free advertising
- Unhappy customers can damage current and future business prospects

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## Slide Show Notes

It's easy to get complacent and take customer loyalty for granted, especially in times when you're busy or stressed. But we have to treasure our customers. Don't forget that repeat customers are the heart of our business. They're like gold to us.

- Did you know that it can cost up to five times more to attract new customers than to keep the customers we already have? And competition for customers becomes stiffer every year in a tough global market where customers have lots of choices. If we don't provide the kind of service they expect, they'll find somebody else who will.
- Also remember that loyal customers help us attract new customers. When our current customers are happy doing business with us, they recommend us to other people, and provide free advertising for our products and services.
- Unhappy customers, on the other hand, broadcast their discontent. They complain about us to other people—lots of other people—and that can damage our current and future prospects.

# Keeping Customers Satisfied

- Do you understand the information presented in the previous slides?



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- Now it's time to ask yourself if you understand the information that has been presented so far. Do you understand what we've discussed about internal customers? Do you understand what we've said about what customers really want and how to determine and meet their needs?

It's important that you understand this information, as well as the value of customer loyalty, so that you are always prepared to provide excellent service to all customers.

*Answer any questions trainees have about the information in the previous slides.*

*Conduct an exercise, if appropriate.*

Let's continue to the next slide and talk about why customers sometimes go to the competition.

# Why Customers Go to the Competition

- They are ignored
- They can't get the information they need
- They are not treated well
- Promises are not fulfilled



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## Slide Show Notes

External customers judge our organization by the contacts they have with us. When those experiences do not meet or exceed their expectations, customers take their business to our competitors. Since we can't afford to lose customers, it is vital that you understand why customers leave so that together we can all take steps to prevent them from taking their business elsewhere.

- One of the most common reasons customers leave is because they are ignored. They don't get enough attention, and this says to them that we don't care—that we don't consider them important or their time valuable.
- Customers also leave when they can't get the information they need. When you don't know about products, services, or policies, customers go to the competition looking for more knowledgeable, helpful service.
- Customers leave when they are not treated well. All customers want to be treated with respect and courtesy. They want to be treated as individuals with names, not just numbers on an order form.
- Finally, customers leave when the promises we make are not fulfilled. That's why you should only promise what you absolutely know you can deliver. Remember what we said earlier—*underpromise* and *overdeliver*.

# How to Turn Complaints Into Opportunities

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- Take all complaints seriously
- Demonstrate concern
- Understand the complaint
- Investigate the problem
- Work to resolve the problem

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## Slide Show Notes

An effective response to a customer complaint can change dissatisfaction into satisfaction and keep customers from leaving. It's estimated that a sincere, concerned, and skillful response to a problem can retain the business of about 95 percent of customers who complain.

- Most customers who complain are reasonable. They just want you to take their complaints seriously.
- They want you to demonstrate concern for their problem. They want you to take interest, pay attention, and show empathy for their predicament. They also want a chance to explain their problem, and they expect a courteous, concerned response.
- You also need to understand the complaint. Why is the customer complaining? What does the customer really want you to do about it?
- You may need to investigate a problem as well. This might mean checking records and talking to others in the organization to find out what went wrong.
- And once the problem has been properly identified, you have to work with the customer to resolve the matter to the customer's satisfaction.

## How to Turn Complaints Into Opportunities (cont.)

- Deliver bad news honestly and positively
- Try to make up for the customer's trouble
- Thank the customer
- Follow up to ensure satisfaction
- Learn from experience

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### Slide Show Notes

- Sometimes, of course, a complaint can't be resolved entirely to the customer's satisfaction. When that's the case, you should deliver the bad news honestly, pointing out any positive elements, such as alternatives that could meet the customer's needs just as well.
- You should also try to make up for the customer's trouble in some way—especially if it's not possible to do exactly what the customer wants. Providing something extra to say “We're sorry; we value your business” often helps repair any relationship damage that might have been caused by the problem.
- And always remember to thank customers for alerting the company to problems. We have to be grateful to a customer who takes the time to complain and point out things we're not doing well. It gives us a chance to improve service and keep the customer.
- Along with thanking customers for complaints, follow up to make sure that whatever solution was agreed upon has actually been implemented and has solved the problem so that now the customer is happy with the outcome.
- Finally, and perhaps most important, remember that complaints give us the opportunity to learn from our mistakes and prevent future problems.

# How to Handle Upset Customers

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- Don't take it personally
- Allow the customer to vent
- Identify the problem



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## Slide Show Notes

- No matter how hard you try or no matter how good our service program is, occasionally an external customer will be dissatisfied. Sometimes a customer will be really upset. Dealing with angry, upset people takes special skill and patience.
- First of all, don't take the situation personally. This is business. No matter how the customer acts, strive to respond positively and professionally, remaining calm and focused.
- The next step is to let the customer vent. Allow the person to express thoughts and feelings without interrupting, except to simply acknowledge those thoughts and feelings. Remember to keep focused on the problem, rather the emotions, so that you can identify the source of the customer's dissatisfaction.

## How to Handle Upset Customers (cont.)

- Resolve the problem
- Follow up to ensure satisfaction
- Show appreciation



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### Slide Show Notes

- When an upset customer has calmed down a little bit, try to resolve the problem. Find out what the customer expects and try to meet those expectations. If it's not possible to give customers exactly what they want, try to find an alternative that satisfies the customer. This might require a consultation with your boss or others in the organization.
- Follow up is essential with all customer complaints to ensure customer satisfaction. But it is never more important than when the complaint comes from an angry customer. Be sure to check with others in the organization who share responsibility for seeing that the customer gets what he or she needs. Also check back with the customer to make sure promises have been kept and the customer is now satisfied.
- And as with every complaint and every customer problem, employees should show their appreciation and make sure the customers know how much they are valued.

Think about the times you've had to handle an upset internal or external customer. How well did you do? Did you take all the steps we've discussed?

*Choose two trainees to role-play an interaction between an angry customer and an employee. Have the group critique the effort.*

## What Can You Do When the Customer Is at Fault?

- Remember that the goal is customer satisfaction
- Don't place blame
- Get to the root of the problem
- Educate and cooperate
- Find a mutually agreeable solution



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### Slide Show Notes

- Not every complaint, problem, or cause for dissatisfaction on the part of customers is our fault. Contrary to the old saying, the customer *isn't* always right. Sometimes customers are responsible for creating their own problems. For example, a customer may have failed to pay attention to instructions, policies, or procedures. When that's the case, you have to be especially careful—and tactful.
- Remember that customer satisfaction is always the goal, even when the customer is at fault. That means you shouldn't waste time and risk antagonizing customers by trying to place blame. Never do anything to embarrass customers or make them look foolish or feel guilty.
- Instead, try to understand their situation and get to the root of the problem as quickly as possible.
- Then, tactfully educate customers so that they won't make the same mistake again. Make resolving the situation a collaborative effort, gaining the customer's cooperation.
- When that has been achieved, a mutually agreeable solution must be found. This means making sure customers get what they want and need from us even when they create their own problems. Remember to keep your eye on the goal, which is to keep the customer's business, not to prove who's right or wrong.

## Avoid Customer Hang Ups

- Always answer your phone promptly and identify yourself
- Listen to the customer
- Ask for any additional information
- Try to give the necessary assistance immediately



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### Slide Show Notes

The telephone is an important part of doing business with customers. To avoid customer hang ups, you have to make sure doing business by phone is efficient and pleasant for your customers. Here are some simple steps you can take to ensure satisfaction over the phone:

- Always answer your phone promptly and identify yourself in a warm but businesslike tone;
- Listen carefully to what the customer has to say and take notes if necessary;
- Ask for any additional information you need and explain why; *and*
- Try to give the necessary assistance immediately, but if you can't, explain what will happen next and when you'll call back.

Let's go on to the next slide now for some more telephone tips.

## Avoid Customer Hang Ups (cont.)

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- Try to avoid long holds and transfers
- Before you hang up, ask if there's anything else you can do
- Thank the customer
- What to do when you make the call

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### Slide Show Notes

- Whenever possible, try to avoid long holds and transfers. If you must put a customer on hold, explain why and keep the hold period brief. Be sure to thank the customer for waiting when you get back on the line.
- If you have to transfer a call, explain why and to whom you are transferring the customer. Give the customer your name and extension in case of an accidental disconnection.
- Before you hang up, ask customers if there's anything else you can do for them at the present time. If the answer is no, be sure to thank customers for calling and invite them to call again any time.
- If you're the one making a call to a customer, begin the call by identifying yourself and the company. Then explain why you're calling. Make sure it's a convenient time for the customer to talk to you. If not, ask for a good time to call back—and then be sure you do call back at the appointed time.

Think about how you interact with customers over the phone. Are you confident that they are always happy with the service you provide?

*Choose two trainees to role-play an incoming telephone call from a customer. Have the group critique the performance of the trainee playing the employee.*

# Dealing Effectively With Customer Problems

- Do you understand the information presented in the previous slides?



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## Slide Show Notes

- Now it's time to ask yourself if you understand the information that has been presented in the previous slides. Do you understand what we've discussed about customer complaints, dealing with customer problems, and providing excellent service over the phone?

This is one of the most difficult aspects of customer service. You must be sure you're prepared to handle these situations well, even under the toughest circumstances.

*Answer any questions trainees have about the information in the previous slides.*

*Conduct an exercise, if appropriate.*

Let's continue to the next slide and discuss encouraging customer feedback.

# Encourage Customer Feedback

- Ask customers what they like about us
- Ask what they'd like to see changed or improved
- Share customer feedback with others in the organization
- Use feedback to improve customer interactions and satisfaction



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## Slide Show Notes

- To serve customers well, we need their feedback. Only our customers can tell us what they really need and how well we're meeting those needs. It's dangerous to assume that they are satisfied just because they haven't complained.
- Periodically ask customers what they like about our products and services. Also ask them what they'd like to see changed or improved. When you ask about improvements, take any negative comments as constructive criticism that will help us be more sensitive to customer needs. Don't view these comments as attacks on the company or on you personally.
- Be sure to share what you learn from customers with others in the organization so that together we can use the feedback to improve customer interactions and satisfaction.
- Can you think of any examples of customer feedback that has helped us improve products, services, procedures, or policies.

*Discuss examples of customer feedback that have helped the organization improve products, services, procedures, or policies.*

# Follow Through On Promises

- Promise only what you know you can deliver
- Follow up on all commitments
- Check back with customers to ensure satisfaction



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## Slide Show Notes

Although we have mentioned the importance of following through on promises several times during this session, this important point bears repeating.

- Remember to promise only what you *know* you can deliver. The best approach, as we said earlier, is to underpromise and overdeliver.
- Follow up on all commitments. Be clear about what you can and can't do, and only commit to what you can do. Making commitments just to calm an angry customer or buy some time is a mistake.
- And, as we've said before, always check back with customers to ensure satisfaction. It's fine to solve a customer's problem and commit to take appropriate action, but the job doesn't end there. Unless you check to make sure that the action has actually been taken and that the customer is satisfied with the result, you haven't solved the problem or ensured customer satisfaction and continued loyalty.

## Customers and You

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- Customers keep us in business
- Customers depend on us to meet their needs
- Every employee is responsible for customer satisfaction

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### Slide Show Notes

The final point we want to make in this training session is that we all depend on our customers and they depend on us. It is a mutually beneficial relationship. That's true for both internal and external customers.

- Attracting, satisfying, and retaining external customers is what keeps the company in business and provides jobs and opportunities for us all. An organization can have the greatest products in the world, but it won't be successful unless it also provides great service to each customer.
- And while we depend on our customers for survival, they depend on us to meet their needs. This is true for all our customers—business-to-business, consumers, and internal customers.
- Finally, we all share responsibility for customer satisfaction. That is true whether you deal with internal customers, external customers, or both. Providing excellent service every day is an important part of everybody's job.

## Key Points to Remember

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- All of us have customers
- You play an important role in ensuring customer satisfaction
- When internal customers are satisfied, our organization runs at peak efficiency
- When external customers are satisfied, they keep doing business with us
- We all depend on satisfied customers

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### Slide Show Notes

Here are the main points to remember from this session on customer service:

- All of us have customers—either internal, external, or both.
- You play an important role in ensuring customer satisfaction.
- When internal customers are satisfied, your organization runs at peak efficiency.
- When external customers are satisfied, they keep doing business with us.
- We all depend on satisfied customers for our continued success and prosperity.

This concludes the customer service training session.

*Give trainees the quiz, if appropriate.*