





Customer Service Skills

Training Manual

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Module Three: Service Touch Points & Delivery

Training Outline

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Every contact we have with a customer influences whether or not they'll come back. We have to be great every time or we'll lose them.

Kevin Stirtz



Workshop Objectives

At the end of this module, you should be able to:

- Know the peculiarities with each customer service touch point and how to provide stellar services at those touch points
- Understand the importance of After-Sales follow-up in a service process



In-Person Service

In-person interactions provide a great opportunity to build rapport with customers. When you talk to a customer on the phone or you exchange e-mails with a customer, it can be difficult sometimes to get a sense of what the other person is thinking and feeling. However, when you talk to a customer in person, you get instant & constant feedback, both verbal and nonverbal. It's easy to tell if you are creating the right impression. Although in-person interactions can be difficult at times, they offer exceptional insight into what customers want and need.

Here are some techniques to excellent in-person customer service delivery:

Smiling

There is nothing like a smile and a pleasant face to greet a customer, especially if s/he has a complaint. A smile and polite conversation can immediately disarm a disgruntled customer.

Your facial expression sets a positive tone before you even begin speaking. A relaxed or pleasant facial expression is ideal all of the time.

Eye Contact

Eye contact is a very important part of in-person service encounters. It helps you to appear engaged, confident and trust-worthy. It is important to always look into your customer's eyes when you address them.

Appearance

As mentioned previously, personal grooming has a big impact on your customers. Dirty hands, messy hair and poor dress can mean the loss of an otherwise happy customer.

When interacting with customers, dress neatly and in a professional manner so as to command respect and to let customers know you take your position seriously.

Shaking Hands

When shaking hands with a customer, a firm and professional handshake is expected. This part of the greeting is now common among both men and women in a professional environment.

Paying Attention

When listening to a customer, slightly lean towards your customer and nod your head ever so slightly to indicate you are listening.

Tone of Voice

Always convey friendliness and amicability. Do not raise your voice in frustration or anger no matter how difficult or tiresome a customer may behave.

Hand Gestures

Use hand movements to emphasize what you say and to emphasize your feelings. Avoid over-gesticulating with your hands. It could be distracting and hinder effective communication between you and your customer.

Personal Space

This is the distance that feels comfortable between you and another person. If another person approaches you and invades your personal space, you automatically move back without thought. You become uncomfortable.

Leave adequate distance between you and your customer. adequate space is important to making customers feel secure and unthreatened.

Posture

Slumping in a chair or leaning against a wall while interacting with a customer are sure signs you are not interested in the customer.

Your pose or posture should express attention, friendliness, and openness. Lean forward, face the customer and nod to let them know you are interested.

Observation

Notice how your customer behaves and what s/he reacts positively or negatively to while you are providing service.

In-Person service, as time-consuming as it may be, has its advantages in certain circumstances. Whatever else can be said about this way of providing customer service, it does allow a level of personal service that is hard to beat.

Speaking to the customer in person rather than on the phone has its drawbacks, and no one would deny this. It keeps professionals away from other work, and can lead to them getting drawn into long, complicated discussions which would be better carried out in a less pressured way. However, when it comes to customer confidence, being able to look a customer in the eye and tell them that you will get to the bottom of the problem does enable a certain amount of satisfaction on the part of the customer that is not easy to achieve in any other way.

When dealing with customer service issues on the telephone, it is possible – and sometimes irresistible – to put the customer on hold and transfer them to someone else. Anyone who has been the customer in this situation knows how frustrating that can be, especially when they then have to relate the problem to another person because it has been poorly communicated. Good customer services rely on being able to maintain the confidence of the customer, assure them that the problem will be solved now, and at no extra cost to them. It also allows a personal touch which is hard to achieve any other way, and when it comes to customer retention and future business, a friendly face will have a lot more impact than a disembodied voice or a few lines of text.



Service over the Telephone

When you are talking to someone in person, body language makes up a large part (some would say more than half) of your message. But as soon as you pick up the phone, body language becomes less important. The success of your interactions depends almost entirely on your tone of voice, your choice of words and your attitude. Getting these things right isn't easy, but with a little practice anyone can learn how to provide excellent customer service over the phone.

For example:

- A flat tone of voice says to the customer, "I don't like my job and would rather be elsewhere"
- Slow pitch and presentation say, "I am sad and lonely - do not bother me."
- A high pitch, rapid voice says, "I am enthusiastic and excited!"
- A loud voice says, "I'm angry and aggressive."

Having known these, let's look at how you can best provide service to customers over the telephone

Answering the Telephone

Pick up the phone in three rings - More than three rings signals chaos in your office or inattentiveness on the part of your organization. Before you take the phone, ensure you end any conversation you are having.

Smile – The customer cannot see you of course but smiling gives you a more cheerful and enthusiastic tone

Greet the caller – If there is a standard greeting verbiage for your organization, use it or “Good (morning, afternoon or evening) may suffice. Greeting shows you respect the caller.

Give your name – Identify yourself by stating your name. e.g. “My name is John”.

This is a courtesy that serves to personalize the customer service experience as well as allowing the customer to hold you accountable for your level of service. By giving your name, s/he now has a point of reference and someone to contact when s/he calls back.

Ask the customers how you can assist them – Asking to help tells the customer you are there to serve his/her needs and to solve the challenges s/he is experiencing. This also leaves the customer with a positive impression.

Putting all of the above altogether, you have a good example – “Good morning, thank you for calling Employ-me Nigeria, my name is John, how may I assist you?” This sets the tone and style of the whole interaction.

Avoid technical terminology - As much as possible, avoid using technical terms or acronyms. Some customers may be reluctant to ask you to explain a technical term for them not to seem like dummies.

Observe the interaction - Stay alert to how the customer is responding. Does the customer sound confuse, skeptical, unsatisfied? Use this information to relate more and improve the service experience.

Take the Phone off Speakers - Don’t use a speaker phone unless you’re having a conference call. When you use a speaker phone, callers get the impression that you’re too busy (or you consider yourself too important) to give them your full attention.

Putting a Customer on Hold

- Ask the customer if you can put them on hold, wait for him/her to say “yes” or “no” and then explain it will only be for a short period of time
- Explain to the customer why you are putting him/her on hold
- After you return to the phone, thank the customer for holding.

Transferring a call – Ask the customer if they would mind being transferred, wait for them to say “yes” or “no” and explain why they are being transferred and to whom.

Taking a Message – Explain your co-worker’s absence in a positive light but do not be too specific.

- Explain that your co-worker is in a meeting, conference, briefing, or training
- Try not to say he or she is gravely ill, is too hung over to come to work, never called in today, can’t be found, that you do not know where s/he is.
- Give a reasonable estimate of when the co-worker will return
- Offer to help the caller, take a message, or transfer to another staff member
- If a co-worker is on holiday and will not return to the office for some time, it is permissible to say that s/he is on holiday. However, avoid such details such as, “Bayo is at the beach and I am sure he is having a great time.” While such details may seem harmless or even humorous, they give the wrong impression to those seeking service.

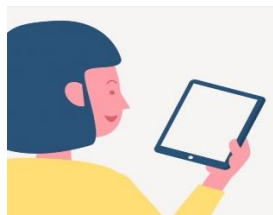
Ending the call

This is the final step in good telephone etiquette. Don't end a call abruptly. You will sound like you're trying to get rid of the customer. If you need to make notes about the call, do that right away. Don't rely on your memory to reproduce information accurately.

Many companies place their customer service issues in the hands of a dedicated department who can only be contacted in a non-personal manner. Some companies do this by using e-mail. However, a customer service department will do the bulk of their work over the phone, and will have a dedicated call center for this purpose. While this removes the personal element from customer service to a large extent, it would be inaccurate to claim that there is not an advantage to doing things this way. Quite apart from anything else, it does permit some thinking time that you might not get in person.

The main disadvantage to this way of doing things is that there is no allowance made for the fact that people are almost always more reassured by speaking to someone in person. The body language we use when trying to transmit assurance and confidence relies on customers being able to see us. If they relate a problem to you, and you are silent while they do so (for obvious reasons of manners and courtesy), they may understandably wonder if you are actually listening. The only way to avoid this becoming a problem is to be as reassuring in your tone of voice as you can. Make clear to the customer that you understand the severity of the situation, and that you will do all you can to solve it.

Even with this level of understanding there are some customers who will feel that things will take longer to get solved over the phone, and the moment they hang up their problem will be forgotten about. This is why you must explain to them at each stage of the process what you are doing; why you are doing it and what will happen next. Solving the problem in the course of one call may be impossible, and you may have to promise them that they will be called back. Some companies make promises like this and signally fail to follow through on them. This can lead to a loss of confidence in all companies who make promises and a resultant pressure on those who are good at problem solving. Solving problems over the phone takes dedication and perseverance. Doing the job well and promptly will pay dividends.



Service over Electronic Media

A growing number of customer interactions are taking place online. Younger people in particular prefer to do too much of their business online rather than in person or over the telephone. The internet has brought with it a lot of opportunities but not without some challenges.

Speaking with a customer face to face or over the telephone provide avenues for service providers to connect and build rapport with the customer using facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice etc. However, communicating using written words does not give same opportunity - at least not in the same way.

Therefore, a lot more effort must be given by the customer service provider to make the interaction with the customer an enriching one.

We shall explore customer service delivery using E-mails and Social Media.

Electronic Mails

E-mail remains one of the tools for communicating with customers (Internal and External) in the business world today. Not only is e-mail an important communication line with your customers, it is often used by them to gauge that you are trustworthy.

Here are some tips to exceptional service delivery through e-mail.

Reply Promptly - If a customer sends you an e-mail with a simple question, and you take forever to answer it, what does it say about the rest of your operation? Surveys show that even top organizations fail miserably at answering their business e-mails. Jupiter communications reported that 42% of the Top-500 took more than 5 days to answer a simple question. In the world of the internet, that might as well have been forever. If a customer has to wait that long for an answer, most likely s/he would have taken their business elsewhere. Business e-mails should be answered within 12 hours or 24 hours max.

Automated acknowledgement responses to mails are best as it does tell the customer that s/he has sent the mail to the right recipient but this should be followed up quickly with a proper response to the customer's query.

Greeting the customer – This is very important as it sets the tone for the whole communication. Opening with a hearty 'Hello' or 'Dear' and not going straight to business is the first step you can take to make your e-mails more personal and build friendliness.

Addressing the customer by name – When communicating with a customer, use their name. Try not to make the communication less personal by using cold titles like "customer" or, even worse, referring to a customer by a case number. Start with the first name, or Mr. /Ms and the surname if you are from a very formal industry. This will add another layer on which you will be able to build a relationship with a customer.

Thanking the customer for contact – Before moving to business, you should thank the customer for contact. You might think you are the person that deserves thanks for answering the customer's questions. However, it is the other way around. You should thank the customers for contacting you.

Summarize the situation – You can summarize the current situation to make sure everyone's on the same page. If you are having any doubts that you understand the customer's situation, ask for confirmation. This is especially important when dealing with tough, complex cases. Rephrasing what the customer said is a good way to check if you fully understand their concern.

Addressing the issue – After all the pleasantries and summing up the situation, it's time to finally answer the customer's question. Use simple language and avoid adding jargon and complex languages. Depending on the complexity of the issue, you should have a range of tools at your disposal that will make the explanation easier to understand:

- Screenshots,
- Step-by-step lists

- Examples
- Link to materials from your knowledge base

The aim here should be not just to answer but also to do it in an easy-to-digest way. (Remember you do not have the luxury of instant feedback from customer as is with telephone conversations or in person service). Ensure you respond directly to any doubts the customer expressed in their original message.

If you do not have an answer to a question, it's important that you don't omit or skip addressing it. Take note of it on the mail and let the customer know that you will do your best to tie up any loose ends. If the problem is not resolved fully, set a time frame when the customer can expect the remainder of the answer.

Your Tone of Writing – As tone of voice is important with telephone and In-person service, the tone of your mail is important in rendering quality service via mails. Make sure you write in a positive tone. Avoid negative words that begin with “non, ex” or that ends with “less” (Useless, non-existent, ex-employee). A simple rule is asking yourself how the customer will feel when and after s/he reads the mail

Close with Style – Add a bit of a personal touch at the end or simply wishing the customer a good day can make them feel good about the encounter.

The Finer Details:

Having gotten the structure of the e-mail, attention must now be paid to other details.

Formal or Informal?

You will contact tons of customers and they will react a bit differently to what you have to say. Which style should you use when replying customer service emails?

Using the formal style is the safe option, but it often doesn't sound personal or even real. Going informal is a bit of a risk and reward situation. You can gain by preparing personalized informal replies but you risk angering some customers. To make your decision, you can consider a couple of factors.

First, you need to be aware of your audience. If you want to provide excellent customer service in a formal industry, e.g. medical experts, it's hard to imagine that an informal reply would work well.

The same goes the other way around if for example you are a customer service provider for an events organizing company.

In any case, look for small cues in the mail the customer sent and the way they address you and how they form their sentences, if it looks formal, you can always mirror their approach and provide a formal reply.

E-mail Background - It is advisable you use the 'default' white background for sending mails. Colors mean different things to different people and caution should be exercised in this regards.

Font – Sans Serif rather than Serif fonts are generally applicable in sending mails except you want the customer to have a hard time *reading your mail*. Some organizations have a standard font type used otherwise the e-mail default font (usually Calibri or Arial) is acceptable.

Font Size – Of importance in clarity of communication with the customer is the size of the characters of the written word. You can use the default e-mail font size (11 or 12).

Font Color – Having a white background would mean you should use a dark font color. Black fonts are generally acceptable. Avoid the use of separate colors for emphasis on the mail except when and where necessary. Rather, you may **embolden** the characters where emphases are made.

Signature – Your e-mail signature provides a medium for customers to get to know you personally. It should contain:

- Your full name
- Designation
- Organization Name
- Contact information

Avoid the use of varying font sizes and types for the information on your e-mail signature as it may come out as clumsy.

Social Media

A survey done by JD Power reveals that of more than 23,000 online consumers, 67% of respondents reported having contacted a company via social media for support. Customer Service providers in this age require being adept in the use of social media channels in providing support to customers. Building better relationships with your customers through social support can add up to huge wins when it comes to increasing customer lifetime value.

Speed, Speed & more Speed – While speed may not be the most important for great support in e-mail, phone or in-person service, in social media, speed trumps all. In a survey by The Social Habit, 32% of social media users who contact a brand expect a response within 30 minutes, and 42% expect a response within 60 minutes.

The fast paced nature of social media – built around live feeds - creates expectations that are different from platforms like e-mail, where a 24-hour response time is a bit more acceptable.

Addressing the Issue – Social media is primarily an informal platform of rendering service. Nonetheless, it is pertinent for you to be able to mirror the customer’s style of conversation.

Use the right Tone – This can pose a bit of a challenge on social media, where some platforms like Twitter limit you to short messages which makes it a lot more difficult to get your tone and nuance right. The right tone depends on your customer, and the best way to get your tone right is to adjust your tone to match the customer.

Does the customer use emoticons, exclamation points and slang? (This is a green light for you to reciprocate).

Take the conversation off-line when necessary – As important as it is to listen and respond to your customers on social media, not every issue can be resolved via social media.

Sometimes, the medium doesn’t allow you to write as long of a reply as you need to. Other times, you may need customer sensitive information that you (or they) wouldn’t be comfortable exchanging online. In these cases, it is okay to transfer the issue courteously to another channel like e-mail or phone.

For the reason that so much of what we do on the internet has been molded from the social aspect, which makes the medium great fun for most of us, the process of electronic communication has become more influenced by that social aspect. When we are communicating with customers it is essential to remember that things are different. We all have different ways of expressing ourselves in person, on the phone, and the internet. The issue of how to correctly express oneself in online communications will be somewhat different from the traditional ways.

Electronic communication is disembodied, and specifically e-mail can come across as being extremely abrupt. Even phrases like “thank you” “have a great time” and even “I love you” can seem quite straight and lifeless when placed in a standard font on a computer screen. It is essential to avoid this abruptness in a customer service e-mail. Picking your words carefully is essential, avoiding jargon is fundamental, and it must be remembered that brevity in what you say should be limited to simply saying things in the simplest way. Abbreviations however, are not for e-mails.

When we speak out loud, our words have an inflection, they are absorbed by the listener, and then we move on. In an e-mail, it stays there on the page and can be read into a number of different ways. It is essential to avoid saying things that are ambiguous, as this can lead to a complaint some way down the line if misinterpreted. Remember that in person if you say something, the listener can then respond instantly before you move on to your next point. This means that if something you said was unclear, they can seek clarification before replying. In e-mail, this is not possible. Getting things said clearly and unambiguously – and ideally just once – is hugely important.



After Sale Follow-Up

Following up after a sale or any customer contact is something that some people consider an optional extra in business. To some people, the idea is to simply provide the customer with what they came for, and let them go on their merry way once they have got it. The priority after this is to go ahead with doing your job in respect to other customers. However, the fact is that a little bit of follow-up work, can make a huge difference to the way your business retains customers, and attracts follow-up business from friends of the original customer.

Follow-up work is a major part of customer service. A customer will always see the good service they got from a business as a reason to return the next time they need something of a similar nature. This kind of service is arguably more powerful than paid advertising as a tool to get customers through the door on a regular basis. Any customer who feels that they have been given exemplary service will be like a walking billboard or a cheerleader for your company. This is something that many companies fail to keep in mind, and it costs them money in the long run.

After the sale service can take on many forms. It may be the person or persons who are on the spot to provide advice and customer support if the customer has difficulties with the purchased product or service.

It may be a call a few weeks after the purchase is made to find out whether the customer is happy with their purchase and whether there is anything more that you can do for them. Showing a customer that they mean something to you and your company is a very important part of giving customer service that is not good, but great.



Module Three Exercise

- Highlight the peculiarities of each service touch point
- How best would you engage a customer after a sale?



Module Three Review Questions

1. _____ interactions provide a great opportunity to build rapport with customers.
a) Fewer b) In-person c) Follow-up d) Medieval
2. When you talk to a customer in person, you get constant _____, both verbal and nonverbal.
a) Feedback b) Aggravation c) Complaints d) Crying
3. While speaking with a customer over the phone you can slouch in your chair because the customer cannot see you
a) True b) False
4. No matter how urgent the work you are doing is, you have enough _____ to speak to the customer.
a) Guts b) Time c) Knowledge d) Nerve
5. Since social media is basically an informal platform, you can be sarcastic when in a conversation with a customer
a) True b) False

6. E-mails should be responded to within _____ max.

- a) 48 hours b) 50 hours c) 24 hours d) All of the above

7. Positive reframing while composing text is important because

- a) It helps in building rapport with customer
- b) It shows professionalism
- c) It shows you value the customer
- d) All of the above

8. The way you conduct yourself in the presence of a customer may well have more impact on their _____ in you more than anything you say to them.

- a) Confidence b) Mistrust c) Antitrust d) Confidentiality

9. Tone of voice is applicable in all service touch points

- a) True b) False

10. Effective After Sale follow up can _____

- a) Retain existing customers
- b) Attract referral customers from original customer
- c) Show where a product or service requires improvement
- d) All of the above

