



Who Are Your Customers?

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Identify who are your customers
- ✓ Discuss how to meet customers' needs.

Who are Your Customers?

Define the Customer and Client

Who are our customers? For many of us, customers are easy to identify. They buy something from us or we serve them in some way. But some people will say, “I don’t work directly with customers.” Before you accept this idea, take a closer look at who your customers are.

In most organizations and agencies, customers take two forms: internal and external.

Internal customers are the people, departments, or agencies served by what we do. The only person who might have no internal customers is the individual who works completely alone. For the rest of us, internal customers are a fact of life. Most of us have at least one internal customer: our boss. We may also have internal customers in the form of people we supervise, who rely on us to meet their needs. For example, a payroll clerk who works in a service call center serves internal employees who need answers about their payroll, so most of her customers are internal. She may also answer questions from spouses of internal employees about the particulars of their benefit plans; those spouses would be external customers.

External customers are the people, departments, or tenants who are the end users of our organization’s products or services. This is, of course, the traditional use of the term customer.

Some organizations refer to the external customer as a client, particularly if you have an ongoing relationship with them. Make sure that you understand who your customers/clients are where you work.

Do you have **VIP customers**, people who rate extra special service? You may think that seniors or people who spend a lot of money in your facility are VIPs. What do you think? In reality, all the people we work with are our customers and deserve VIP treatment.

What do people want? Well, at the simplest level, our customers have some basic needs:

- They want to be understood.
- They want to feel welcome.
- They want to feel important.
- They want to feel comfortable.

About Relationships

In the **80-20 rule** of business, 80% of our customers are reliable, honest, and do good business with us. 20% of customers can be challenging: rude, demanding, paying their bills late, and so on. The difficulty is in determining how to serve all of our customers.

Can we make the demanding 20% as easy to get along with as the 80%? No. In customer service training, it used to be common to hear, “The customer is always right.” That meant that we would do whatever

the customer needed or wanted in order to keep him as a customer. The reality is that every customer relationship – the good and the not so good – is based on a relationship.

Normally, a customer exchange within the call center is a short, impersonal interaction. Customers expect, and should receive, a direct, immediate, and efficient response. A **call center customer** is someone that you have probably never dealt with before and will quite likely never service again.

Clients are also people who expect and receive a direct, immediate, and efficient response. However, the difference is that clients are people that you must get to know and with whom you must have a relationship.

The big difference between servicing customers and servicing clients relates to the type of relationship that you are committed to. Understandably, client relationships take a lot more time and effort to develop than customer relationships. Both customers and clients expect good service and yet both expect it to be delivered differently. One of your important skills is to determine whether you are servicing a **customer** (get their needs met quickly and satisfactorily) or a **client** (get their needs met quickly and satisfactorily while developing this relationship).

Test Your Knowledge

| My Clients | My Customers |
|------------|--------------|
| | |

To Serve and Delight

One of the easy mistakes to slip into is to **adjust your speech** to what other people might expect. Whether you are new to the workforce or have been around a long time, you might find that your customers sometimes try to push your buttons. For example, they might swear and expect you to do the same. Or they might think that because you are from the same neighborhood or town, you can give them a deal.

The things that you say are a direct reflection on the company that you represent. Customers may not remember exactly what you say, but **they will remember the service they receive**. The qualities you display determine whether those customers will want to do business with your organization again.

When you talk with someone on the phone, you are the company.

Although you may be tempted, especially if you are talking to a regular customer or someone you know, **never EVER speak badly** of the company or any of your colleagues. We live in a small world and word of mouth or blast by text message are effective ways for people to share any negative messages you may give them about your company. Even though you may be frustrated or you may know that a customer complaint is a result of a colleague’s bad work habits, your customer does not need to know.

Test Your Knowledge

When you call to speak to someone in a call center (ordering from a catalog, for example, or to book a vacation), what positive things do you recall?

If you call to file a complaint, what positive things get you through the call?

Did You Hear Me?

Listening Skills

Active Listening

Listening is not the same as hearing. When we are serving callers, it is helpful to use specific techniques that help to strengthen listening skills.

Callers will often state that the reason they didn’t get what they ordered, needed, or asked for was because the CSR didn’t hear what they said. Most CSRs understand how important it is to have good speaking skills. Few CSRs, however, are already skilled at listening when they join the industry.

Hearing is physical. Sound reaches the eardrum, creates vibration, and gets relayed to the brain. Listening is actually differentiating among those sounds and creating meaning from what you hear;

listening is more of an attitude. In its broadest sense, listening can be passive or active. **Passive listening** means looking or seeming like you are listening without giving the speaker your full attention. **Active listening** means that you are giving the speaker your full attention.

Here are some techniques that will help you listen actively. (You may want to copy these tips onto a reference card at your desk and keep it handy.)

- Clear your desk so that you have only the things nearby that help you to provide service to your callers.
- Have forms, notepads, pens, and any technical materials (like directories, reference material, and charts) nearby.
- Sit up straight at your desk (or stand straight) to allow you to breathe and operate efficiently.
- Listen for sounds nearby. If there are loud noises or distractions, you might need to put a do not disturb sign on your door or desk. Turn off radios or loud machines that can distort noise during your phone call.

Zero in on the Matter at Hand

In order to really listen to your callers, you must make a decision to pay attention to what they say.

Do:

- Be polite.
- Listen for cues (words that help explain what they want and need).
- Let them have their say.

Don't:

- Interrupt.
- Give in to your biases.
- Mix fact with feeling.

A Few Words about Biases

- We all have them.
- Identify your biases about people, places, and things.
- Acknowledge that, as a CSR, your biases cannot influence your professional behavior. You must control, not act on, your biases.

The Mission: To Listen

Introduction

Some people seem to be naturally good listeners, while others have to learn how to listen. Even people who seem to be good listeners can have an off day. Perhaps you are someone who appears to be a good listener, but you are not really focused on the conversation.

Quiz

Read the following statements and rate yourself on each one on a scale of one to five, where:

- 1=You never do that
- 2=You do that occasionally
- 3=You do it frequently
- 4=You do that most of the time
- 5=You do that all the time

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| | My mind wanders when I talk with people on the phone. |
| | I know what people are going to say, so I interrupt them or finish their sentences. |
| | I tend to look around the room or check my watch when people speak to me. |
| | I am planning what to say next while the other person is still talking. |
| | I tend to organize my desk or read unrelated things if someone is talking too slowly or taking too long to explain something. My customers, co-workers, spouse, or friends tell me that I am not listening. I cannot remember details of a conversation long after it takes place. |

Scoring

Add your scores together and plot your total on the quality listening spectrum below.



Test Your Knowledge

What can you do in the next two weeks to improve your listening skills?

Further Reading:

