

# CUSTOMER SERVICE WORKSHOP

Nipawin, Feb. 24/09  
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## IMPROVE CUSTOMER SERVICE WITH EXCELLENT COMMUNICATION SKILLS

### BASIC PREMISES:

1. A customer = revenue – wages = employees = the reason YOU have a job!
2. The building blocks of customer serve are as follows:

Foundation – consists of a favorable first impression, courteous  
Treatment and a positive attitude

+

Effective communication Skills

+

Rapport/ relationship building skills

**equals**

Customer base: first –time and regular

**Introductions:** introduce another participant – ask his/her name, home and reason (s) for attending workshop.

**Opening query:**

**The scene:** think of a business you've recently walked into that made you feel comfortable

**The questions:**

1. What did the employees do/say that made that made you feel comfortable?
2. What aspects of the business' appearance/physical lay-out made you feel welcome?

**Elicit, discuss and note participants' answers on flip-chart**  
**Use local examples, scenarios**  
**Engage participants**

**BUILDING BLOCKS** – will supplement and underscore basic workshop premises by referencing, reading and discussing Key Points and Quick quotes from **Customer Service Training 101** in **WORKSHOP HANDOUT** (ref #1)

***The Foundation:*** participants' reference/summary **Customer Service Training 101** pp.1, 2

**STEP 1: First Impressions Matter**

Key points:

- Customer service begins the minute a customer comes into your business, calls you on the phone, or e-mails you
- Favorable impression provides the first step in providing customer service (think demeanor, grooming, language etc)
- Poor impression translates into business needing to start building a customer service foundation
- Question to ask self – what do your customers see?
- Positive body language (elicit examples)

**STEP 2: Courtesy Counts**

Key points:

- Courtesy is an important part of forming a positive first impression
- Courtesy words, phrases and behaviours contain powerful messages which show you care about and value customers
- Verbal examples – please, thank you, I'm sorry etc (elicit more)

- Non verbal examples – paying attention, listening, not interrupting, fairness, treating other with respect etc (elicit more)

### **STEP 3: Attitude is Everything**

Key points:

- Attitudes speaks volumes (indicated by words/body/language)
- Positive attitude begins with individual and his/her self-talk
- Change negative self-talk i.e. “ I’ll never get the right” to positive self –talk i.e. “ Next time I’ll do better” plus other examples
- We set ourselves up for success or failure; articulate difference between the two loops
- Self confidence feeds into the belief that you can make a positive difference in customers’ lives by providing excellent customer service
- Don’t mistake your personal opinion/first impression of a customer fir the truth
- Recognize assumptions and counteract them by keeping an open mind, and avoid stereotyping people
- Important to leave baggage/stress outside the door
- A great attitude helps overcome a poor impression
- A negative attitude helps destroy a positive first impression

**HAND-OUT** (ref #2) **Am I Positively Charged?** Do/discuss

### **STEP 4: Doing the Right Thing/ Ethical Issues**

Key points:

- Honesty – extremely important, makes life less complicated, builds trust
- Lies/deception will come back and cause more trouble in the customer service paradigm
- Base decisions on doing the right thing – include treating all customers fairly/equally
- Give your word and mean what you say
- Tell the truth re product, services, policies
- Accountability i.e. take responsibility for mistakes and deal appropriately with them; creates respect
- No negative comments about colleagues and/or competition. If asked to, can say something like “I don’t know enough about that to comment” etc

## ***Effective Communication Skills***

### **BASICS:**

- Communication is the basis of every relationship
- Communication is the 'glue' in all interactions
- Communication serves many purposes i.e. connects us to others, helps us make decisions, solve problems, seek/give information, get the job done, understand who we are/who others are, complete daily activities/tasks
- Effective communication is the **key** to excellent customer service
- YOU represent your business; as far as the customer is concerned, you **are** the business
- Communication consists of **two** parts i.e. **words** (verbal) and **body language** (non verbal)

### **BASIC COMMUNICATION STYLES:**

1. Non-assertive or Passive
2. Indirect
3. Aggressive – direct and passive aggression
4. Assertive

### **Non-assertive or Passive:**

- General characteristics – let's others make decisions, usually doesn't get what is needed or wanted out of situation, doesn't say what thoughts or feelings are, does not stand up for self or own rights
- Feelings – frustrated, insecure, inferior, angry, hurt, resentful, unhappy, powerless
- Verbal statements – I don' t care, don't know, you tell me, you do it, whatever you say
- Body language – head down, poor/no eye contact, tense, poor posture
- Overall impact – insecure, confused, lacking knowledge an/or control of situation
- Impact on customers if salesperson projects non-assertion – frustration, customers have no confidence in salesperson, no desire to purchase product or return to business. Does not lead to customer respect.

### **Indirect:**

- Similar to non-assertive/passive in terms of general characteristics, feelings, body language, impact and customer impact
- Verbal statements – indirect, tries to meet needs and wants through hinting, and hopes others will get it/guess correctly; behaviour is manipulative
- Does not take responsibility for self

### **Aggressive – direct and passive aggression:**

- General characteristics – makes and/or takes decisions for others, gets exactly what is wanted or needed out of a situation, expresses self forcefully and disrespectfully, demands, puts self and own rights ahead of others' every time
- Create conflict
- Feelings – anger, irritation, inflated ego/righteous, quick tempered, powerful
- Verbal statements – you'd better or else, you always, you never, my way is the best; may order, command, blame, threaten, judge, criticize, use sarcasm
- Body language –aggressive, dominating i.e. too close, too much eye contact, stiff, tense, voice may be louder than necessary or have a menacing undertone
- Passive aggression involves expressing superiority/hostility in a hidden, self-serving, back stabbing way i.e. I'll get the better of you and the situation without you realizing it while it's happening
- Overall impact – superior, bully loud mouth, unpleasant. Does not lead to customer respect
- Impact on customers if salesperson projects aggression – customers feel intimidated, defensive, humiliated, angry, resentful and fearful, have no confidence in salesperson, no desire to purchase product or return to business. Does not lead to customer respect

### **Assertive:**

- General characteristics – has respect for others' rights, feelings and opinions, has self respect, chooses behaviour that is appropriate to the situation, is accountable to self and others
- Focus is on customer
- Feelings – a normal spectrum of both positive and negative, but deals with each responsibly
- Verbal statements – lots of *I* statements i.e. I'll do my best to help you, how can I help you, I think, I will show you etc. Will listen, use feedback and appropriate questioning techniques
- Body language – relaxed, open posture, palms up, head up, eye contact, body faces person being talked to, smiles, pleasant tone of voice
- Overall impact – secure, knowledgeable, in control, friendly, competent
- Impact on customers if salesperson projects aggression – customer feels listened to, respected, served, will want to check out product, may purchase, will come again for the excellent customer service

**VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL ELEMENTS** – participants' reference/summary  
Customer Service Training 101 pp. 3, 4, 5

**STEP 1: Words**

Key points:

- Words factor into myriad communication channels i.e. face-to-face, phone conversations, use of fax, internet/e-mails, text messages., and regular Canada Post ail
- Important to be able to meet and greet customer appropriately within first 3-10 seconds; give positive/negative examples
- Identify self, give name and ask for customer's name; use name respectfully
- Know where the line is between professional and personal word use
- Use of positive welcome words i.e. welcome to my business, my name is, how can I help you today, Yes I/we can, absolutely, certainly, definitely I'll be happy to, I'll be happy to find that out for you, I'll check that out right away, etc
- Need to convey a **this is what I can do for you** in words/body language
- "How can I help you?" Say it in the following tones – bored, angry, unsure
- Tone of voice is extremely important
- **How** you say words is more important than **what** you say

**STEP 2: Body Language or Non-Verbal Communication**

Key points:

- Comprised of posture, gestures, face, eyes/eye contact, tone of voice, proximity
- Define, give examples of and model positives/negative posture, gestures, face, eyes contact, tone of voice
- Define, model proximity, give positive/negative examples of physical space/distance and interactions i.e.
  - Intimate distance: no space – 18 inches
  - Personal distance: 18 inches – 4 feet
  - Social distance: 4 feet – 12 feet
  - Public distance: 12 – 25 + feet
- Most sales take place within a 2-4 feet proximity
- Communication is powerful even without saying a word i.e. giving/receiving the 'silent' treatment, walking away or ignoring the speaker, looking somewhere else when speaker approaches or is speaking, giving 'the look' and so forth. (Elicit and physically model the non-verbal communication)
- Body language accounts for at least 65% of what we communicate
- Tone – 25% of what we communicate
- Actual words -10% of what we communicate
- Summary of negative body language: slump, yawn, lower/avert eyes, stare, defensive stance, arms crossed, hands in pockets, grouchy expression, tense body and so forth

- Summary of positive body language: good posture, head up, relaxed, arms at sides, hands open, appropriate eye contact, smile
- Non-verbal exercise: while you're explaining your product to a customer
  1. Look at customer and smile – convey interest
  2. Slump over and yawn – convey boredom
  3. Lower/avert eyes – conveys disinterest/dishonesty, insecurity
  4. Stand too close – conveys pushiness, anger, aggression
  5. Stand too far – conveys insecurity, disinterest, incompetence

### STEP 3: Grammar

Key points:

- Represent your business by using words that reflect work place
- Know your product 110%
- Speak clearly
- Gear communication to age, stage and level of customer
- Use language that's easily understood
- Never ever talk down to a customer
- Good word usage, basic grammar, proper sentence structure are important
- No swearing, jargon, or insider's talk

### STEP 4: Questions

Key points:

- How do you know that your customer understands you the way you mean your words to be understood? Think: customer's body language how will it present if your communication is understood/not understood?
- Think before your speak
- Use questions to confirm his/her understanding
- Know what to ask, and when to ask
- Ask questions to narrow down wants
- Keep questions relevant, understandable, simple, to the point
- Open questions – the **5W-H** questions i.e. **who, what, where, when, why,** and **how** are used to gather information, and elicit more than a yes/no response i.e. preface questions with words like these how will you, where, what else, what are some, tell me more about, who will use this, when will it be used etc. [elicit more, and establish relevance]
- Closed questions – use for clarification, more of a yes/no response [elicit more, and establish relevance]
- Importance of **feedback** – verbal/non-verbal – via questioning techniques
- Be aware of own body language, including tone of voice and signals sent
- The right words coupled with negative body language sends the **wrong** message to the customer
- The best communication is when **words** and **body language match**

## STEP 5: When the Customer Says No

Key points:

- Listen, listen, and listen some more
- All customers have the right to be heard
- Validate the customer's concern/issue – i.e. I can understand that the price seems high, however... (you insert benefits of products, if applicable)
- Provide options
- Don't personalize customer's comments; this is not about you
- Avoid becoming defensive and/or aggressive
- Stay courteous

## STEP 6: Listening

**HAND-OUT (ref #3) Are You a Good Listener? Do/discuss. [Pre-workshop assessment tool]**

Key points:

- The most important thing in your life when providing customer service is your customer
- The most important thing about your business *is* the customer, as no customer equals no business
- Give customer 100% of your attention and focus
- Act like your customer is the only person in your business
- Your business is about what the customer needs/wants, **not** about your perception of what he/she needs/wants
- Never, ever **assume** anything about your customer
- Assuming what your customer wants can be expensive, as it may cost you your customer
- Listen completely; no interruptions
- Listen to what's not being said by paying attention to customer's body language
- Show you're listening by positive body language:
  1. Eye contact
  2. Good posture
  3. Nodding, smiling
  4. Asking open/closed questions
  5. Confirming words/phrases i.e. hmmm, I see, tell me more
  6. Giving and asking for feedback

**HAND-OUT (ref #4) Active and Passive Listening Do/discuss.**



## ***Rapport – Relationship Building Skills***

### **STEP 1: Establishing Rapport – participants' reference/summary** Customer Service Training 101 pp. 6-14 inclusive

Key points:

- This is the corner stone of customer service
- Relationship building happens from the moment the customer forms a first impression of you, to the point when the transaction is complete
- Rapport building begins immediately with first customer contact
- Use effective communication skills
- Greet every customer
- Welcome customer into your business
- Ask or say how you can help and give your name
- Use customer's name
- Customer judges business by you
- Make sure words match body language
- Seek to build new relationships and maintain existing ones

### **STEP 2: Interacting Positively with Customers**

Key points:

- Pay attention to that one customer
- Be sincere and believe in what you sell
- Do your best; give your all
- Go that extra mile
- Learn as much as you can and be knowledgeable about your products
- Qualify your product to the customer every step of the way
- Look for and find answers to any and all customer queries
- Help your customer by being a part of his/her solution
- Know when to stay and when to go – customer wants to look around, touch base with him/her in a timely manner
- Know scope and location of products

### **STEP 3: Identifying Customers' Needs**

Key points:

- Listen
- Learn about customer's needs
- Use open and closed questions
- Be able to summarize (paraphrase) customer's needs
- Show and tell – be able to confidently and knowledgeably show and endorse products
- Be able to answer questions and respond to objections

## **STEP 4: Making the Customer Feel Valued**

Key points:

- Always give the customer more than they ask for
- Make sure they have all product accessories
- Show gratitude
- Show courtesy
- Validate sale with appropriate words/body language
- Validate a no-sale with courteous comments like: It's a big decision, I'll be happy to answer any other questions, I'd like to show you other product options etc
- Never make customers feel badly about their decision
- Thank customer for coming in

## **STEP 5: Maintaining Ongoing Relationships**

Key points:

- **Customers judge a business through their relationships there**
- Understand your customer demographic and why your product appeals to them
- Know who your customers are
- Know and continue to use their names
- Remember something about your customer
- Know what they expect from your business
- Know how your business' s products/services are able to enhance their lives
- Know your products/services inside and out
- Know what accessories are needed to accompany the product
- Be familiar with what's out there i.e. know what the competition sells, in order to endorse own product
- Never bash competition
- Learn your repeat customers' preferences
- Take time to talk to repeat customers
- Take time to show repeat customers new product lines
- Take time to offer repeat customers courtesy i.e. coffee, if applicable
- **A customer returns or not based on relationships/customer service**

## **STEP 6: Handling Different Types of Customers**

Key points:

- Always maintain respect and courtesy for customer
- Use effective communication skills
- Pushy, aggressive customers – stay courteous, remain calm, stay in control by not matching customer's aggressive tone, words, or body language

- Timid, indecisive customers – use patience, ask open questions to draw customer out, listen
- Flirty customer – stay professional, stick to business
- Culturally different – show tolerance and kindness, listen, try find words that he/she will understand
- People with disabilities – focus on person **not** disability, show respect, talk directly to person, not to his/her companion, try place self at eye level if person is in a wheelchair, never lean on, tower or hover over wheelchair
- If you're not exactly sure how to help (with showing a product for example) ask how best you're able to help/what you should do

**TELEPHONE CONTACTS** - participants' reference/summary  
Customer Service Training 101 pp. 11-12

**STEP 1: Putting Your Best Ear Forward**

Key points:

- Greet and welcome customer
- Listen to customer's reason for call
- Don't ask customer to repeat reason
- Never interrupt
- Pay attention to own tone of voice
- Smile when speaking
- What you say and how you say it are important
- Don't drink coffee, chew gum or eat

**STEP 2: Saying Hello**

Key points:

- Answer on first ring
- Greet and welcome customer with a smile
- Sound enthusiastic
- Be ready to help
- Listen to customer's introduction and use judgment in how you address customer
- Know what your business' expectations/protocol are for answering calls

**STEP 3: Helping the Customer**

Key points:

- Assure customer you can and will help
- Use effective communication and rapport building skills

## **STEP 4: Saying Goodbye**

Key points:

- Recap what you'll do
- Ask if you can do more
- Thank customer for calling

## **STEP 5: Outgoing Calls**

Key points:

- Know what you'll say before you call
- Practice your opening lines/introduction before you call
- Use a professional greeting that identifies you and your business
- Explain reason for call upfront

**E-COMMERCE** - participants' reference/summary  
Customer Service Training 101 pp. 13-14

**STEP 1 – 4:** introduce key points, illustrate with examples, discuss if time permits  
Key points:

**DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS** - participants' reference/summary  
Customer Service Training 101 pp. 15, 16, 17

## **STEP 1: Determine the Reason**

Key points:

- Listen carefully
- Assure the customer you'll do what you can to solve problem
- Stay composed
- Use empathy

## **STEP 2: Cause of the Problem**

Key points:

- Ask open/close questions to determine what happened
- Apologize
- Determine if complaint is valid
- Explain

### **STEP 3: What I Can Do**

Key points:

- Focus on what you *can* do
- Offer solutions
- Don't fault the customer
- Explain the business' stance – how it is and why
- Offer alternatives

### **STEP 4: What I Can Say**

Key points:

- Acknowledge the problem
- Thank customer for opportunity to make things right
- If possible offer compensation or restitution i.e. refund, priority treatment next time, credit toward service charges or fees, gift certificate, discount, a give-away item etc

### **STEP 5: Fix Whatever Needs to be Fixed**

Key points:

- Figure out what went wrong and why
- Determine if this is a repeat complaint
- Use this as an opportunity to improve
- Look at business's procedures, policies, communication
- Work on turning a dissatisfied customer into a satisfied one

### **STEP 6: Customer Still Not Satisfied**

Key points:

- Acknowledge customer's right to be heard
- Apologize for customer's frustration
- Listen with empathy and courtesy
- Find out as much as you can
- Ask for specifics
- Paraphrase using active listening skills
- Agree with facts i.e. customer's frustration and perception of situation/problem
- Know what alternative solutions you're able to offer
- Provide solutions **not** excuses
- Don't make promises you cannot keep
- Follow up proposed action with action
- Understand your business's structure and know when to involve your boss
- Do not allow a customer to abuse you verbally; set clear boundaries
- **Preventing problems is easier than solving them**

Brain-storm words to say when apologizing to customer  
Role play if time allows

**HAND-OUT (ref #5) How I Act in Conflicts**

*Rationale:* It's important to understand own style of conflict in order to understand another's. Do/discuss if time allows

**HAND-OUT (ref #5)**

**Active Listening Self Assessment** Do/discuss what knowledge workshop participants have gained. **[Post-workshop assessment tool]**

**KEY CONCEPT:** CUSTOMERS MAY COME INTO YOUR BUSINESS  
BECAUSE OF THE PRODUCT, BUT THEY WILL COME AGAIN BASED ON  
HOW THEY ARE TREATED

## HOW TO KEEP CUSTOMER COMING BACK

### Questions:

- How do you treat your customers?
  
- Do you have the building blocks of customer service i.e.
  1. Basics – first impression, positive attitude, courteous treatment
  2. Effective Communication skills
  3. Rapport/Relationship building skills
  
- Presenting a positive business image is an important component in customer service. Do you know what others see?
  
- What does your place of business look like; what are you trying to project& Take a mental walk through your business and check out the following:
  1. Location?
  2. How does it physically look/lay-out?
  3. Is there an interesting focal point?
  4. Is it easy to move around?
  5. Are there a sensible traffic flow pattern?
  6. How's the lighting?
  7. Is everything clean? Neat? Attractive?
  8. Are bathrooms accessible, well stocked and clean?
  9. What are options to pay?

### **HAND-OUT** (ref #7)

**Communication Skills** Read/discuss if time permits, as a supplement to overall communication skills presented in workshop

**QUICK SUMMARY:** Think of your customer as your guest. Use acronym **GUEST** as follows:

**G = GREET** – within first three seconds welcome customer into business, identify self/give name, ask customer for his/her name

**U = UNDERSTAND** – give customer a chance to talk while you listen, ask questions to understand what customer wants, use positive communication skills

**E = EDUCATES** – educate the customer about your products, know your products and how they work, provide options, customer chooses product

**S = SATISFY** – you've used the first three points to provide excellent customer service, and your customer has purchased product

**T = THANK** – thank customer for the purchase, for the interaction and for doing business with you

**PROMOTE THE USE OF BROCHURES, MAPS AND LOCAL INFORMATION TO INCREASE TOURISM IN N.E. SASK** – Provide actual examples of what's available. Stress that these materials are free!

**WRAP-UP** – participants' reference/summary Customer Service Training 101 p. 18 Quick Quotes – "Being the best you can be".

Read these quotes, illustrate concepts and express gratitude to workshop participants for their time, attention and dialogue

**BE THE BEST YOU CAN BE!**



## REFERENCE OF HAND-OUTS USED

1. Customer Services Training 101
2. Am I Positively Charged?
3. Are You a Good Listener? [Pre-workshop assessment tool]
4. Active and Passive Listening
5. How I Act in Conflicts
6. Active Listening Self Assessment [Post-workshop assessment tool]
7. Communication Skills

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