
1. Dealing with customers

Overview

Purpose

Customers feel safe and secure when they are confident that a service technician can solve their problems. In order to accomplish this, the gas service technician/fitter must always maintain a professional attitude and use effective communication techniques when dealing with customers.

Objectives

At the end of this Chapter, you will be able to:

- employ professional standards and behaviour; and
- use effective communication.

Terminology

Term	Abbreviation (symbol)	Definition
Active listening		Listening through words and nonverbal behaviours
Effective communication		Communicating using attitude, emotion, knowledge, and credibility along with the content of the message being conveyed

Professional standards and behaviour

Attitude

As a gas service technician, you must always maintain a professional attitude when dealing with customers. Customers feel safe and secure when they are confident that you can solve their problems. Your confidence in your technical skills and knowledge and your professional manner increase the customer's sense of confidence and security.

Methods of projecting a professional attitude:



CSA Group Gas Trade Training Materials – Red Seal Alignment

Red Seal		CSA Gas Trade Unit	1	2	3	4	4A	5	6	7	8	9
2014 Red Seal Block	2014 Red Seal Task	Title	Safety	Fasteners, Tools and Testing Instruments	Properties, Characteristics, and Safe Handling of Fuel Gases	Utilization Codes, Acts and Regulations	Utilization Codes, Acts, and Regulations – Ontario Supplement	Introduction to Electricity	Technical Manuals, Specifications, Drawings and Graphs	Customer Relations	Introduction to Piping and Tubing Systems	Introduction to Gas Appliances
A - Common Occupational Skills	Task 1	Performs safety-related functions.	✓									
	Task 2	Maintains and uses tools and equipment.	✓	✓	✓							
	Task 3	Plans and prepares for installation, service and maintenance.	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓			
B - Gas Piping Preparation and Assembly	Task 4	Fits tube and tubing for gas piping systems.									✓	
	Task 5	Fits plastic pipe for gas piping systems.									✓	
	Task 6	Fits steel pipe for gas piping systems.									✓	
C - Venting and Air Supply Systems	Task 7	Installs venting.									✓	✓
	Task 8	Installs air supply system.										
	Task 9	Installs draft control systems.										
D - Controls and Electrical Systems	Task 10	Selects and installs electronic components.						✓				
	Task 11	Selects and installs electrical components.										
	Task 12	Installs automation and instrumentation control systems.										
E - Installation of Systems and Equipment	Task 13	Installs gas-fired system piping and equipment.									✓	✓
	Task 14	Installs gas-fired system components.										
	Task 15	Installs propane storage and handling systems.										
F - Testing & Commissioning of Gas-fired Systems	Task 16	Tests gas-fired systems.										
	Task 17	Commissions gas-fired systems.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
G - Servicing Gas-fired Systems	Task 18	Maintains gas-fired systems.										✓
	Task 19	Repairs gas-fired systems.										✓
	Task 20	Decommissions gas-fired systems.	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓

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Do...	Do not/never...
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Always show respect toward the customer.• Give easily understood explanations of problems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speak down to the customer.

The desire for the respect of other people is deeply ingrained in all of us. When dealing with customers, keep in mind that having someone tell us of our faults, failures, and shortcomings can be hurtful and offensive. Treat your customers with the respect you would like to receive yourself.

Remember that the customer may not be aware of the technical nature of your work. Explain the technical aspects of the problem or your work in simple terms, but do not be condescending in your explanation or in your tone of speaking.

Example

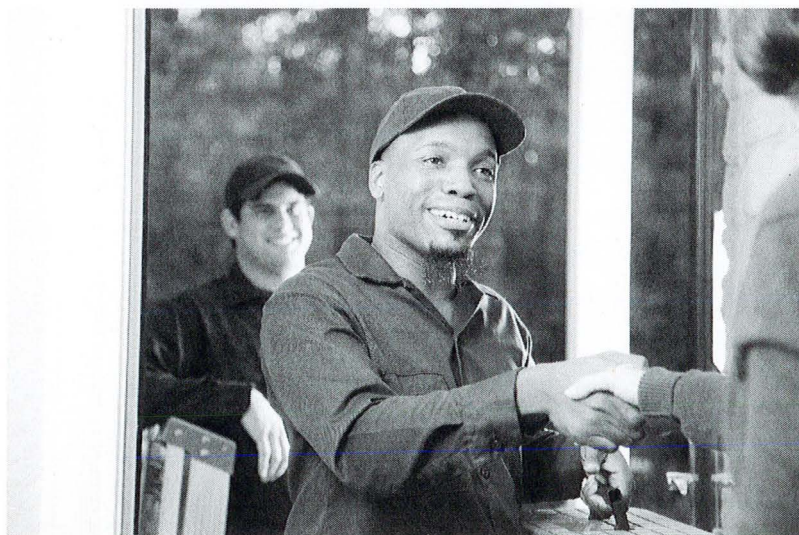
If a customer's thermostat needs adjustment or repair, it would be a good idea to give a simple explanation of its function and what the fault is by following these steps:

- First, explain that the thermostat is a device that senses temperature changes and switches the furnace on and off to maintain the desired temperature in an area of the building.
- Second, advise the customer what needs adjustment or repair in terms they can easily understand.

Appearance

A neat, well-groomed appearance indicates to a customer that your work will reflect the same care and consideration. If you are professional, then you should look professional. Remember the following:

- Uniforms and clothing should always be clean and fit well.
- Hair must be clean, well-groomed, and neatly combed.
- It is essential to be clean-shaven. Neatly trim your beards and mustaches when you wear them.



Example

A gas technician/fitter arrives at a customer's premises un-showered, unshaven, and wearing soiled, wrinkled clothing and dirty footwear. Most customers would be concerned about the quality of work they would see from a service person appearing in such a condition, and understandably so. An untidy appearance indicates a lack of self-respect and a lack of respect for the customer.



Workplace behaviour

As the representative of your company, you must always be aware of the impression you convey to the customer. An important part of your customer service responsibilities is your behaviour while working on the customer's premises. The following list of dos and don'ts outlines the basic rules of workplace etiquette that all service technicians must follow:

Do...	Do not/never...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask permission when it is necessary for you to move furniture or other items. • Warn the customer if you are going to cause undue noise or other disturbance. • Ask permission to use water, electrical power, etc. • Clean up all the waste and mess that your work has created. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wander about the customer's premises without asking first. • Eat or smoke on the customer's premises. • Drink coffee, tea, or other beverages without the customer's invitation. • Disrupt the work of other personnel on the premises. • Use the customer's telephone without the customer's permission. • Leave equipment and the customer's premises in disarray if you will leave the building to get supplies or tools. • Leave hazardous equipment and materials unattended. • Leave tools or tool box on appliances that may scratch the surface.

Unacceptable behaviour

Certain types of behaviour are always unacceptable when dealing with customers and when working on their property, including:

- smoking;
- horseplay;
- harassment;
- profanity; and
- criticism of customer's home and belongings.

When to refer to higher authority

At times, you may encounter questions from a customer to which you do not know the answer or that are beyond the scope of your authority or technical knowledge to answer. In these cases, you should refer the customer to a senior crew member (if present) or a supervisory staff member who can answer the customer's question.

Some of the issues that fall into this category are:

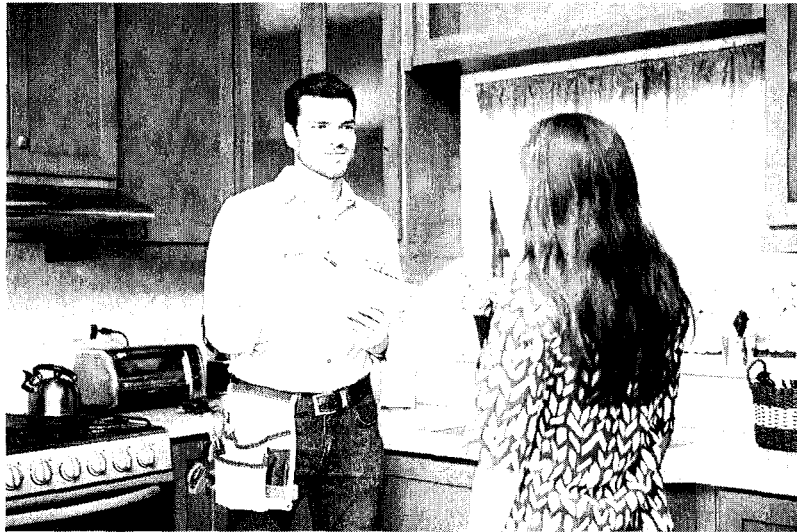
- non-technical questions;
- terms of contracts;
- warranty terms; and
- safety issues with the installation.

Effective communication

Communication strategy and methodology

When listening to a customer's questions and concerns, you can employ the following active listening and clarifying techniques to establish and maintain good communication:

- Establishing eye contact while talking and taking notes, when necessary, will help you maintain your focus on the customer's questions and comments.



- If you are in a noisy or crowded environment, suggest moving to a location that is free from noise and other distractions so that you and the customer can converse more easily.
- Avoid interrupting the customer—show patience by letting the customer complete his or her explanation before you respond.
- Acknowledge the customer's concerns.
- Be sympathetic to the customer's problem or request.
- Ask for clarification on points raised so that correct information can be passed on if necessary. Don't be afraid to ask for the service manual. It is impossible to retain all the specific information about every appliance. That's why the manuals stay with the appliances.
- Make notes to pass on to supervisory staff or other concerned parties.
- Use layperson's terms to answer customer's questions and requests and ensure that the customer understands your explanation before proceeding on to a new topic.
- Recap or paraphrase the customer's explanation of the problem or request in order to clarify your understanding of it; this ensures the customer that he/she has accurately communicated it to you.
- Ensure that the customer agrees to any corrective action you will take before commencing work.

First contact with a customer

The first thing to do after arriving at a customer's premises is to determine what the problem is. You do this by asking why the customer called for service.

A good way to begin is by asking the customer to describe the problem if possible. The things you need to know are what, when, and where did the customer see, hear, touch, or smell something that indicated there was a problem. Make sure to listen closely to the customer's answers. Customers and/or operators can often lead you to the problem, saving you time and them money.

It is important to accurately determine what the problem is. If necessary, you must continue to ask the customer questions until you understand all the facts of the situation.

Example

The best approach to a problem is to ask the right questions in the proper manner. For example, Mr. Smith has called for furnace service, but you have no description of the problem or its symptoms on your service order. Your first question to Mr. Smith should be something like:

"Mr. Smith, I understand that you have a problem with your furnace. Could you describe what kind of trouble you are having with it?"

This type of question is very useful for getting the kind of information that you require to determine the problem. Asking the right question makes all the difference. Instead of the question above, you might have asked the following question:

"Mr. Smith, I understand that you have a problem with your furnace. Could you please show me where the furnace is?"

If this was the case, you would know where to find the furnace, but would be no further ahead in discovering the actual problem. Customer input is an important first step in troubleshooting problems. You get the basic information you need, and the customer is brought into the process, making it a win-win situation for both parties.

Informing the customer

Unusual or loud noises, the smell of gas, and appliance failure can be very distressing to a customer. Once you have identified and/or solved the problem, it is important to inform the customer in terms they can easily understand, what the problem was and how you resolved it.

Ensuring the customer's sense of safety and security is an important aspect of customer relations. People's fears and concerns are usually based on personal experience, and it is important to take them seriously and use the facts of the situation to allay those fears and concerns. Most customers are not familiar with the technical aspects of your trade and depend on your expertise to solve their problem. A simple explanation goes a long way toward ensuring their sense of well-being and comfort.

Example

Loud noises are distressful to a customer. Mr. Martin has placed an emergency call for service because his furnace is periodically making loud noises.

The previous week, a gas explosion suspectedly destroyed a house in his town. You arrive on the scene and find Mr. Martin visibly distressed.



After investigating the problem, you discover that the flame on the furnace pilot burner is too small. You change the pilot filter, adjust the pilot flame, test ignition, and put the furnace back in operation, but the customer is still obviously fearful. Before you leave, it is essential that you assure him that the issue has been fixed and there is no danger. The best way to accomplish this is to give a brief explanation of the problem, such as:

"Mr. Martin, I discovered that the pilot light on your furnace was not functioning properly. When this happens, the main burner does not light quickly: there is a delayed ignition. The pilot filter was dirty and has now been replaced with a new, clean filter. I have tested the furnace and ignition is now reliable and safe."

Through good communication skills and effective customer service attitudes, you put yourself in a positive light, and the company you represent will reap the benefits in the bottom line.

Assignment Questions – Chapter 1

- 1) Which of the following methods is used to project a professional attitude?
 - a) Drive a clean vehicle
 - b) Give easily understood explanations of problems
 - c) Always carry a toolbox
- 2) Why is a neat, well-groomed appearance important when dealing with a customer?
 - a) It indicates to a customer that your work will reflect the same care and consideration
 - b) It indicates to a customer that you are a supervisor
 - c) It represents the values of the company to the customer