






Customer Service Skills

Training Manual

 EmployMeNigeria  @EmployMeNg  employmeng  0708-555-6666

www.employme.ng & www.elearning.employme.ng  01-2932996

 info@employme.ng & elearn@employme.ng  P.O. Box 72631, Victoria-Island Lagos Nigeria

87a Mustapha Azeze close, off Alabuku road by ABC Transport Terminal, Amuwo-Odofin Industrial Area by 2nd Rainbow Bus Stop Oshodi-Apapa Express way, Lagos Nigeria.

Module Four: Dealing with Different Customer Types

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All of your customers are partners in your mission.

Shep Hyken



Workshop Objectives

Customers come with different queries and approaches, some younger and some older. At the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Understand how to deal with different customer types.



Dealing with Angry Customers!

The most challenging customer service encounter is that with an angry customer. The angry customer is someone who comes into your store, calls you on the phone, or sends you an e-mail while they are upset or downright angry. Customers who have problems with your products or service are not necessarily angry. Anger comes when a customer is not treated in the manner that s/he feels is appropriate. As long as the treatment is deemed appropriate in the eyes of the customer, problems can be resolved easily. This may be true or it may just be a perception in the mind of the customer. Either way, the problem becomes larger as long as this situation is allowed to continue. Generally speaking, the longer it takes to resolve an issue the harder, and more expensive, the solution becomes.

You cannot talk effectively to an angry or upset person. What you need to do is to take steps to reduce the anger and get the person as close to a relaxed state as possible. You accomplish this by:

- Offering a calming statement indicating you are willing and eager to help e.g. "Please be assured that I will be able to assist resolve the issue"
- Using positive words in your conversation. Use "can" and "will" instead of "can't" and "won't"
- Speaking in a calm and soft voice

- Concentrating on what you can do. Customers do not really care about the things you cannot do. Customers do not care about policies or rules that may get in the way of resolving the issues they are experiencing
- Offering a customer, a cup of water or coffee. Sometimes the customer having a little break can be useful to reduce anger and frustration
- Not getting too close to the person you are talking to. This will tend to make the other person feel uneasy and threatened
- Smiling and acting friendly. Be aware of your body language. Try and keep your stance open and do not cross your arms or act defensive. This will make it easier to calm down a customer.
- Not rushing the customer when they are talking about their challenge. Letting a customer “vent” is very effective in reducing customer frustrations. Cutting off a customer will give the impression that you are not interested in what they have to say.

If you cannot calm the customer down, you may need to take a decision on how to proceed. When confronted with a customer you cannot help or calm down, you have the following options:

- Get another person to work with this customer. This may be a manager who has more authority or a person in another department, say the resolving team.
- Direct the customer to the next step required to resolve the problem. In these cases, it may be possible that the customer is asking you to do something that may not be your responsibility. When this occurs, you should inform the customer of what they have to do next and provide them the information e.g. name, address, phone number, etc. to help them proceed.

Getting someone else to help is usually used when the customer is not happy with your answers or asks for something that exceeds your authority or responsibility. In some cases, customers may ask to speak with a manager, supervisor or anyone higher up in the company than yourself. When this happens, do not take it personally. The customer usually will not have any issues with you as a person, it is just that the customer is not getting the answers or action from you that they feel they are entitled to.

The “passing” of a customer or an issue to another person is called an “escalation”. An escalation is the act of moving the situation to the next level. Usually, a company will have an escalation procedure indicating who the next person should be. If your company has an escalation procedure, familiarize yourself with it and use it. If no such policy exists, try and get your company to create one. A clearly defined escalation procedure is an important step in assuring that each customer is treated the same no matter whom they talk to initially. You should not view escalating a situation as a failure. Rather, you should view it as a step in satisfying the customer. Do not let pride get into the way of helping a customer. It is better to concentrate on resolving an issue instead of being “right”.



Dealing with Customers with Attitudes!

There will come a time when a customer will walk into your store, or call you on the phone and this customer will have one heck of an attitude. His attitude may be one of arrogance, superiority, or just having something to prove. Unfortunately, you are the one who will have to deal with them, not the other way round. It is sometimes very difficult to treat someone with respect when they do not do the same to you. If someone treats you like dirt, the most common response is to treat that person the same way. While this may feel good to you personally, it does nothing to make the situation better, it just makes things worse. It is said that “the customer is always right”. This is not true! The customer may be wrong but the customer is still the customer. The goal here should not be to show anyone who is right rather, it is to complete sale or resolve an issue and eventually gain a customer.

If we go into a situation with the focus on resolving a problem or making a sale, we will tend to focus our efforts on positive behavior instead of reacting to poor behavior. A good attitude tends to direct efforts towards a solution. A negative attitude will tend to direct things in a more negative direction. For the most part, the more negative things become, the more expensive and time-consuming the resolution will be. Attitudes are due to “emotional baggage”. This means that everything that has happened to a person in the past helps form their current attitude. If the customer has tried to resolve a problem four (4) times already with no success, they are likely to feel they will have no success this time either. Even if you may have a sincere desire to help the customer, they will not feel the same toward you.

As with dealing with angry customers, one effective way of dealing with customers with attitudes is to direct your efforts in getting the person to calm down and then transfer the customer to another individual if you are not making any head-way to resolve the complaint or get-along with the customer.

It is also very important that you be understanding but not necessarily apologetic. There will be some cases where the customer’s viewpoints or expectations are just not appropriate. Apologizing for things that are not your fault or your responsibility will only validate your customer’s thinking in their minds. Also, an apology may be used against you in certain legal situations. An apology may be considered to be an admission of guilt which could come back to haunt you in the future. Always remember that you should take steps to reduce any attitude that you may come into contact with.



Dealing with Knowledgeable Customers

One of the most interesting advances in consumer business has been the introduction of the internet. The internet brings an entire planet’s worth of resources into the living room of anyone with a device that can connect to it. More and more people today use the internet for research before they purchase. They research products, features, prices, and countless other information before they even set foot in a retail store (if they want to as they can buy online). They may even come with more product knowledge than you!

What this means to you is that you must possess more product knowledge than ever before. If you try to “steer” the knowledgeable customer to the wrong product, or give false information, you are more likely to be caught today than ever before! Because of this, it is crucial that you are always honest when quoting prices, information and other details about any product. To properly interact with a knowledgeable customer, you must be ready and able to discuss all the reasons why they should buy from you rather than the competition. You should point out any value added services that you offer that only your customers are eligible for. In some cases, this may justify an increased price for a product or service. A knowledgeable and smart customer realizes that it is not just the price of an item but rather the total package that is important. Relying on price alone may give a false representation of value.

Purchasing by mail, or over the net, for example, may involve additional costs for delivery or shipping. When comparing your competition, make sure you are up to date on the policies of other stores. Do they include all the accessories with the product? There are many camera dealers that advertise low prices but they remove items like batteries, lens cap etc. from the package and charge extra for them.



Dealing with Professional Customers

Some of your customers will be professional customers that have limited time to shop. These individuals may make N100,000 per hour or more and do not want to spend more time than they have to make a purchase. Depending on the type of business you are in, you may deem it worthwhile to offer certain service to this segment of your customer base. I do not mean to infer that these people are more important or valuable to society than the vast majority of us. What I am stating is that they may have special needs that may be worthwhile for you to address.

Many businesses offer special levels of services to those customers who purchase a certain amount of product from them. Airlines for example, have Gold level lounges, first class clubs, and other benefits for those who travel regularly and pay full price. Clothing stores have private shoppers that assist people make clothing purchases. Even banks offer custom services for large depositors! If you stop and think about it, a person who makes several thousands of Naira an hour or even more, can make more money working that extra time instead of doing shopping, banking or waiting in line. If a customer spends an hour on line and makes N100,000 an hour, that hour cost him N100,000! The customer would be willing to hire someone to do the shopping for him or pay a higher price to get that product or service. This is not necessarily about vanity or ego but rather just common business sense.

If you offer high priced goods or services, it makes sense to offer a different level of services catering for this segment of your customer base. In large metropolitan areas there may be enough of this type of customer to make this a very profitable segment of your business. While there would be additional costs involved in providing custom services, these should be more than offset by the higher prices and fees usually associated

with custom services. Services may include a personal shopper, home delivery or shopping, special product purchasing, or any other service that will make shopping more convenient and less time consuming.

As long as these services represent a cost effective solution to your customer, they will use them and you will earn revenue from them.

One potential trap that should be avoided is that you must not let your service to the rest of your customer base suffer because of the service being offered to professional customers. Keep in mind that your long-term success depends on serving all your customers properly and effectively. You should never abandon one group of customers to serve another. The only time you should consider this is if your organization's focus changes and part of that change involves changing your product, service, or customer base. When this occurs, sometimes you need to reconsider your resource deployment and make required changes to support the new direction. One of the most desirable traits in successful businesses is the ability to look at the available customer base and determining which groups represent viable opportunities. Once that is done, then each opportunity is examined and decisions are made according to potential benefits versus costs involved. Ignoring one part of the customer base might be the difference between long-term success and failure.



Dealing with The Elderly

Depending on the product or service that you sell, you may or may not have a large elderly customer base. If this is the case, you need to address certain factors to help insure proper service to this type of customer. The elderly often feel more vulnerable and skeptical. There is a very good reason for this. There are a lot of individuals that target the elderly for scams. They look at the elderly as a class of people that are not able to defend themselves or protect themselves against fraud. Elderly people may also feel vulnerable because they no longer can do the things they used to do years ago. Because of this, they may feel frustrated and upset due to their limitations. Maybe they cannot walk as well as they used to or would have loved as much as they did ten or twenty years ago. These things are not things to be ashamed of but they might be embarrassing to some people. In these cases, a little compassion and assistance will go a long way towards making a person feel a lot better! Take a look at your operation and see what kind of changes might be able to be made to make your business more "elderly friendly".

Changes could be adding more parking closer to your store, more handicapped parking and making getting around your store a lot easier. You could waive delivery charges for senior citizens or provide free product coupling/assemblage. While the value of these kind of services may seem trivial, they may be priceless to someone that cannot get around anymore.

Another reason for feeling vulnerable is that there is a huge amount of change going on in the world today and the elderly may feel that they just don't understand things anymore. Their old records have been

replaced by something called a “CD”. Cassette tapes are now replaced by “MP-3’s”. As if to make matters worse, now they are being told “For more information, please visit us at <http://www.employme.ng> “What is that? Internet! What is an internet? Something that affects the elderly, and many other groups of customers, is that they have more time on their hands than most working people. Whenever someone has time to think about a problem or issue, the more likely that the person will become agitated as they think about the problem. By the time they get talking to you about it, they are already frustrated and angry. Think about just sitting and waiting in the doctor’s office.

The longer you are kept waiting, the more agitated you get. Why? Because your thoughts dwell on one thing. When this happens, the human mind tends to magnify what is bothering us until things get blown out of proportion. Elderly people will require more patience when dealing with their complaints. Take the time to explain something to them because the entire concept may seem foreign and daunting. By taking the time to explain, you show good faith and help foster a feeling of security in the minds of your customer.

One of the things elderly people have in common with every group of people is their need to be accepted and respected. Just because someone is advanced in age does not mean that they are less valuable or any less worthy of your respect. Like any other group, they do not want pity or to be treated in a condescending manner. They just want to be appreciated and respected like anyone else. It is important to realize that anything that makes a person uneasy may get in the way of making that person a customer. By understanding the different needs of the elderly, you can make it an easier and more comfortable experience for them to do business with you.



Dealing with Younger Customers

At the exact opposite end of the customer spectrum lies the very young customer. This is the customer with little or no experience or knowledge or a consumer that is not fully aware of the responsibilities involved in making a purchase. Many businesses tend to overlook or trivialize the importance of younger customers. Keep in mind that the long-term success of any business depends on a steady flow of new customers to replace lost customers. Young people grow up to become adults and purchase adult products and services.

By treating younger customers well now, you improve your chances of getting their business when they are older. It is also a misconception that younger customers don’t have much to spend and therefore are not worth the time and effort involved in serving them. Today, more and more young people are working or have parents /guardians that give them significant allowances to spend. Young people buy a lot of merchandise.

Depending on the type of product or service you sell, a significant source of revenue might come from this segment of the customer base. Music stores sell a large amount of product to customers under the age of eighteen. Hair salons and nail shops do a lot of business with girls starting at eight! To not address this segment

of the population could result in losing significant revenue. Young people require a little more effort in serving them. They may or may not be aware of all the different decisions involved in deciding which product is right for them. They may make a decision solely based on appearance of a product. Their thought process is: “It looks cool so I’ll get that one”. It is your task to make sure that the product is the right one for them. There is also a tendency by some people to take advantage of a younger customer. These people are the same people that would take advantage of the elderly. Keep in mind those younger customers all have parents, guardians or older relatives that will realize when their child has been mistreated. When this happens they will come back to demand that refunds are made. That would mean resolving the issue and having to run the risk of not only alienating the younger customers but their parents, guardians and relatives also. Younger customers may not understand all the details in an advertisement or contract. While it is true that the responsibility lies with the customer, it is in your best interest to explain the details to the customer so they fully understand what they are getting into. It makes little sense to hide anything that will become evident in the future. While this may help you close one sale, the effects of your actions may prevent customer from doing business with you in the future.

Making any purchase when you are young is new and exciting. Young people are more apt to buy something of lower price today instead of waiting and saving their money for something better tomorrow. While this is not your problem, keep in mind that your products and services represent you and you should help your customer make the very best decision possible when they are shopping. Make your recommendations and let the customer make their decision.

Very often a young customer will come in with a parent or guardian when they want to make a large purchase. When this occurs, avoid the natural urge to address your comment to the adult. The adult is not the one making the purchase. He or she is just there for support. Instead, address your comments and conversation toward the young person. Answer their questions and interact with them but also include the young person in your discussions. The same applies to the elderly, also. This accomplishes two very important things. First, it makes the young person feel important and appreciated. This is a feeling that everyone desires. Second, it makes the young person part of the process and you stand a much better chance of getting all the information you need to help them properly.

There are going to be instances where you know you are not going to make any sale to a younger customer. If a fourteen (14) year old walks into a car dealer shop, for example, you probably know they are not going to buy a car. In cases like these, let the customer roam around and look at your products. Keep an eye on them in case they have other motives but make them feel welcome. The feeling they get today may be a deciding factor when they get older and will be buying their first car.

Younger customers are an important long-term resource for any business. Make every effort to develop this resource by treating your younger customers well and addressing their needs.



Dealing with Customers of Different Cultures

When dealing with customers from different cultures, you must take into consideration the beliefs and background of that culture when communicating with them. If you do not do this, you run the risk of offending customers or having your comments misunderstood or misinterpreted. Common differences among cultures may be language, religion, practices or viewpoints. To be effective, you must know what all these items are and how you will address them.

For example, people in some faith and cultures celebrate the Sabbath starting on sun-down Friday. To offer delivery only on Saturdays will make these customers go elsewhere for their purchases. I strongly suggest that you have some kind of resource available for the cultures within your sales area. This guide should list all aspects of these cultures that will affect the way your company does business with them. It should list preferred methods of interacting with certain cultures that take into consideration all pertinent information. This resource should be required reading for all new employees and be readily available for use as a resource. Please be advised that you should not develop any policy or plan that discriminates against any person or group of people. Your policies should address only effective ways of communication, not ways to discriminate or take advantage of any person.

If there are specific cultures within your sales area, you may wish to contact a representative of that group and talk to them regarding how you can effectively interact with them. Most groups would be highly receptive to such enquiries and will enhance your standing within their community. These representatives can share with you, things you should and should not do when interacting with that specific culture. Without this information, you may do something inappropriate without ever being aware of it. Something as simple as touching a person may be misinterpreted or cause uneasiness within your customer. You want to do whatever you possibly can to avoid these situations.

One very powerful reason for taking steps to effectively interact with different cultures is that it can significantly increase your customer base. As you show your desire to respect different cultures, your standing in the community increases and your business grows. Always keep in mind that your efforts should be focused on providing the least stressful experiences for your customer. By taking steps to make them feel appreciated and welcome, you show your customer that you care about them and their needs.



Module Four Exercise

- What do you think is the most important attribute a customer service provider should possess to be able to deal with the different customer types? Give your reasons.
- In not more than two paragraphs each, describe the best way to handle and how NOT to handle the situation below.
Situation: Your company has billed a customer for a transaction that never took place and the customer is very angry, threatening to close his business with your company.

