

Debre Birhan Polytechnic College

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Sector: Economic Infrastructure

Sub Sector: Information Communication Technology

Learning Guide: Establishing and Conducting Business Relationship

Learning outcome:

- ▣ **Establish contact with customer**
- ▣ **Clarify needs of customer**
- ▣ **Provide information and advice**
- ▣ **Foster/encourage and maintain business relationships**

Clarify and accurately identify customer needs and expectations, using appropriate interpersonal skills

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What customers need

Customers need you to...

- **Accessibility**
 - be easy to talk to (approachable)
 - be easy to contact
- **Responsibility**
 - be willing to keep customers happy
 - provide prompt service
- **Courtesy**
 - be polite, respectful, considerate, friendly
- **Reliability**
 - perform the promised service dependably and accurately
- **be punctual**

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Security

- ▣ provide security, ie, freedom from danger, risk or doubt (eg security of data, protection of health and safety)
- ▣ **Good at communication**
 - ▣ keep them informed, in a language they can understand
 - ▣ listen to them
- ▣ **Understand the customers**
 - ▣ make an effort to know them and their needs
- ▣ **Credibility**
 - ▣ be trustworthy and honest
- ▣ **Competence**
 - ▣ have the skills and knowledge to perform the service
- ▣ **Confidentiality**
 - ▣ not discuss matters relating to them (except with other staff, if appropriate)

Identifying customer needs or concerns involves:

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- **active listening**—allowing the customer to explain their need or concern, without trying to solve the problem immediately
- **questioning**—using questions such as reflective questioning techniques to draw out the exact need or concern
- **paraphrasing**—repeating the need or concern back to the customer in your own words to check you've understood it correctly
 - ▣ developing an action plan for a solution when the customer starts to calm down and then repeating what was agreed on as an action plan
 - ▣ encouraging customer to propose solution
 - ▣ deciding on the urgency of the customer's needs.

Do not:

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- ❑ **take things personally**—they're angry at the organisation not you for expectations not being met
- ❑ ***present respond a bureaucratic way***—let them see you as a human being doing your best to help
- ❑ ***ignore difficult customers***—problems will escalate.

Key principles of active listening

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- Do more listening than talking.
 - ▣ Give the other person time to talk. Show that you are interested in what they have to say.
- Show encouragement.
 - ▣ Use non-verbal as well as verbal cues to show you are listening. For example, maintain eye contact, sit upright and say 'yes' or 'I see' at appropriate places, and use a positive tone of voice.
- Avoid appearing tense.
 - ▣ For example, avoid sitting with arms and legs tightly crossed and speaking in a hurried and agitated tone of voice.

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- Try not to agree or disagree ***right away***.
 - ▣ If you feel you have to disagree, wait until the other person's explained and then disagree but provide reasons for your stand.
- Show empathy.
 - ▣ Imagine yourself in the other person's position. Respond to their feelings.
- Be 'other-directed'.
 - ▣ In other words, don't project your feelings or ideas on them.
- Be accepting of the other person.
 - ▣ This means being non-judgmental and non-discriminatory

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- Be non-defensive.
 - ▣ Instead, admit any errors or oversights on the part of yourself or your organisation and apologise for that.
- Paraphrase (summarize) what the speaker is saying.
 - ▣ In other words, restate/repeat key facts, issues, perceptions and interpretations. When you receive a client request, even a simple one, it's important to check that you've understood it correctly.
- Be aware of the other person's sensitivities
 - ▣ If you need to ask questions of a sensitive nature, ask them in a gentle, polite and supportive manner and tone of voice.
- Assure confidence.
 - ▣ Wait for the right time to ask as well-that is, when the other person is relaxed and you have gained their confidence.

When customer expectations are high, timelines are short, and resources are limited, you need to prioritise your customers' needs.

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- How do you determine what needs to be attended to first?

Determining priorities

- Here are some guidelines on determining the urgency of customer requests:

Create a prioritised to-do list

- ▣ It's a good idea to follow these steps:
- ▣ *consider your current goals and activities, and create your 'to-do' list*
- ▣ *then give each task in your list a priority, with 1 as the highest priority*
- ▣ *then rearrange your list so the highest priority tasks are at the top*
- ▣ *cross off each task as you complete it*

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- ▣ Whenever you're not sure what to do at any given time, or whenever you feel like you're losing control, look at your prioritised to-do list and ask yourself '***What is the best use of my time right now?***'
- ▣ Here are some more questions that can help you to prioritise the things on your to-do list:
 - ▣ *Who asked me to do it?*
 - ▣ *When is the deadline?*
 - ▣ *How important is it?*
 - ▣ *How long will it take to do?*
 - ▣ *Do I want to do it?*
 - ▣ *What will happen if I don't do it today?*

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- ***Determine what the consequences would be if you did not meet a certain need right away.***
 - ▣ ***Group like tasks or requests together.***
- ***Update your assumptions about the customer's need***
 - ▣ Needs can change. Example: Ask your team leader if the work team will still be meeting on that day.

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- ***Consult with your team leader, if it is not within your authority to fulfill the need***
 - ▣ In your role, you might not be in a position to make certain decisions.
- ***Distinguish between important and urgent tasks***
 - ▣ Important tasks will usually have longer-term job outcomes.
 - ▣ Urgent tasks will have short-term outcomes.

Managing your time

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- ▣ To help you, manage your time so that you can meet urgent tasks, you could create a schedule or keep a time log.

▣ Create a schedule

- ▣ think about the **best** times of the day for you and schedule more demanding or creative tasks for those times.
- ▣ *group similar tasks together*

▣ Keep a time log

- ▣ A time log itemizes how you spend your time.
- ▣ It helps you review how you currently spend you time, and make changes where necessary.

Identify limitations in addressing customers' needs and seek appropriate assistance from designated individuals

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- Constraints may include:
 - ▣ *You do not have the **authority** to meet the customer's need.*
 - ▣ *You do not think that your unit has the **resources** to meet the need.*
 - ▣ *The customer is asking for a service that your unit does not provide (as far as you know).*
- It is important to speak to someone else about these customer requests instead of just simply telling the customer that you or your unit cannot provide the service.
- Your supervisor or manager may be able to find ways in which your unit can meet the request.

- **Provide service promptly to customers to meet identified needs in accordance with organisational requirements**
 - ▣ Reflect on examples in your own life where you felt that you had no complaints about the customer service.
 - ▣ One reason for your customer satisfaction might have been the prompt service.
 - ▣ If the service was delayed, the service provider probably apologised very early on and informed you as to when to expect the service

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- ***How do you establish and maintain rapport/relationship with customers?***
- The service provider probably spoke in a friendly and respectful way and told you all you needed to know to make your decision.
 - ▣ Now think of an example where you had a complaint about the service or product. How did the service provider respond?
- How you felt as a customer depended on how the service provider communicated and what action they took.

There are a number of communication models that we will look at.

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□ **AIDA (Attention Interest Design Action)**

- ⇒ Also referred to as the 'hierarchy-of-effects model'.
- ⇒ The AIDA model is used by many companies when planning communications
- ⇒ because it describes the stages through which the customer (or buying organisation) progresses **when interacting with marketing communications.**
- ⇒ *The AIDA model assumes that there are four stages a customer goes through when **deciding whether to accept (or buy) your service or product.***
 - ⇒ *The four stages are:*

Attention

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- Firstly, gain the attention of your customer.
- Attention is created when *potential* customers become acquainted/familiar with your service (or product).
- Your appearance, presentation and positive attitude are a good start but you need to add to these by saying something meaningful about the service (or product) that will obtain the focus of your customer.
- At this point, it is important to find out exactly what your customer needs.
- If you think that what they need is something that you can provide, then try to interest them in what you have to offer (the next step).

Interest

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- ⇒ Having gained the customer's attention, you must now arouse interest by the customer in your unit, organisation or company.
- ⇒ Interest reflects the customer's desire to learn more about *what* is being discussed (ie, what services?).
- ⇒ This is when you provide the explanation of what your service may do for the customer.
- ⇒ Make sure, at this point, to provide all relevant information that will help the customer make an informed decision on whether your service is what they need.

Desire

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- ➔ Next you need the **customer to want your service** (or product).
- ➔ Desire is the **recognition** by the customer that when the need occurs, that is the service or product to buy.
- ➔ If you are sure there is interest, then desire may come automatically.

Action

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- Once you have established desire in the customer, action normally follows.
- Action is the **desired behaviour** that you want from the customer.
- Some customers will still need some form of inducement/persuade so watch for the signs and do what is realistic to close the deal then and there.

The consultative model

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With the consultative model:

- ➡ the customer's issue or problem is discussed
- ➡ alternative solutions are proffered[offered]
- ➡ an agreement is reached—or, if you cannot help the customer on that issue, you suggest where they might be able to get the help they need.
- ➡ The key point is that you and the customer are equal participants in the consultation process.
- ➡ Both of you are endeavoring / attempting to achieve a positive outcome for your unit or organisation.

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- ➔ Although you might not be able to provide the customer with the specific service or product they need, you nevertheless try to be as helpful as possible—and, thus, you continue to maintain a strong relationship with customers who will return to you when they need a different service or product.
- ➔ In the consultative model you must listen, identify the customer's concern and respond in a professional, two-way communication situation.
- ➔ The consultative model requires different communication skills, focusing on two-way interaction. Here, listening skills are paramount / dominant.

The process for identifying a particular situation and need is as follows:

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- Ask questions.
- Listen carefully to the answers.
- Identify and interpret the answers—eg, ‘So the situation is...?’ or ‘So the need is...?’
- Ask further questions to clearly understand the stated need or situation.
- Listen carefully again to ensure you fully understand the customer’s situation, problem(s) and needs.

Customer complaints should be seen as

- an opportunity to **fix problems and improve your customer service.**
- If you handle customers well, they will come back.
- Unhappy customers whose problems were not resolved will leave you and will most likely tell others of your poor service.

Six steps to solving problems

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- Outlined below is a technique for managing **difficult customers**:
 - Listen to the customer so you understand the meaning of what they are saying.
 - Empathise to show your concern.
 - Ask questions to get the facts and show interest.
 - Summarise the problem as you understand it.
 - Avoid personalising the situation.
 - Be prepared to negotiate to achieve an agreed outcome.