

Customer Service Communication in the Workplace Series

Leader's Guide by:

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For Trainers:

Introduction

This is the fifth and final program in the Communication in the Workplace Series. This program focuses on both internal and external customers and clients using fictional current affairs show "On this Day" and its presenter Naomi Henderson as a case study.

Just as poor attention to the needs of external customers can lose sales and profits for an organisation, so too can poor internal service lose sales, jobs and productivity. The program looks at the following:

- Defining customer service and customers.
- What makes for better customer service practices.
- The customer transaction.
- Sustaining good customer service.
- Concluding the customer transaction.
- Dealing with difficult customers.

Program Timeline

00:00:00	Introduction
00:01:08	Chapter 1 – Customer Service and Customers
00:05:34	Summary – Customer Service and Customers
00:06:12	Chapter 2 – Beginning the Customers Transaction
00:10:54	Summary – Beginning the Customers Transaction
00:11:31	Chapter 3 – Sustaining Good Customer Service
00:14:40	Summary – Sustaining Good Customer Service
00:15:01	Chapter 4 – Concluding the Customer Transaction
00:18:27	Summary – Concluding the Customers Transaction
00:18:58	Chapter 5 – Dealing with Difficult Customers
00:24:09	Summary – Dealing with Difficult Customers
00:24:35	Conclusion
00:25:21	Credits
00:25:59	End Program

Background Information on Customer Service

There are no hard and fast rules that can be applied with absolute precision to every company, but here are five general guidelines to achieve and maintain consistent, high-quality service that increases customer loyalty and retention.

Customer service has always been an important element of good business, but in the modern economy it's more vital than ever. Almost half of all businesses are now service related and employ about a third of the total work force. Increased competitive pressure also makes customer service a critical issue, with many businesses promoting their level of service as a key competitive advantage. And finally, the lifeblood of almost every company is repeat business. A solid commitment to quality customer service can keep the customer coming back AND generate substantial new business from customer referrals.

The Honeymoon Never Ends.

Because so many organisations are focused on generating new business, they work hard to establish a positive, enthusiastic relationship with PROSPECTIVE customers, and they're just as responsive to their BRAND NEW customers, but once a customer has been with them for awhile there is often a subtle shift; genuine enthusiasm turns to courtesy. Excitement is replaced with professional politeness. And while there's nothing inherently wrong with being polite and courteous, the customer DOES notice the shift in attitude, even if you don't

Establishing and maintaining an energetic, enthusiastic attitude toward ALL customers, old and new, requires conscious awareness and commitment from both employees and managers, because it goes against our natural human nature (New is interesting and exciting, old is familiar and dull) and without a concerted effort among the entire staff, it's easy to make long-time customers feel like yesterday's news.

Don't Make Promises You Can't Keep.

One of the most common complaints made by consumers today is that they can't always depend on companies to ship the correct order, deliver on time, issue refunds promptly, return calls when promised, and a host of other issues that taken individually may seem like mostly minor items. But because these problems are so common – one company may deliver a shipment late, another might not return a phone call on time, etc. – consumers tend to view ALL companies with a bit of critical suspicion.

So when you tell a customer that their order WILL be there in time for a Granddaughter's birthday, don't be surprised if your word doesn't seem good enough to assure them. If you're not sure the order will make it in time, DON'T make that promise. It may not be easy to say, "I can't absolutely guarantee that it will be there..." but if that's the truth, then it's the best thing for you, your company and the customer.

Quite simply, be honest. Of course there will be times when you've made a promise and then unforeseen circumstances prevent you from keeping it – but in those cases, let the customer know right away. We're all human and mistakes are made. Customers will forgive a mistake or an unforeseen circumstance, but they want to be told the truth.

When a customer orders a product or service from you and you can't deliver as promised, they're not interested in your reasons (problems with suppliers, workers, etc.), so don't offer excuses – the customer expects you to do whatever is necessary to provide the product or service within the time frame you agreed upon. That's all. Going on and on about WHY you can't keep your commitment only frustrates the customer and makes you look incompetent.

A Low Price Doesn't Buy Loyalty.

With our increasingly complex and competitive economy, businesses are struggling to find ways to differentiate themselves, and many are trying to differentiate based on price – “Lowest prices guaranteed!” “Nobody beats our deals!” “We’ll match anyone’s best price, and beat it by \$5!” – but many companies are discovering that price alone isn’t enough to gain and KEEP a customer’s business. Your lower price may tempt them, or even motivate them to start using your product, but without quality and service, you’ll quickly lose them to someone else.

No matter how fair and competitive your price may be, your business will suffer unless you are delivering an excellent product and providing first-rate, reliable service. Remember, there will always be someone out there who’s willing to do it cheaper, accept a lower profit margin or drop the price a little further – so competing on price alone will NEVER be a permanent solution.

The Telephone is a Tool, Not a Shield.

If a customer calls you, they rightfully expect a prompt return call. When you don’t return a call promptly, you’re telling them that you aren’t interested any more in continuing the EARN their business, now you just expect it. Or you just aren’t interested in it any more.

If you’re busy and can’t return a call right away, have someone else in your office call to assist the customer and let them know when they can expect a call from you. The customer will appreciate your diligent efforts, and understand you have multiple tasks to accomplish, IF someone takes the time to explain this to them. What they can’t (and won’t) tolerate is being ignored.

Respect your customer’s intelligence, don’t avoid their phone calls. If you’ve got a difficult issue to resolve with a customer, when they call your office and someone tells them you’re “away from your desk” or “in a meeting” or you “just stepped out” understand that the customer immediately assumes (rightly or wrongly) that you’re avoiding them. This is at least defensible if you are in fact in a meeting, but if you’re having someone screen your calls this way, you know it’s wrong, the customer knows it’s wrong, and the call-screener knows it’s wrong. So since you can’t really hide, just take the call and deal with the difficult issue. Everyone will feel better in the end, especially the hapless call-screener who probably whispered something to the customer, giving away your charade.

The Customer is STILL Always Right.

A customer wants to return an item, but it’s been opened and your policy doesn’t allow that. The product isn’t defective; he just doesn’t want it any more. So what do you do? Well, ask yourself a question. What do you have to gain by contending that your customer is wrong and insisting on following your “policy?” In this day of frenzied competition for every customer, it’s amazing how many businesses (or their employees) will make a big “to-do” over minor items just to prove a point. Don’t let your ego get in the way of a business relationship. If you do, you’ll lose those customers and, worse yet, many of them will tell others how you “mistreated” them. It doesn’t matter who was objectively right or wrong – only the customer’s perception matters, because that perception is what will help or hinder your business.

Customers are the lifeblood of your business; without them, obviously you can't survive. Whether or not you personally believe that your customers' concerns are valid is irrelevant. What's important is that they are satisfied so that they will continue to do business with you in the future and perhaps recommend you to others. After all, it's much cheaper to please your existing customers than it is to find new ones.

Use Rapport Building Techniques Every Time

Though there's no 'right' formula for building rapport with customers there are a few simple techniques to apply:

- Use the customers name.
- Smile.
- Establish eye contact.
- Show your interest in the customers needs.
- Don't invade personal space.
- Say please and thank you.
- Give your customers your undivided attention.
- Listen and show that you care.
- Mirror body language.
- Make the customer feel important.
- Show respect for the customer regardless of their colour, age, height, gender etc.
- Show respect for your colleagues.
- Be calm and confident.
- Be proud of your appearance.
- Be conscious of personal hygiene.
- Always explain your reasons for saying no.
- Be empathetic.
- Let the customer know the range of options available.

Be Rational and Empathetic with Difficult Customers

Professionalism is knowing how to behave and to control your feelings – adopt a rational approach. The key ingredient to being rational is to be empathetic.

It is critical to behave in a rational manner when dealing with a person who is in an emotional state.

Rational:

A rational person is agreeable to reason, reasonable, exercising sound judgment or good sense, endowed with a faculty of reason.

Empathy:

Is a mental entering into the feeling of a person or thing – an appreciative perception or understanding.

Listen Actively to the Customer

- Don't interrupt.
- Show interest – make listening noises – 'yes' – 'I see' – 'right'.
- Be open minded - we all tend to listen defensively.
- Check for understanding.
- Take notes and don't rely on memory.
- Don't jump to conclusions; judge what is being said, not just how it is being said.
- Listen for feelings, not just facts. Poor listeners tend to listen only to facts. Listen between the lines to changes to tone, pitch and volume.
- Separate the person from the words. React to the ideas not the person.
- Concentrate and shut out distractions – resist the challenge to watch a colleague. Block any attempts to interrupt you, for example a colleague places a message in front of you while on the phone or gestures to you – so you want a cup of coffee...
- Most people can think four times faster than someone else who is talking so use this time to focus all of your senses

Ask a Variety of Questions

Central to the whole issue of good customer service is the ability to ask questions. If you ask ineffective questions you will be making barriers to yourself – because you will find it difficult to establish exactly what the customer wants.

- Open Questions – start with who, what, when, where, why or how. Good for getting the other person talking about ideas and feelings as well as facts. There are two types of open questions – general and specific. Use general open questions in a non-confrontational and non-directive situation. Use specific open questions when needing information – they are good to apply in difficult situations.
- Closed Questions – require the person to answer with a yes or a no. Good to use when summarising and dealing with a difficult person – to return to the subject in hand if the conversation has wandered and to check if you have understood correctly.
- Leading Questions – they give the person an indication of the answer you want them to give.

Ask specific open questions to gather information, closed questions to check for understanding and avoid leading questions altogether.

Always confirm Your Understanding

Step 1: Use a confirming statement

Let me confirm...

Let me make sure I understand your request...

So you want...

I'd just like to confirm that...

Step 2: Summarise the Key Facts

You want to compare benefits for hospital stays

You'd like to find out if floor seats are available

Your shipment never arrived

Step 3: Ask if Your Understanding is Correct

Did I get that right?

Is that correct?

Did I understand you correctly?

Right?

Is that it?

Step 4: Clarify Misunderstandings (if necessary)

We have two ways in which you can use the program –

Customer Service

If you have limited time use the first option – we have called it the Customers Count – this session will take one hour. If you have around three hours we suggest that you use the plan for the Customer Service 101.

1. Customers Count

Phase One: Session Starter.

Phase Two: Discussion based on customer service.

Phase Three: Information to look for on the key concepts covered in the DVD whilst viewing the program.

Phase Four: Discussion based on the drama as it unfolded in the DVD.

Phase Five: Personal Action Plan.

2. Customer Service 101

Phase One: Session Starter.

Phase Two: Discussion on Customer Service.

Phase Four: Letter from one of your customers.

Phase Five: Information to look for on the key concepts covered in the DVD whilst viewing the program.

Phase Six: Discussion based on the drama as it unfolded in the DVD.

Phase Seven: Exercise: The Great Service Debate.

Phase Eight: Personal Action Plan.

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1. Customers Count

Phase One: Session Starter – Customer Service means

Explain to the participants that in the envelope are phrases that when assembled provide seven definitions of service. Their job is to work together to assemble the phrases – each sentences starts with 'customer service means...'. After five minutes ask each team to read aloud their definitions.

Cut out the following word and phrases – put all of the words and phrases in an envelope – 24 pieces in all – have one envelope for every three participants.

doing	ordinary things	extraordinarily well	
going	beyond	what's expected	
adding	value and integrity	to every interaction	
being	at your best	with every customer	
discovering	new ways	to delight	those you serve
surprising	yourself	with how much	you can do
taking care	of the customer	like you would	take care of your grandmother

Phase Two: Discussion based on customer service

Before Viewing the Program

1. Have a group discussion - it could centre on the following;
 - a) Why is customer service important?
 - b) Describe your own experiences of good and bad service and how you felt.
 - c) What do you think would be the difference in the definition of good customer service between your own and your parents' generation?

Phase Three: Information to look for on the key concepts covered in the DVD whilst viewing the program

While Viewing the Program

1. Why is good customer service essential for a successful business?
2. Give two examples of both internal and external customers.
 - a) Internal.
 - b) External.
3. List five things you should do when beginning the customer transaction. The first one is completed for you.
4. List the four things you should do to sustain good customer service.
5. What is the final step in the customer communication process?
6. Dealing with difficult customers requires special attention. Identify three behaviours you should portray when dealing with difficult customers.
7. List the good and bad communication techniques displayed by Naomi Henderson.
8. What key information should you capture when taking a telephone message? What are the key behaviour characteristics should you portray in your telephone manner?

Suggested Responses:

While Viewing the Program

1. Why is good customer service essential for a successful business?
 - No customers, no business.
 - Returning customer more valuable than new.
 - Good customer service gives edge.
2. Give two examples of both internal and external customers.
 - a) Internal
 - Manager
 - Colleague
 - b) External
 - Existing customers
 - New customers
3. List five things you should do when beginning the customer transaction.
 - Greet the customer warmly
 - Show interest, eye-contact, posture
 - Non-verbal signals
 - Listen attentively
 - Summarise the customer's needs
 - Telephone often first point of contact
 - Answer promptly
 - Adopt warm, courteous tone
 - Avoid speaker phone
 - Take detailed notes

4. List the four things you should do to sustain good customer service.
 - Check customer requirements
 - Know products and services
 - Keep customer informed
 - Offer solutions instead of problems
5. What is the final step in the customer communication process?
 - Requires you to finalise practical matters
 - Payments, receipts, deliver
 - Classify, check arrangements
 - Build relationships with customers
 - Failure to follow through will damage future relations
6. Dealing with difficult customers requires special attention. Name three behaviours you should portray when dealing with difficult customers.
 - Requires special attention
 - Apologise, rather than defend, blame
 - Be sincere, concerned
 - Ask questions
 - Focus on solutions, don't present problems

Phase Four:

Discussion based on the drama as it unfolded in the DVD

1. As a group, compare your earlier views (before viewing the program) on customer service with those you have now (after viewing the program.) Is the definition now broader, so that it includes internal and external customers?
2. If you were Naomi Henderson's personal assistant, how do you think you would respond to her dismissive attitude?

Phase Five: Personal Action Plan

2. Customer Service 101

Phase One: Session Starter – Customer Service means

Explain to the participants that in the envelope are phrases that when assembled provide seven definitions of service. Their job is to work together to assemble the phrases – each sentences starts with 'customer service means...'. After five minutes ask each team to read aloud their definitions.

Before your workshop: cut out the following word and phrases – put all of the words and phrases in an envelope – 24 pieces in all – have one envelope for every three participants.

doing	ordinary things	extraordinarily well	
going	beyond	what's expected	
adding	value and integrity	to every interaction	
being	at your best	with every customer	
discovering	new ways	to delight	those you serve
surprising	yourself	with how much	you can do
taking care	of the customer	like you would	take care of your grandmother

Phase Two: Discussion based on customer service

Before Viewing the Program

1. Then proceed to have a group discussion - it could centre on the following;
 - a) Why is customer service so important?
 - b) Describe your own experiences of good and bad service and how you felt.
 - c) What do you think would be the difference in the definition of good customer service between your own and your parents' generation?

Phase Three: Letter from one of your customers

Give a copy of the following letter to the participants to read or show on screen via data projector or overhead transparency.

Tell participants that they are going to write a letter using the following format to themselves.

TIP: Rather than giving out a copy display via data projector or overhead transparency

Dear Julie

I wanted to write to thank you personally for the service you provided when I called Atlantis for help with my video camera.

You helped me out in a number of ways. First you told me about the time delay switch that would allow me to set the camera and then jump into the picture before it started filming. This made me aware of something I didn't even know about my own camera.

I also appreciated the way you took the time to talk me through the whole procedure. Your patience made me feel like a valued customer.

Finally I wanted to say thanks for telling me about the compact tripod Atlantis offers for this video camera. I think it will really make a difference to my home videos.

Keep up the good work.

Sincerely

Patrick

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Phase Four: Information to look for on the key concepts covered in the DVD whilst viewing the program

Take a look at the DVD to further develop customer service orientation.

1. Why is good customer service essential for a successful business?
2. Give two examples of both internal and external customers.
 - a) Internal:
 - b) External:
3. List five things you should do when beginning the customer transaction. The first one is completed for you.
4. List the four things you should do to sustain good customer service.
5. What is the final step in the customer communication process?
6. Dealing with difficult customers requires special attention. Identify three behaviours you should portray when dealing with difficult customers.
7. List the good and bad communication techniques displayed by Naomi Henderson.
8. What key information should you capture when taking a telephone message? What are the key behaviour characteristics should you portray in your telephone manner?

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Suggested Participant Responses:

While Viewing the Program

4. Why is good customer service essential for a successful business?

- No customers, no business
- Returning customer more valuable than new
- Good customer service gives edge

5. Give two examples of both internal and external customers.

a) Internal

- manager
- colleague

b) External

- existing customers
- new customers

6. List five things you should do when beginning the customer transaction.

- Greet the customer warmly
- Show interest, eye-contact, posture
- Non-verbal signals
- Listen attentively
- Summarise the customer's needs
- Telephone often first point of contact
- Answer promptly
- Adopt warm, courteous tone
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4. List the four things you should do to sustain good customer service.

- Check customer requirements
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- Requires you to finalise practical matters
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- Classify, check arrangements
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6. Dealing with difficult customers requires special attention. Name three behaviours you should portray when dealing with difficult customers.

- Requires special attention
- Apologise, rather than defend, blame
- Be sincere, concerned
- Ask questions
- Focus on solutions, don't present problems

Phase Five:

Discussion based on the drama as it unfolded in the DVD

1. As a group, compare your earlier views (before viewing the program) on customer service with those you have now (after viewing the program.) Is the definition now broader, so that it includes internal and external customers?
2. If you were Naomi Henderson's personal assistant, how do you think you would respond to her dismissive attitude?

Phase Six: Exercise – The Great Service Debate

Divide the group into two teams of equal size. Each team will review a customer service scenario and will hold a debate to determine what course of action should be taken by the customer service representative. Give each team a copy of the scenario and a position to defend. Ask each group to elect a spokesperson.

As the debate takes place write pros and cons of each sides position on a flip-chart. The aim is for the group to examine and discuss a diverse variety of customer service issues.

Handout

You work at Wanamaker Widget Factory as a customer service representative. Your company is currently facing a widget shortage and has put a temporary limit on widget sales: 2000 widget sales per customer per week. One day you take a call from Alvin Zinger at South Coast Supplies. He is a longtime customer who usually orders 4000 widgets a week. When you tell Alvin about the temporary limit on widget sales, he informs you he'll either get 4000 widgets a week from you or he'll buy 4000 widgets from your competitor Walla Walla Widget Factory. Argue from your teams position, regardless of what you might do in this situation.

Team A: Your position is that the factory should make exception for Mr Alvin Zinger and agree to sell to him 4000 widgets.

Team B: Your position is that Mr Alvin Zinger should not receive more than the allocated quota of widgets.

Rules for the Debate:

1. All members of your team should participate in the team discussion.
2. Designate one spokesperson.
3. You will have five minutes to discuss your position and come up with a list of reasons to support it. Then you will speak for two minutes on your team's course of action.
4. After each side has spoken your team will have two minutes to come up with rebuttals to your opponent's argument. You'll then have one minute to voice your rebuttal, then the debate ends.

Phase Eight: Personal Action Plan

Other Relevant Programs Available from Training Point.net

Communication in the Workplace Series

The Customer Talks Back

Give 'Em The Pickle

If Looks Could Kill

It's Personal – For the Customer and For You

So HELP Me

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