



## Training for Customer Service Excellence

### Learning Outcomes

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

- ✓ Discuss the Importance of Training and Development in Customer Services.

## Training for Customer Service Excellence

Training and development is the key to an organization having a very skilled and informed staff. It is extremely necessary to help the organization make progress. In the old days, organization did not put much emphasis on employee training and expected the employees to do their jobs. However, in the fierce competition that a company faces in today's world, they have to step up their efforts to stay ahead of the competition. Organizations are now becoming more customers focused. But organization cannot provide quality services to its customers if the employees don't know how to do their job and are not motivated.

All organizations now realize the power of their workforce. It is only the employees and their way of doing work that help the organization differentiate itself from others and make progress. Managers now know that in order to make best use of the potential of their employees, they need to be trained to give their best performance. Training and development helps in boosting the confidence of employees, tells them how to do their job efficiently and teaches them great techniques to deal with their customers. Other than the technical staff, managers also need to attend training programs. Research shows that training programs boost leadership skills and promote co-operation and team work among employees. It also helps stress the importance of customer care and keeping the customer happy.

## Identifying Training and Development Objectives

### Listen To Customers

Customer feedback is extremely important for an organization to evaluate how well it is performing and where it stands in the market. Organization should contact customers and ask them about what they think of the quality of the services provided to them. This feedback can help the organization draw up strategies to improve its services. When new strategies are made, employees need to be briefed about its objectives. Also after obtaining feedback, organization can find out what areas of customer service need improvement and they can design training programs accordingly.

For example, a survey was conducted by Glaxo SmithKline, asking its customers to give their own opinion about what they thought about the quality of services offered and the usual amount of time taken to respond to queries. Customers were asked if they were happy with the response time. Results obtained from the survey helped the organization improve its customer care services. Training programs were then designed for the purpose of training staff to handle customer complaints quickly and efficiently.

Now-a-days having customers fill out survey forms and participate in detailed survey programs has become very common. The results obtained from such surveys can help the organization provide better

services to the customer. We take the example of a high street fashion retailer; the organization introduced a new refund policy. They started training programs for their staff to make them familiar with the policy. After the policy was implemented, mystery shoppers were assigned to each store of the organization to see how well their staff was performing. The results showed that further training of staff was required.

Surveys do not really give detailed information to the organization as they consist of short, to the point questions. When detailed analysis is required, customer focus groups are used in which some customers are inducted into the program which is supervised by the organization's own trainer. Each customer is asked a series of questions and their answer are recorded in detail. This is much like an interview and these 'interviews' are also recorded on tape in case more analysis is required later. Some organizations also use a technique of 'calling back' the same customers on a regular basis to conduct interview sessions. One example is Southern Electric.

If we see another example; at Marriott International Hotel, the very first impression of the hotel is based on the behaviour of their front-line staff like waiters etc. They are people responsible for taking orders and servicing the customers. Hence, customer satisfaction depends a lot on the type of services delivered by this front line staff. In Marriott International, to improve customer satisfaction, the front-line staff was made to attend a training session in which importance of customer service was one of the topics on which talks were delivered by the management. This resulted in 1% increase in customer satisfaction levels in all its branches.

Therefore, customer feedback helps the organization pin-point the areas which need improvement. Training programs designed to fulfil this need to be conducted after a fair bit of planning. Customer feedback helps organizations determine the objectives of their training program. Another thing which needs to be kept in mind is that training should not be forced upon the employees. Instead they should be encouraged to attend training programs as it would improve their skills.

This is why the training program needs to be very properly planned and organized. The content of training should not be boring and the participants should be informed about the objectives of the training program. Another thing which can affect the success of the training program is the management's commitment to the cause. If the senior management does not take much interest in the matter, employees won't take it seriously either. In order for the training program to yield good results, the employees and management should be involved in the learning process and the program needs to be very well designed (according to the needs).

## Training and Development Methods

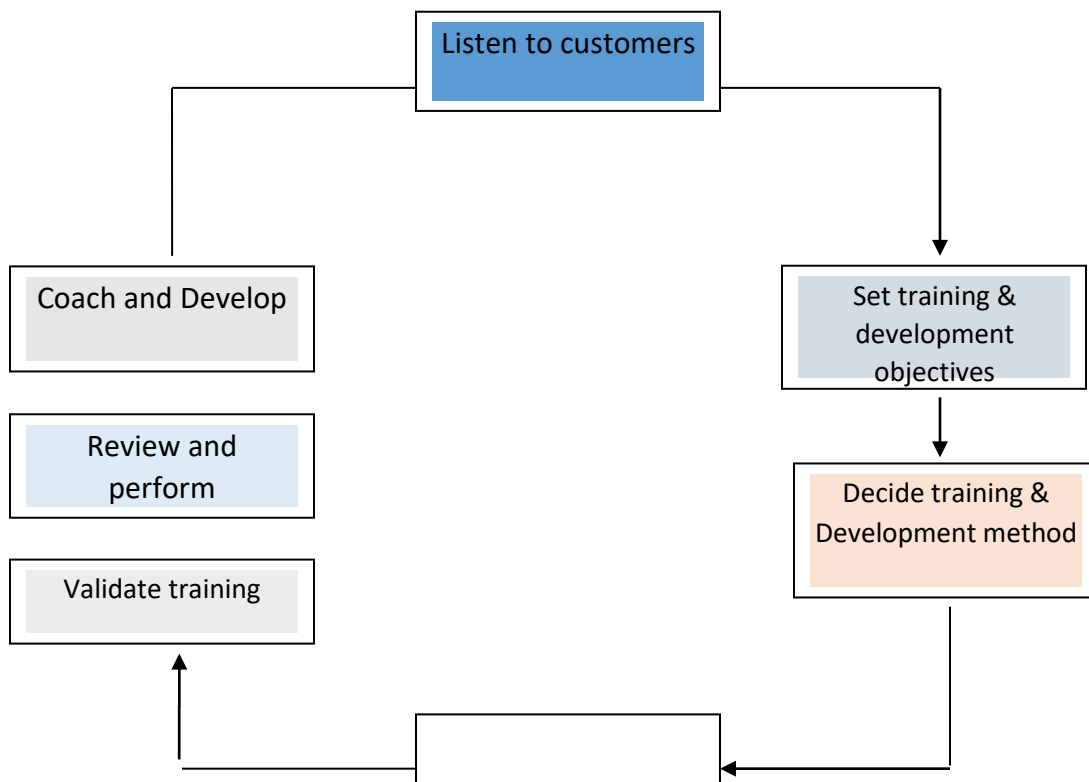
After the organization makes a decision to introduce a new training program, it needs to decide what training techniques should be used. There are many efficient techniques but the success of the program

depends on choosing the right technique. Different people have different styles of learning and this should be kept in mind before deciding to try any specific training method.

When designing the training program, the following need to be considered:

- The learning to take place.
- Trainees' preferred learning style.
- Past experiences of training and development.
- Time available for training.
- Cost.
- Work environment.
- Degree of involvement required.

For example, a lecture or a talk delivered by any speaker would require the participants to listen and concentrate more and practical work done in such a training program won't be in a large number. Also the trainers and managers would be more involved in doing some work as compared to the participants.



**Fig: 1.1 Training & Development cycle**

## **Training and Development for Managers**

The success of a new strategy or new initiative depends greatly on the involvement of managers in its development and implementation. If the managers show concern for a new initiative, they can motivate and train their employees to work hard to achieve new goals. Same is the case for training programs. The success of any training program depends largely on the amount of managers' involvement in it. Managers usually know their employees well and know their potential. If managers are involved in the development and implementation of a training program, greater success is guaranteed. It can be summed up that success of the training program or a new strategy depends on:

- Motivation and morale boosting of employees.
- Involvement of managers in all the activities of the organization.
- Clear understanding of objectives that are to be achieved.
- Demonstrable changes and improvements.

Managers can really make a difference in the company if they are committed to their jobs. They have the gift of leadership, of inspiring others, being a role model and of motivating and encouraging others. They need to use this gift for the progress of their organization. The technical staff is the one which has to deal with the customer. These employees need to be motivated from time to time to make them feel confident and satisfied with their efforts. Their efforts should be recognized by the organization to make them work even harder. This can only be done after the managers have received proper training about managing their people. All people are of different types and different behaviours. The managers need to be trained to handle such diverse kind of people efficiently.

To state an example, managers at the Benefits Agency agreed to attend training sessions for training about improving customer services and employee empowerment. The managers were tasked with designing a strategy/development plan which they thought was best suited for the organization's current condition. This workshop also trained them about analyzing customer feedback and behaviour changes.

## **Coaching**

Organizations in today's world are becoming more customer friendly and goal oriented. They promote a more open culture where interaction with co-workers is extremely important to get the job done. Now-a-days managers don't just supervise their employees, they are tasked with helping their employees get the job done. Due to open culture, employee-manager relationship has also significantly improved.

Organization's do not just focus on training and development of the technical staff but also know the importance of having well-informed and well-trained managers. Senior executives and managers attend workshops or training programs which help them learn how to manage their staff and increase their efficiency. Managers now 'coach' their staff and tell them exactly how to do a job. This results in more

interaction between the managers and employees and also helps encourage the employees to work hard. Managers also coach their employees about making key decisions themselves (empowerment).

### **Managers as Trainers**

Much of the training is now delivered to the employees by their managers. Managers first receive training to tell them about the objectives and features of the new plan as well as train them to handle their staff. Using this training, the managers brief their staff and tell them what is expected from them. They supervise their employees and are directly involved with the implementation of the new program. This is exactly what is required to make the plan succeed. Managers also need to be aware of the job that has to be completed by the employee to help them train to work efficiently.

For example, about 350 managers at Pizza Hut received training about dealing with customers, handling customer complaints, resolving queries about service, interaction with customers, menu knowledge and health and safety regulations followed by the chain. Afterwards, they simply trained their branch staff about all these things. Similarly, managers at TNT attended a 13-week long workshop to help them train about providing better customer service.

Having managers train the staff is much more beneficial than hiring external trainers to conduct training programs. One of the reasons for this is that the managers understand the abilities of and skills of their employees and can train them better than external trainers. Another reason is that when training programs are conducted by managers, timings suitable to the organization can be finalized instead of fixing timings to suit the trainers. Also when managers act as trainers, it helps boost the relationship between the employees and the managers.

However, managers cannot act as trainers if they do not have the required skills to train others. Managers need to be given training about improving their communication skills and should be trained to boost their presentation skills. They should also be taught techniques through which they can effectively train their staff. One usual practice is to make managers attend the same training program that the staff has to attend. This way they'll know what the staff needs to be trained about. They also need to do some research about the training program, just like a teacher prepares his lecture.

For a successful training program, the manager needs to be able to convey his point of view clearly to the employees. He/she needs to tell the participants about the objectives and purpose for organizing the training program before going into details. A good, interactive presentation would help in keeping the participants involved. Physical demonstration and exercises also need to be included to give some training to the participants.

According to the Industrial Audiovisual Association, we learn most through:

- Taste 3 per cent
- Touch 6 per cent
- Smell 3 per cent
- Hearing 13 per cent
- Sight 75 per cent

And we remember:

- 10 per cent of what we read.
- 20 per cent of what we hear.
- 30 per cent of what we see.
- 50 per cent of what we see and hear.
- 80 per cent of what we say.
- 90 per cent of what we say and we do.

Other thing that the managers can do is making a schedule that would help them keep track of their progress. Individual performance of all the participants should be recorded. This can be analyzed at the end of the training program to see how well the staff performed overall.

### **Customer Service Training For Front-Line and Support Staff**

About a decade ago, the usual approach for introducing a new training programme was by attracting employees to interactive and polished presentations. The whole staff enjoyed the training programme but this method kept them interested for only a short period of time. After some time, all the passion and enthusiasm seemed to vanish. Plus, such training programmes were organized for only the technical staff. This technique was practiced by big organizations like British Airways, American Express etc.

This technique was not very useful because when employees returned from training, they required the managers to supervise them and give them further training. But the managers were not trained to coach their staff and left employees on their own after they have had the training. Many training programs failed because of this. For an organization to be truly customer focused, everyone should be involved in the activities of the organization. Everyone should voluntarily take part in seminars, training programs and workshops arranged by the organization to help them become familiar with organization's strategies.

## Knowledge

Knowledge about organization's practices and strategies is important to help everyone do their job in the organization. The customer support staff as well as their managers need to be updated about new products, product features and other information as well as be informed about the standards and rules that are followed in the organization.

For example, a telephone banking company, First Direct, introduced two schemes to help keep the staff informed about the activities of the organization. In one scheme updates about changes taking place in each branch were made available to employees. In the second scheme, problem solving teams were created. This helped the staff gain better knowledge about the organization and its customers.

Many other companies have similar programs which keep the staff updated about organization's policies and product information. An example is Texaco.

To state another example, an investment bank introduced a program where managers from each division gave a presentation about the market trends and working of their branch. This helped keep all the staff updated about the way work was being done in all the branches.

Wal-Mart, the successful chain of supermarkets in the US, knows that everyone has different capacities of learning and every person has a different technique through which they learn effectively. Keeping this in mind, many different training programs have been designed to facilitate the needs of different employees.

## Skills Training

Various skills that the customer service staff needs to be trained are:

- Listening and questioning skills.
- Assertive communication.
- Dealing with difficult customers.
- Written communication skills.
- Teamwork.
- Complaint handling.
- Managing pressure and stress.
- Problem-solving in teams.

To state an example, we see that the patrol staff at RAC is given special training to improve their listening skills so that they can communicate better with each other when on patrol or when rescuing someone. Other aspects of training include better interaction with the customers.

### **Customer-Focused Attitudes**

If the organization wants its employees to have customer focused attitudes, it needs to make a commitment to the cause as well i.e. its vision should let the employees know that the organization wants to strive to make its customers happy. In Harvester Restaurants, new recruits are taken through an orientation program. They are told what kind of attitude the organization expects from its employees and what steps it takes to make sure it fulfills customer needs and increase customer satisfaction.

After the orientation program finishes, the new recruits are asked to make a commitment to the cause and work for the betterment of the organization. This helps in shaping employee's attitudes. However, when they start working, their co-workers and managers need to further strengthen that commitment. The work environment also affects the attitude of the employees. Managers also encourage the employees to think of the services that they provide from a customer point of view to improve them.

In Barclays, a program "Understanding Small Businesses" was introduced to improve organization's relationship with small businesses. Managers studied and analyzed the small organizations that had applied for loans. This helped them understand customer needs better. Other organizations like BT also undertake similar activities for their employees.

### **E-learning**

Technology has greatly changed the way people work around the globe now. Good organizations realize the importance of technology and use it to keep their employees informed/updated and even to conduct training programs. Organization's intranet helps employees keep in touch, interact better, share ideas as well as keep updated about product information and organization's policies.

### **Teamwork**

Teamwork is extremely important for getting the job done in today's competitive world. An organization cannot simply rely on one person, who is specialized in some specific field, to do the job himself. Teamwork is now the key to success. Organizations look for people who can work effectively in a team and can communicate well. Organizations also organize team building activities to help bond a team more. This also helps boost leadership skills and lets the employees evaluate their skills. Training programs and workshops are also conducted to teach the employees the importance of teamwork and how to work in a team.

## **Empowerment and Multi-Skilling**

Other than teamwork, empowerment of the employees is also extremely necessary. Employees need to be encouraged to take important decisions about their work themselves. Training and development is necessary to help the employees understand their responsibilities and handle all those responsibilities.

Multi-skilling is the new trend these days. Employees need to possess multiple skills to complete their jobs other than having technical knowledge. For example accountants and auditors need to know how to use finance related software and spreadsheet software to complete their work.

## **Process Improvement and Problem-Solving**

Employees are now encouraged to give feedback about the organization's processes and practices. If the employees are not comfortable with their work environment, they won't be able to work hard for achieving organizational goals. In such cases, employees are trained to give suggestions about improving these processes to the senior management.

Organizations also focus on making teams to facilitate problem solving. For example, Rover Group trained its employees to improve their skills and thinking abilities to enable them to improve their problem-solving techniques.

## **The Learning Organization**

It is quite clear that organizations now heavily focus on enabling their employees to improve their skills by conducting training programs for them. However, the organization also needs to take into account the likes and dislikes of the employees when conducting training programs. Training programs which are not necessary for the employees (which do not train the staff about organizational procedures etc.) should be conducted after consulting with the employees first to help them take maximum benefit from it. For example, Ford allocates £100 for each employee to choose the training program he wants to attend, anything that he likes. Similar procedures are followed by Peugeot, which lets its employees decide the training program they want to enrol in. This helps boost the confidence of the employees as well as giving them freedom, which would make them satisfied and happy. This also helps the employees realize their responsibilities and helps them form strong relations with other employees.

## **Knowledge Management**

Organizations encourage their employees to improve their skills, gain more knowledge and also try to keep themselves informed about their customers and their behaviour. They expect employees to use this knowledge to help the organization make progress. However, if an employee leaves the organization; the knowledge he had goes with him. To prevent this from happening, organizations now

ask employees to share all the knowledge they have with their co-workers as well as supervisors. Knowledge that the employees have about their customers have to be submitted to the supervisors to help organization keep that information about the customer even if the employee plans to leave. This has become necessary for all employees now and affects their performance review.

## Building Customer Service Into All Training And Development Activities

### Recruitment

Recruiting the right kind of people is extremely necessary for an organization to make progress. When selecting candidates, other than the skills, important aspects about the candidate's personality should also be noted. Tests should be conducted to evaluate whether the candidate will be able to work in the work environment provided by the company or not, whether his attitude matches with what is required by the organization or not. This is the reason why many successful companies spend a lot of time, energy and money in improving their recruitment process. Many things that are evaluated about the candidates include:

- Attitude towards customer service and people.
- Knowledge.
- Skill.
- Experience.
- Flexibility.
- Communication Skills.
- Resourcefulness.
- Intelligence.
- Personality.
- Appearance.

### Recruit For Attitude, Train for Skill

Many organizations are now applying this rule “recruit for attitude and train for skills”. This means that the person with the right attitude should be hired because skills can be increases through training and development later on.

### Blended learning

Relying on the organization to provide training is longer suitable for ambitious employees who want to excel in their jobs. Organizations have also taken notice of this and now encourage their employees to opt for training courses focused on a wide array of topics. Organizations also expect their employees to

use self-study and researching techniques to keep updated with the latest developments and trends in their related fields. E-learning is the best tool for this purpose.

## Training To Deal With Challenging Situations

Organizations also need to train their employees and management alike, to deal with difficult situations. In crisis situations/challenging situations, swift response and quick thinking is required from both, the managers and the staff. Employees are trained to deal with tough situations by putting them in such situations (as a test exercise) and asking them to solve the problem. This helps in boosting the employee's confidence.

Another thing the organization needs to tell its employees is that when they are dealing with an angry customer, they should properly listen to his complaint first, then apologize and tell him that the problem can be fixed. Some employees expect that the customer would want compensation but most of the time, they just want the problem to be fixed instead.

### **Induction**

Induction is the short time period in which employees form their attitude about the organization and its customer (and usually this attitude doesn't change afterwards) after their recruitment. Therefore, it is extremely important to tell the employees about the main focuses of the organization and how it wants its employees to treat the customers. Research indicates that employees are most focused and work very carefully on their very first day. This is why emphasizing the need for developing the right attitude is necessary. Keeping this in mind, all of DHL's new recruits spend a 5 day induction program with the courier service.

Now-a-days there is a trend of hiring part-time workers when the job load increases. These part-time workers do not have the same relationship with the organization as others have and conducting the same training programs that is designed for full time workers is not suitable. Therefore, short and efficiently designed crash courses are conducted to quickly train the part time workers. They are told what they are expected to do and when an organization treats these part-time employees in the same way in which it expects its employees to treat the customers, it helps in forming a positive attitude.

Managers need to give special time to new recruits during their induction period. This is to help them realize the importance of the beliefs and vision of the organization and to make them focus on providing best customer services. Managers need to make sure that these new recruits develop the right attitude, which is required for the job as well utilize their skills to the maximum. It is necessary that managers take out this time from their busy schedules to make sure that the future of their company is secure.

## Competences

'Competences' means the ability of an organization's employees to perform some task. In order to make sure that all employees focus on the customers, it can be included in the competence framework of the organization. This framework defined what the employee behaviour should be and how he should accomplish a task.

Competences also help the organization evaluate the performance of its employees by comparing it with the standards that they are expected to meet. Some include:

- Find out what customers want.
- Talk to customers to discuss problems.
- Listen to customers' complaints and comment sympathetically.
- Resolve customers' problems.
- Plan their work and the work of staff to respond to customer needs.
- Change what they are doing at short notice to deal with customers' needs.
- Make others aware of the importance of satisfying customer needs.

These competences also guide the behaviour of all the employees and explain what kind of behaviour and attitude will help in getting the job done efficiently. For example, the competence framework of an organization could include guiding principles for the managers that he should be able to:

- Utilize the skills of his staff, know their capabilities, encourage them and considers their feelings and aspirations.
- Have strength of purpose and should be willing to deal with important issues head-on, no matter how tough.
- Do the job for the company and the customer, should give his 110% and see himself as part of the team.
- Open and honest, approachable and dependable, a good listener, and display an interest in others' points of view.
- Take action – 'let's go for it'.
- Discuss decisions and listen to arguments. Disseminate all relevant information.
- Inspire confidence and trust – decisions have been reached and thought through.
- Demonstrate trust and encourage ownership.
- Asks for people's ideas – be prepared to be persuaded by logical, relevant discussion.
- Care about people and their problems – take interest on a personal level.
- Give realistic objectives and have clear criteria and ground rules.
- Know what's going on, has a bigger picture, look at problems globally, and be able to communicate company's vision.

## **Performance Review**

When reviewing the performance of the employees, it should be evaluated whether they paid attention to customer satisfaction or not. Other things that should be evaluated in performance appraisal are:

- Customer Orientation.
- Enthusiasm.
- Ability to fit into a team.
- Loyalty.
- Flexibility.
- Technical Expertise.

## **Personal Development Plans**

Other than working to achieve the goals of the organization, employees should have their own personal goals that they should set out to achieve.

## **Emotional Intelligence (EQ)**

Organizations should also introduce training programs to introduce the Emotional Intelligence or EQ of its employees. EQ plays a role when employees are dealing with customers and give them an ability to predict what the customers wants by seeing their own services from customers' perspective.

Employees who have a high EQ score are aware about:

- Themselves and the range and depth of their feelings – sad, happy, depressed.
- Other people and their feelings and what signals such feelings give off.
- The impact they have on others.
- The impact other people have on them.

Such employees know the skills they possess and understand the amount of pressure they can take. They know how their behaviour impacts others including their customers. They know how they can make a difference by having the right behaviour. This is an extremely power tool. Therefore, organizations conduct special training sessions for their employees to increase their EQ levels so that they can realize their actual potential and utilize it for the benefit of the organization.

Such employees are very successful in dealing effectively with the customers and solving their problems. In customer service, when an employee receives a call from a particularly difficult customer, the key to satisfying this customer is to calm him down. In such a case, the employee needs to practice empathy with the customer and listen to him carefully. He should use a soothing tone of the voice to calm the

customer down. He should also try to relate to what the customer is saying. This makes it easier for him to solve the customer's problem and would also have a good impact on the customer.

### **Review and Refresh Training and Development**

A key factor which needs to be considered related to training and development is that the program designed should suit the needs of the organization and be up to date with the current market trends as well. For example the training programs being used today won't be effective to use after a decade or even 5 years. Therefore, the organization needs to keep track with changing technology and trends and then design new programs accordingly. Also, the old training programs need to be analyzed and refreshed to make them effective. This is the job of the department in charge of training and development.