

EYE OF THE CUSTOMER

Good customer service can make a real difference in your organization. When customers receive good service, they do business with you more often and treat you with more respect. Knowing the skills of customer service helps you avoid problems and makes handling complaints easier. Stress is reduced as your own job satisfaction improves.

Good customer service is more than just your treatment of customers. For customer service to be truly effective, it must be provided by the entire employee team. When all customers receive good service, it makes everyone's job more enjoyable.

More important, providing your customers with good service makes your job more enjoyable. Your interactions become more efficient and pleasant. And good customer service skills are carried with you, wherever you go—they benefit you in any job.

This **Participant's Checklist** is yours. Keep it handy at your workplace so that you can refer to it frequently. It summarizes the key skills of customer service. More important, it will help you remember why these skills are important. . . especially from the customer's point of view.

Lesson 1: Making an Extra Effort

SKILL: GREET THE CUSTOMER WITH A SMILE

What It Means

- Smile at your customers as you approach them. A warm, friendly smile sets the best mood for interaction between you and the customer.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- First impressions are extremely important. A smile says a lot about your attitude, even before you speak.

SKILL: COMMUNICATE GOOD BODY LANGUAGE

What It Means

- The way you sit or stand, hold your arms, gesture, or use facial expressions communicates as much or more than do the actual words you say. It is important that your customers receive a message of courtesy and willingness to listen from all facets of your communication.
- Good eye contact connects with a customer's gestures and facial expressions as well as with his or her eyes. It focuses attention on the customer without becoming a stare.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- Because body language communicates as much or more than your words do, you can contradict your verbal message with your body language. Open, positive body language helps keep communication clear and adds to the customer's feeling of value and importance.
- It makes the customer feel valued and important.
- It makes it easier for you to hear and to understand the message.

SKILL: GIVE THE CUSTOMER YOUR FULL ATTENTION

What It Means

- You must shut out whatever distractions or pressures you may be facing to give each customer your full attention. You should be careful never to give customers the impression that their presence is interrupting something more important.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- Customers can sense when you are distracted by other pressures or concerns. But when they feel that you are giving them your full attention, they grow more confident. Your full attention puts customers in the spotlight and makes them feel special, unique, and important.

SKILL: ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS TO DETERMINE NEEDS

What It Means

- In many selling or customer service situations, close-ended questions (yes or no) should be avoided because they don't draw out information from the customer. Open-ended questions require a more detailed response than a simple "yes" or "no."

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- Open-ended questions require that the customer reveal more information concerning his or her specific needs. This enables a customer-contact person to promptly identify and provide the appropriate product or service.

SKILL: SHOW CUSTOMERS THAT YOU VALUE THEIR BUSINESS

What It Means

- Always thank your customers by showing appreciation for their business. Expressing appreciation for your customers' business lets them know that you care.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- Customers like to be valued and to know that you appreciate their business.

Lesson 2: Valuing the Customer

SKILL: GREET CUSTOMERS CORRECTLY

What It Means

- When you approach a customer or client in a face-to-face situation, you should smile and offer a pleasant and enthusiastic greeting. Generally, "Hello" or "How may I help you?" is an appropriate greeting.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- A proper greeting conveys an atmosphere of professionalism. The customer senses that both the employee and the organization have an interest in satisfying his or her needs.

SKILL: USE THE CUSTOMER'S NAME

What It Means

- When you know the customer's name, use it.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- Using the customer's name personalizes the conversation and says that you value his or her business.

SKILL: USE CONSULTATIVE SELLING TECHNIQUES

What It Means

- Frequently customers have not fully identified their needs. You must act as a "consultant" in this identification process. Know your organization's products and services, ask open-ended questions to determine needs, and point out how the product or service will benefit the customer.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- Not all customers are knowledgeable about, or even aware of, the products or services they need. Using consultative selling techniques assures them that you understand their needs and have their best interests in mind.

Lesson 3: Being Sensitive to the Customer's Needs

SKILL: EVALUATE THE MESSAGE, NOT THE CUSTOMER

What It Means

- You must be careful not to let your own biases—personal likes or dislikes—influence your judgment about the information the customer gives you.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- When personal biases do not interfere with your dealings with a customer, interaction is more productive and needs are more easily

SKILL: MAKE AN EXTRA EFFORT TO GIVE GOOD SERVICE

What It Means

- Always try to do something extra for the customer. This is where your creativity can be utilized. Sometimes, an extra-warm greeting or special thank-you is appropriate.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- People remember consistently good service. They return time and time again to organizations that provide it.

SKILL: RESPECT YOUR CUSTOMER AS A PERSON

What It Means

- Acknowledge the customer's feelings.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- It makes the customer feel valued and important. It also shows that you are sensitive to his or her needs.

Lesson 4: Effective Telephone Procedures

SKILL: BE PREPARED FOR INCOMING CALLS

What It Means

- Know your organization's products and services. Stay current with any revisions or updated information. Have this information readily available when customers call.
- Being prepared also means keeping a pen and notepad handy at all times.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- Being prepared with the appropriate information callers need demonstrates your efficiency and builds confidence in your organization. Having information readily available also shows callers that you value their time.
- This saves callers from having to wait while you try to locate one or the other to take notes.

SKILL: IDENTIFY YOURSELF AND YOUR ORGANIZATION

What It Means

- You should identify yourself and your organization in a clear, distinct tone of voice.
- In some cases, you should identify your department.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- Identifying yourself and your organization reassures callers that they have dialed correctly. Your initial contact with callers tells them they have reached a professional, competent organization.
- Identifying yourself and your department immediately confirms to the caller that he or she has reached the correct individual or department.

SKILL: SPEAK WITH ENTHUSIASM

What It Means

- Your voice should be enthusiastic and pleasant, yet businesslike, you should avoid artificial or a mechanical, overly formal tone of voice—sound natural and professional.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- Because callers can't see you, your voice alone must make them feel welcome. Callers will be strongly affected by both what you say and how you say it. An indifferent or artificial tone of voice can make callers feel that their business is not wanted. A warm, welcoming tone can elevate the caller's mood and make the entire transaction more enjoyable and productive for both of you. Your enthusiasm also helps build the caller's confidence in your organization.

SKILL: USE THE CALLER'S NAME

What It Means

- You should use the caller's name frequently. People value their names, so you should listen carefully for the correct pronunciation. If in doubt, ask for clarification. You should also be sensitive to whether the caller prefers to be addressed formally (by last name) or informally (by first name). In the absence of obvious cues, it's safer to use his or her last name.

Why Important/How the Customer Benefits

- By using the caller's name, you humanize what could otherwise be an empty exchange between two impersonal voices. You may deal with numerous callers each day. When you use a caller's name, you show that your full attention is on this call and on this caller's unique needs.

SKILL: KEEP WRITTEN RECORDS

What It Means

- Take notes of all pertinent facts the caller gives you.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- Taking accurate notes enables you to refer back to them throughout or after the call. Written records also prevent future confusion, misunderstandings, or costly errors.

SKILL: KEEP TELEPHONE NUMBERS ACCESSIBLE

What It Means

- Keep a list of the names and phone numbers of your organization's personnel near the phone.
- Keep a list of outside resources related to your specific industry.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- Keeping a list of names and phone numbers ensures that you'll be able to transfer or refer callers to appropriate individuals or departments.
- Good services also means providing callers with the names of individuals or service outside your organization if you're unable to fulfill their needs.

SKILL: SHOW THAT YOU VALUE THE CUSTOMER

What It Means

- Always thank customers for their business or interest in your organization.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- It shows callers that you appreciate doing business with them.

SKILL: TRANSFER CALLS PROPERLY

What It Means

- You should never transfer a call without being sure that you're putting the caller in touch with the right person. Part of your responsibility is finding out which co-worker has the necessary information for your caller.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- Callers resent being transferred to someone who is no more qualified to help them than the first person they reached.

Lesson 5: Handling Complaints

SKILL: GIVE THE CALLER YOUR FULL ATTENTION

What It Means

- You must shut out whatever pressures or distractions you may be facing to give each caller your full attention. You should be careful never to give callers the impression that their call is interrupting something more important.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- Callers can sense when you are distracted by other pressures or concerns. But when they feel your full attention, they grow more confident. Your full attention puts callers in the spotlight and makes them feel special, unique, and important.

SKILL: RESPECT YOUR CUSTOMER AS A PERSON

What It Means

- Acknowledge the customer's feelings.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- It makes the customer feel valued and important. It shows that you are sensitive to his or her needs.

SKILL: LISTEN CAREFULLY

What It Means

- Irate callers often have a lot of pent-up frustration to get off their chests. Only if you hear them through patiently will they be able to calm down and state their problems in more reasonable terms. By listening carefully, you can detect what callers are saying as well as what they mean.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- Your full attention makes callers feel important. One of the most tangible ways you can show callers that they have your full attention is by listening carefully. They want you to grasp the consequences of the bind they're in. By listening, you show callers that you regard them as reasonable people who are upset for a good reason. Paying them this respect makes it easier for them to give you the respect you want. Listening is one of the best ways you can both give and get respect.

SKILL: REPEAT THE PROBLEM IN THE CUSTOMER'S OWN WORDS

What It Means

- By repeating the problem back to the caller, you provide valuable feedback. By using words as close to the caller's own as possible, you show that you truly grasp the problem and its implications from the caller's point of view.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- Callers, especially those with problems, need to feel that you understand their situation. Repeating their problem back to them in their own words confirms that you do. This puts them at ease. In contrast irate callers often remain frustrated, even abusive, when they get no signals that the person on the other end really grasps their problem, what it means to them, and what they want.

SKILL: ASK QUESTIONS

What It Means

- Once you have heard the caller's stated problem or need, you should gently ask probing questions to deepen your understanding. And give the caller time to respond fully. You should avoid making assumptions or leaping to conclusions prematurely.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- By asking questions, you elicit additional information about the caller's stated problem or need. This information can help you achieve a more accurate and thorough grasp of what is needed to remedy the situation. Only by holding your own assumptions and value judgments in check can you ensure that your understanding is, in fact, accurate.

SKILL: PROMISE SPECIFIC ACTION

What It Means

- When you promise action, you should avoid vague or noncommittal words such as "maybe" or "when I can get to it." You should be as specific as you can, without exceeding your authority or promising something you may not be able to deliver.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- A caller with a problem wants one thing from you: ACTION. Realistically, though, many of you may lack the authority to promise instant remedies to all problems. By promising what you can, as specifically as possible, you build the caller's confidence in you.

SKILL: CONFIRM AGREEMENTS AND THEN FOLLOW UP

What It Means

- Confirming agreements is a form of feedback, similar to repeating back the caller's problem. You should repeat back any instructions or messages you receive them during the call. Then, before hanging up, you should confirm any agreements regarding what subsequent action will be taken. Be sure to follow up on what has been agreed upon.

Why Important/How Customer Benefits

- If callers were face to face with you, they would have a host of visual cues to help them know if you understand them—and if you'll follow through with the action they expect. Over the phone, though, these signals are absent. This is why callers rely on you to give regular feedback during the call—and it puts them at ease when you confirm all instructions and agreements, especially at the end of the call.