



What is Customer Service

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

Unit 1

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What is Customer Service?

Customer service is the way you treat the people who support your company. These can be paying customers (**external** customers) or staff members (**internal** customers). The customer's perception of that service is what brings them back to you for repeated service. Great service is what they cite when they send referrals to you.

People who provide good customer service (regardless of the nature of their business) earn psychological benefits in addition to any rewards offered by their company. If you are unhappy in your job, take an objective look at the kind of service you are giving. In almost every case, your job satisfaction mirrors the satisfaction people feel when doing business with you. Giving poor service is a way of beating up on yourself.

The Critical Elements of Customer Service

We're going to cover a lot of material in this course, but it is really focused on six critical elements of customer service. Each of these will be discussed through the course.

The six critical elements of customer service are:

1. A customer service focus
2. Defined within your organization
3. Given life by the members of the organization
4. Be a problem solver
5. Measure it
6. Reinforce it

A Customer Service Focus

The first critical element of customer service is a **customer service focus**. There are some important concepts that we need to understand about customer service before we can do a really good job of providing it.

Service is a philosophy — not a department, a program or a policy.

Service means meeting, not necessarily exceeding, customer expectations.

Service is not always natural, automatic, or coincidental.

Who Are Your Customers?

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. People will sometimes say, “I don’t work directly with customers.” Before you accept this idea, try taking a closer look at who our 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. Do you meet with external customers, or somehow meet the needs of internal customers, like your co-workers?

As individuals, we all have at least one internal customer: our boss. We may also have internal customers in the form of people we supervise. They rely on us to meet their needs and they form opinions about how well we meet those needs.

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

Do you have **VIP** (very important person) customers, people who rate extra special service? You may think that certain customers who spend a lot of money at your business are VIPs.

In reality, all the people we work with are our customers and deserve VIP treatment. When we treat all of our customers like VIPs, we start to become known as an organization that offers exceptional service to everyone.

What do people want? 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.

Meeting Expectations

Every individual's needs are important. Each customer wants to be treated like they are your only customer. They know that isn't true, just as well as you do, but they still want that kind of attention. A service oriented philosophy says that you are there for your customer.

How do you feel about knowing that customers today are much more demanding than they were 50 years ago? The customer's expectations are higher than ever, they know more about you and your products, and they also know about your competition.

Here are six ways to meet your customer's expectations.

- If the phone is ringing, make sure someone answers it. If no one is available, then a voice prompt will suffice (provided that it is working properly). People appreciate talking to people when they call to get service.
- When a customer enters your premises, greet them as though you are happy to see them. Don't leave someone standing awkwardly.
- Be present for your customer. Your body language and tone of voice, whether you are on the phone or in person, need to let your customer know that you want to be there and you are pleased to serve them.
- Be polite. There is no excuse for bad manners. Your customer will not forget rudeness, even when they are being difficult.
- Pay attention to the details. If you promise something, make sure you deliver. Wow them by being on time and remembering all of the required pieces.
- Always thank your guest. There is a lot of competition out there, so your goal is to retain your customer, not send them on. Even if you are providing a service they cannot get somewhere else (like a government department issuing a driver's license), be thankful for their attention and business.

Setting Goals

Creating a Personal Vision Statement

If you want to feel like you're getting more out of life, then we recommend that you set a personal vision statement. This will then help you set short and long term goals, which should influence your daily plan. Everyone should know what they want from life and to have a plan to get there. You can think of it like a pyramid:



There are three important steps to creating your personal vision.

Step One: Identify Your Values

The list below reflects some common values. Choose the ten that are most important to you as a person (meaning that they apply both at work and at home). You can customize the wording, or add your own to the list.

Ability to make decisions and implement them	Ability to persuade and influence others	Achieving excellence
Achieving fame and recognition	Adventure and excitement	Behaving ethically

Being challenged by pressures and deadlines	Being organized and dependable	Being skilled and capable
Building a family	Building meaningful relationships with others	Competition with others
Contributing to society	Cooperation with others	Demonstrating expertise
Diversity in daily tasks	Doing something meaningful	Efficient and effective
Enjoying what you do	Environmental rights	Establishing a reputation
Expressing creativity	Feeling excited and stimulated by life	Feeling independent
Feeling of belonging and community	Feeling of inner harmony	Feeling of patriotism
Financial security	Financial wealth	Free speech/human rights
Freedom to set your own pace and goals	Having a feeling of security	Having power and control
Having privacy	Helping those in need	Religion and/or spirituality
Leading others to success	Moving at a fast pace	Moving at a slow pace
Being productive	Reliability	Self-development
Sense of accomplishment	Serving the public	Spontaneity
Truth and integrity	Working as part of a team	Working individually

We cannot focus on too many things at one time and remain effective. Look at the ten values you selected and select the five that are most important to you. Cross the others off. Be firm with yourself if you need to be. Remember, you are focusing on what is really important to you.

Next, reduce the list to just three values. These are the things at your very core. Cross the other two off your list. Put circles around the three items that are your core values.

Step Two: Define Your Values

Now, outline what success for each of those values would look like.

Value One

Value Two

Value Three

Step Three: Put It All Together

Finally, bring the three statements together into one paragraph. You may feel that you need to go back and re-evaluate your values, or you may want to re-work some sentences to create what is meaningful to you. That's OK! Above all, this should be a reflection of your innermost thoughts and a roadmap for how you would like to conduct your life.

Use the space below to write out your vision statement.

Identifying Dreams and Setting Goals

Your organization probably has goals that are reviewed regularly to keep focused on priorities and make adjustments as they are needed. By setting goals on a personal level, we have the opportunity for the same kind of success.

Most people do not write their goals down, but doing so gives you something concrete to refer to and helps to keep you on track. If you know people who are really successful, there is a very good chance their goals are written down and that they look at them regularly.

What areas of life do you want to set goals in?

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“In my life, I would like get the most out of each day by being as productive as possible. For me, being productive means feeling good about what I have accomplished at the end of the day and knowing that I have helped as many people as possible. It is important to me to do this in a way that allows me to feel good about my choices and to know that I have maintained my integrity while giving my best in work and life. As well, I need to feel challenged in my life. I like overcoming new problems and meeting new people while having new experiences.”

- Exceed my customer service targets.
- Become more educated about communication skills.
- Learn how to do yoga and practice it daily.
- Climb Mount Everest.

Clearly some of these are achievable in the short term while others will take longer. Some will obviously take more work than others.

SPIRIT

Each objective should be broken down into several small, achievable goals that will help you get where you want to go. Good goals should have SPIRIT!

Specific

Be specific about what you want or don't want to achieve. The result should be tangible and measurable. "Look gorgeous" is pretty ambiguous; "Lose 20 pounds" is specific.

Prizes

Reward yourself at different points in the goal, particularly if it's long-term. If your goal is to become more educated, for example, you might treat yourself and a friend to dinner.

Individual

The goal must be something that you want to do. If your spouse wants you to lose 20 pounds but you think you look fine, you're not going to want to work towards the goal.

Review

Review your progress periodically. Does the goal make sense? Are you stuck? Do you need to adjust certain parts of it?

Inspiring

Frame the goal positively. Make it fun to accomplish. You could make a poster of the end result, frame it, and post it on the wall.

Time-Bound

Give yourself a deadline for achieving the goal. Even better, split the goal into small parts and give yourself a deadline for each item.

My Dreams and Goals

My Vision

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Defined in Your Organisation

Standards are helpful because they let us know what is expected of us. They also tell us what we have to do in order for our work to be considered satisfactory by our supervisors or managers.

Standards also need to meet the expectations of our customers, with a degree of reasonableness. The customer may feel that the phone should be answered on the first ring, but the company may have a standard of two or three rings. Since this is pretty close to what the customer expects, it might be considered close enough. However, we should make certain that our standards are meeting or exceeding the expectations of our customers. The only way to do this is to ask our customers, on an ongoing basis, if they are satisfied with the service.

In order to meet expectations, we need to know what the standards are. Here are some sample standards.

- If customers ask to have their repairs completed in 24 hours, and your standard turnaround is three days, you have to be clear on what you can do.
- If employees are driving company cars that they sign out as needed, a standard may be that the car is returned with a full gas tank.

You can replace these with standards that actually fit with your organization. If you have not set standards yet, perhaps now is the time to do so.

Create standards for the following items.

Answering the phone

Returning voicemail messages

Dress while at work

Providing coffee to visitors

Given Life by the Employees

If we make a commitment to provide excellent customer service, that commitment must be demonstrated by our employees, from the front line people right up to the CEO. When the commitment is only demonstrated by some employees, our customers will sense that there is a gap and their experience with the company will be diminished.

Quiz

	YES	NO
1. Do people usually buy from someone they dislike?		
2. Do you understand the power of a smile?		
3. Do you show sincere interest in your customer and engage in preliminary small talk?		
4. Do you treat new customers differently than existing customers?		

5. Are you aware that a negative first impression may turn a prospect off of your product?		
6. Do you open with a sincere compliment?		
7. Do you promptly offer a prospect refreshments and a comfortable place to sit?		
8. Do you pay attention to what you wear and how you look?		
9. Do you welcome visitors with a warm greeting and/or firm handshake?		
10. Are you congenial no matter what the outcome?		

Further Reading:

- ✓ *Customer Service, By Pattie Gibson, 2013*
- ✓ *Customer Service, By John Tschohl, 2011*