

Project Base
William Angliss Institute of TAFE
555 La Trobe Street
Melbourne 3000 Victoria
Telephone: (03) 9606 2111
Facsimile: (03) 9670 1330

Acknowledgements:

Project Manager: Dennis Tonkin
Writer & Instructional Designer: Cindy Curran
DTP/Production: Rochelle Edmonds

© Supreme Commission for Tourism - Saudi Arabia 2006

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, repackaged, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means whatsoever without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

This booklet was produced by William Angliss Institute of TAFE to be used as resource material.

Disclaimer:

Every effort has been made to ensure that this booklet is free from error or omissions. However, you should conduct your own enquiries and seek professional advice before relying on any fact, statement or matter contained in this book. William Angliss Institute of TAFE is not responsible for any injury, loss or damage as a result of material included or omitted from this course. Information in these training materials is current at the time of publication.

The time of publication is indicated in the date stamp at the bottom of each page.

Supreme Commission for Tourism - Saudi Arabia Travel and Tourism Training Project

The purpose of this project is to design and develop detailed curriculum and instructional design materials for ten tourism occupations. The project is funded by the Human Resource Development Fund, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The curriculum and materials will be used to provide training to develop human resource capabilities in the identified occupations within the tourism industry as part of the countries 'Saudisation' economic policy.

Welcome

Welcome to the training program: Provide Customer Service. This trainee guide provides you with learning materials and activities to prepare you for assessment against the following key competency tasks:

- Meet customer needs and expectations
- Make a good first impression
- Deal with customer dissatisfaction and complaints

The key competency tasks describe exactly what skills, knowledge and application you need to demonstrate competency.

This training manual:

- Details each step of the learning and assessment process.
- Gives you opportunities to monitor your own progression or performance in the training program.



Introduction

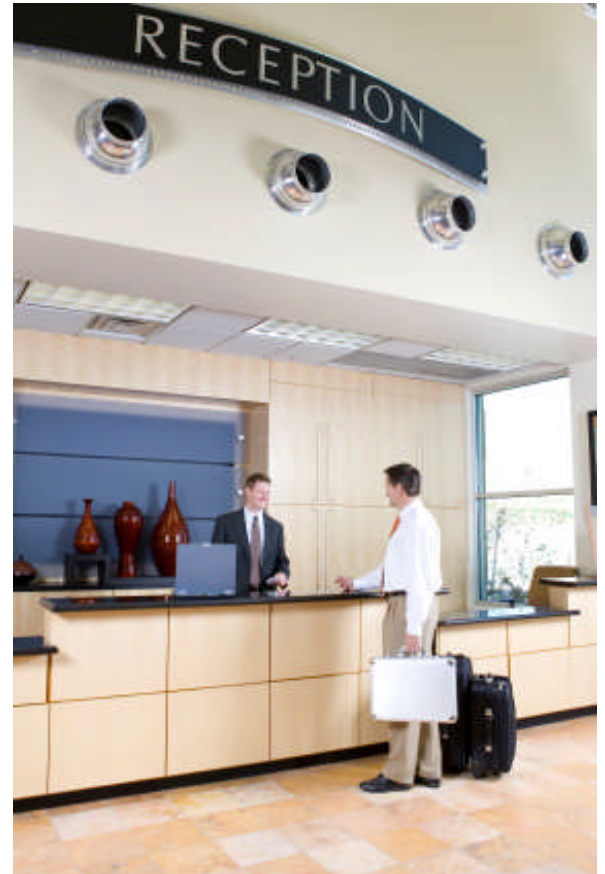
This unit deals with the attitudes, skills and knowledge required to provide customer service.

The tasks relate to common competencies for the tourism industry based around:

Provide customer service		
Common Duties	Training Hours	On-Job-Training Hours
1. Meeting customer needs and expectations	10	1 day (8 hours)
1.1 Customer Service		
1.2 Customer Needs		
1.3 Active Listening Skills		
• Attending		
• Questioning		
• Encouraging		
• Paraphrasing		
• Summarising		
• Recognition		
1.4 Meeting customer needs		
1.5 Meeting customer expectations		
2. Make a good first impression	5	
2.1 Dress appropriately		
2.2 Personal grooming and hygiene		
2.3 Be responsive and attentive		
2.4 Be welcoming		
3. Deal with customer dissatisfaction and complaints	5	
3.1 Six step method of complaint resolution		
Total:	20 hours (1 week)	1 day (8 hours)

Meet customer needs and expectations

In this section of the training program you will learn how to meet customer needs and expectations.



01

To be effective within the Tourism industry you must be able to meet and exceed customer expectations.

Exceptional customer service requires you to:

- relate to customers from a range of social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds
- use appropriate body language and tone of voice when dealing with a customer
- clarify a customer's needs and ask open questions to obtain those needs
- use your organisation's customer service policies and procedures
- quickly deal with a customer enquiry using your organisation's systems and technologies
- smoothly pass a customer over to the expertise of another colleague if you are unable to handle the customer's enquiry
- communicate clearly to a customer an alternative to a product or service that could be of greater use to them or if the specific one he requests is not available
- seek feedback from the customer to ensure his request is accurately met

Customer service

Customer Service is a term that is used to describe the process of taking care of our customers in a positive manner. Good customer service meets the needs and expectations while exceptional customer service exceeds the customer's expectations.

Customer service is vital to the success of a business. High levels of customer service will result in return custom while poor customer service will cause a business to lose customers and sales.

Think about places where you enjoy doing business – restaurants, stores, banks and so on. Why do you like doing business with them? Apart from the actual product

or service they provide, it is probably because you find them courteous, friendly, flexible, and interested in meeting your needs and expectations.

Customer service could be defined as a variety of activities intended to ensure a customer receives the goods and services they require whilst satisfying their needs and expectations in the most effective and efficient manner possible. To succeed with excellent customer service, organisations and individuals need to continually improve their methods and techniques. You should always follow your organisation's policies and procedures when you interact with a customer.

Excellent customer service is the ability to constantly and consistently exceed the customer's expectations.

Sometimes your organisation will have already identified what a customer wants and is contracted to provide it. For example a customer may want a cargo company to consistently make deliveries at a specific time or day of something which may involve refrigeration or be very fragile. Even in these cases there is still a need to clarify the changing requirements of a customer and try to continually improve the service you give him.

Identifying customer needs

It is not possible to meet your customer's expectation and needs if you are not absolutely clear what he wants. The easiest way to identify your customer's needs is to ask him questions. There are two types of questions that you can use:

- Open questions
- Closed questions

Open questions require your customer to give you a detailed answer while closed questions require only a yes or no response. For example:

Open Questions

- What are you looking for in this holiday?
- May I ask why you have chosen this particular tour?

Closed Questions

- Have I answered all of your questions?
- What day is good for delivery?

The importance of active listening skills

Once you have asked your customer a question you need to be quite and listen to what he tells you. There are ways of speaking that indicate you are listening to your client and are interested in their point of view. Active listening skills include:

- attending
- questioning
- encouraging
- paraphrasing
- summarising and
- giving recognition.

Listening is very important. Without listening you would never be able to work out what your customer needs.

You can improve your listening skills by:

- paying attention and concentrating
- never interrupting the other person
- not trying to guess what the other person will say
- asking questions to clarify any information
- not jumping to conclusions.

Attending

As a worker it is important to be aware of the influence your body language has on a client. Being aware of your own thoughts in a situation can help you manage your own body language. For example, if you feel anxious in a situation, consider what message your body language is conveying to the client.

Egan¹ proposes an acronym (SOLER) as a framework for using non verbal skills to visibly tune into clients. However, he notes that communication skills are particularly sensitive to cultural differences, thus care should be taken in adapting the following to different cultures.

S: Face the client SQUARELY - adopt a position that indicates involvement (not literally face to face, most often clients are more comfortable with slightly angled positioning rather than face to face)

O: Adopt an OPEN POSTURE - generally seen as a non defensive posture. Crossed arms and legs can be seen as closing yourself up to the client and therefore not communicating involvement or interest

L: LEAN towards the client at times. This is an indication of interest in the client's story.

E: Maintain good EYE CONTACT.

R: Try to be relatively RELAXED or natural in these behaviours.

Questioning

Questions are used to help establish rapport (How are you today?), to elicit information (May I ask you why you have chosen this tour?) or to open up possibilities (What would happen if it was to rain while you are on holiday?)

Questions may be open or closed.

- Open questions are non-threatening, help build rapport, open things up, and allow your client freedom to explore their answers. As a general rule, an effective worker would use more open questions than closed.
- Closed questions are used to clarify specific points, or gain specific information. Answers are usually short, with no elaboration, although may be more than just yes or no.

¹ Egan, G (2002). *The Skilled Helper: A Problem-Management and Opportunity- Development Approach to Helping*. 7th Ed. Brooks Cole: CA.

Encouraging

Encouraging can take many forms including:

- nods of the head
- open gestures
- positive facial expressions (eg smiling) · minimal verbal utterances such as 'umm', 'uh-uh', 'I see'
- repeating back one word or short phrase of the client
- repeating back a word or phrase as an implied question
- leaving a silence for the client to fill.

Your voice tones are important indicators of your interest, your implied question, or desire for your client to keep talking. Encouragers need to be expressive, but not overdone. One word encouragers are powerful facilitators of deeper meanings. Encouragers can also be powerful ways of engaging with clients who are not initially motivated.

Paraphrasing and Reflecting

Paraphrasing involves restating and feeding back to your client their own words in a shortened and clarified form. The words you use should:

- match client's language patterns, eg visual, auditory, physical
- use some of your client's own words
- get the essence of what your client is saying, feeling, experiencing.

It is important to check out your paraphrase with the client for accuracy.

Note also the importance of rapport and accurate observation. Paraphrasing is a good opportunity to use your voice tone to encourage your client to adopt a more receptive state, in the case of an angry customer.

Reflecting involves stating the feeling within a client's message. Sometimes the feeling is expressed in words, sometimes via body language.

It is important that when reflecting feelings that you do so in a manner that offers it as a hypothesis rather than fact. Also be aware that naming and discussing feelings can be threatening for some clients.

For example it may appear threatening to say the following: "It seems like you are angry." or "It sounds as though you are very annoyed."

Egan (2002) notes that empathic understanding is shown when a worker accurately connects with a client's behaviours and feelings. It is the skill of communicating and checking that understanding. These aspects are a key to the development of rapport with a client. Egan proposes a formula for communicating empathic understanding:

You feel (name the correct emotion expressed by the client)..

because (here indicate the correct experiences and behaviours that give rise to the feelings.)

Example:

Client:

If you don't find my delivery and get it to me today I will sue you for loss of sales.

Worker:

I understand that you feel especially angry because without the goods in the parcel you risk losing sales.

Summarising

Summarising involves a selective précis or summary of a large portion of some or all of what your customer has told you.

Summarising may include observations of what your client's particular needs are and should include the same issues described in the discussion of paraphrasing (ie match client's language patterns, matching your client's words, express the essence of your client's desired experience, getting feedback from your client).

Summarisation requires experience, practice, accurate observation and memory, and is a useful way of beginning and ending any on-going customer experience, or reviewing overall progress. For example:

Welcome back Aziz. I haven't seen you since your last business trip to Egypt. How did it go? Was the hotel up to your expectations? Did you receive the service that you expected?

Recognition

The client's emotional state, energy level, and tension level may be observed by you, or may be mentioned by your client. It can be affirming for the client to have this acknowledged. This is an active listening skill.

You could ask the client an open question, or paraphrase a comment. For example:

- It sounds like you are a bit nervous about flying? Would you like me to indicate this to the flight crew leader?
- It sounds like you are looking forward to this holiday. Have you been to Egypt before? Where did you stay? What did you like about the hotel? What could we plan to make this holiday even better than your last?

Meeting your customer's needs

Once you understand what a customer wants the next step is to provide him with it. If you do not have a strong knowledge of the products and services your organisation offers this may be very hard for you. Quite often a customer will not know exactly what service or product they need or it may not be available. You should be flexible enough to suggest what may fulfil their needs and even be able to suggest alternative products or services that may be of equal or greater assistance to them. If you cannot provide assistance make sure you smoothly pass him on to somebody else within your organisation that can help him.

To provide a customer's needs and expectations you should:

- talk in a language which the client feels comfortable with
- use simple language and words
- interact positively and honestly
- understand what your organisation's products and services are and how to access them competently and quickly
- Check the client's options
- Check your available options
- Compare the two options
- suggest alternative products or services that may be of equal or better value to the customer if what he requires is not available
- explain to the customer why an alternative product or service may be better suited to his needs and why his specific request cannot be met
- make the customer aware of any special promotions for products or services that are currently available according to your organisation's policy
- have a strong practical knowledge of the systems and technology in place to handle a customer enquiry
- seek feedback from the customer to confirm that the product or service you provide will satisfy his needs
- make the customer aware of any guidelines you must follow when providing the products or service.

If a customer issue cannot be resolved on the spot you should follow it up as soon as possible using workplace procedures to guide you. For example, you may need to talk to a more experienced colleague for further

information on a product. Be sure to let the customer know how long you will take to get back to them.

If you are having difficulty providing the customer with the level of service they require and expect, you may have to pass them on to a more qualified colleague such as your team leader, supervisor or manager.

It is important you communicate to the customer why you cannot meet his requirements so he will understand where his enquiry or request has been placed in the organisation. This way his will understand why it is in his best interest for you to take the time to hand him over to another person better suited to respond to his enquiry or request. For example, you may not have the authority or the experience to provide a customer with what they want but can put the customer through to someone who does.

Convey what you know of the customer's enquiry or request to the colleague you are passing the customer on to so that the customer's time is not wasted repeating information that he has already given to you. For example:

Hello Aziz, Ibrahim is a valuable customer of our organisation. He would like to arrange for a delivery of frozen fish to arrive tomorrow. I have explained that frozen deliveries only happen twice a week but I thought you might be in a position to work out an alternative delivery method or route that could help Ibrahim achieve his request.

You should explain clearly to your colleague what you know of the customer's needs and why you cannot currently meet these.

If the customer is on the phone you could the customer's phone number and get your colleague to ring them back with the answer. That way the customer doesn't have to wait on hold. At a time when many people use mobile phones it means the organisation pays for the call and not the customer.

While it is essential to treat customers as individuals, every customer defines 'service' differently. It is up to you to determine your individual definition of service, and provide it.

Some of the definitions of service may include:

- To feel respected – which is why you use 'Sir'
- To feel welcome – which is why you give all your customers a warm, genuine and sincere smile and welcome showing that you really are pleased to see them
- To be served by friendly staff – which is again why you smile and spend the extra few seconds with your customer, talking about his day and so on
- To be dealt with in a prompt and courteous manner – which is why you don't keep your customer waiting for service
- To receive assistance when necessary – which is why you have excellent product and local knowledge and why you look forward to opportunities to pass this on to your customers whenever you can.
- To be in comfortable, clean surroundings – which is why you make sure your work environment is spotless
- To feel remembered and recognised – which is why you use your customer's name as often as you can
- To be treated as you like to be treated – which makes perfect sense

Not only is it important to identify and provide appropriate products or services to your customer, it is important to provide them on time. It is no use finding out what your customers wants are and making promises to fulfil them if you know that you can't. Don't try to impress your customers with ultra fast service. Give yourself sensible time frames so that you stay looking professional and they are not disappointed.

Whatever sector you work in within the tourism industry, it is important that you 'deliver the goods' to your customers on time, that is, when you say you can.

Meeting customer expectations

Expectations are not the same as needs. To meet customer expectations you will need to provide exceptional customer service. The aim of exceptional customer service is to provide the customer with more than they expected.

In general, exceptional customer service requires:

- Good product knowledge
- Professionalism
- Positive attitude
- Effective communication skills
- The desire to provide outstanding service.

Good product knowledge

The importance of product knowledge cannot be overemphasised. Have you ever gone into a store to ask questions about a product before making a buying decision and found that the salesperson knew less about the product than you did? What was your reaction?

If you are working for an organisation that only has its own products, it should not take long for you to become comfortable with your product knowledge. If you have a large number of products produced by others, as travel agency does, the learning process never ceases. You must make time to study new products and changes to existing products.

Product knowledge is crucial! There are many sources of product knowledge including brochures, customers, trade reference manuals and the internet. Products change frequently, so you must constantly update yourself.

Examining a freight forwarder's job is an excellent way of understanding the important contribution that product knowledge makes in providing quality customer service.

Freight forwarders play a vital role in the transportation process of goods ensuring they reach their destination either internationally or nationally on time and in good order. They handle all logistical requirements and take

care of the large amount of documentation that exporting and transportation requires. At a customer's request a freight forwarder will make arrangements for goods to be exported to an overseas or national destination. They must be experts in all areas of transporting goods which includes:

- providing advice on foreign import regulations
- arranging for inland transportation
- booking space with an ocean, air or land carrier
- completing export documentation
- arranging for cargo insurance
- providing guidance on packaging, marking and labeling
- arranging for products to be packed and containerised
- consolidating freight.

Freight forwarders can assist with an order from the start by advising of the freight costs, port charges, consular fees, cost of special documentation, and insurance costs as well as their handling fees; all of which help in preparing a quotation. Freight forwarders can also recommend the type of packaging to protect the goods in transit and arrange to have the goods packed or containerised at the port.

Professionalism

Your customers expect you to be professional at all times. They expect you to present yourself well, to have done your homework and to understand their needs.

To be a professional your customer will come first, last and always! To be professional all the time is hard work. You have to pay attention to your customers, their needs, your organisation's expectations and your own presentation.

A true professional will always:

- Present himself well – wear their uniform with pride (neat, clean and well-kept)
- Take pride in his work and being a professional
- Take work seriously – it is his career
- Find out why things happen – why something did not go according to plan
- Strive to do better
- Have a positive attitude
- Put in extra effort without being asked
- Represent himself and his company
- Value the important of the customer

Positive attitude

Most of us believe our attitudes are caused directly by outside influences like unpleasant experiences or negative people. But while external pressures may trigger our feelings, we are the ones wearing those feelings just like we wear our clothes. Remember that it is your reaction to events that create your mood and you are in total charge of your response.

Be aware that your attitude affects you and others. Every day ask yourself, "Does my attitude help me or others? Is it helping me be the way I want to be?"

Each day when you come to work you bring an attitude. You can bring:

- a moody attitude and probably have a depressing day.
- bring a grouchy attitude and irritate our coworkers and customers
- bring a sunny, playful, cheerful attitude and have a great day.

You can choose the kind of day you have by choosing to have a positive attitude. A positive attitude is essential to providing exceptional customer service. A positive attitude can be encouraged and maintained.

A positive attitude will:

- Make your customers feel important
- Make your job easier
- Encourage everyone to like you and want to work with you
- Provide confidence in your ability

Meet customer needs and expectations - Summary



Always strive to not only meet but exceed your customer's expectations. Remember to:

- Ask questions to identify clearly your customer's needs.
- Listen attentively and concentrate on what your customer tells you.
- Clarify a customer's wants and any special needs back to them to ensure understanding.
- Use appropriate body language and tone of voice when dealing with a customer.
- Follow your organisation's policies and procedures relating to customers.
- Make sure that you can clearly answer questions customers have about the product or service your organisation provides.
- Quickly deal with a customer enquiry using the organisation's systems and technologies.
- Smoothly pass a customer over to the expertise of another colleague if necessary.
- Communicate clearly to a customer an alternative to a product or service if the specific one they requested is not available.

Make a good first impression

In this section of the training program you will learn how to make a good first impression.



02

“We have a constantly improving infrastructure, our people are warm and hospitable, and we have a rich and colorful heritage with amazing historic sites and antiquities.”

Prince Sultan bin Salman bin Abdulaziz.

You only have one chance to make a good first impression. Remember that a customer will usually form an impression of you and your organisation within 30 seconds – it may be possible to change that impression but it will take a lot of time and effort.

The first impression that customers get of an organisation will depend on the image of the staff and the first thing that will be noticed is your appearance, followed by your attitude to the customer and general behaviour before, finally, your skills and efficiency at dealing with the customer’s needs.

You may be very skilful and efficient in delivering customer service, but if your appearance creates a casual image or you are impolite to the customer, a very poor image of the organisation will be formed.

Many tourism organisations provide staff with uniforms. There are several customer service advantages in this:

- a professional corporate image is presented
- staff can easily be recognised as part of the organisation
- staff can easily be found by customers
- it gives the staff member a sense of belonging to a team.

Whichever part of the tourism industry you work in, it is important that you present yourself well.

Personal presentation refers to the way you dress, your personal grooming habits and your hygiene. It also refers to the way you behave. Personal presentation is reflected in the way you appear to other people. Both your employer and your customers will be asking themselves these questions:

- Are you smartly dressed?
- Are you clean and tidy?

- Are you friendly?

If you are careful about how you look and make sure that you are always clean and tidy, then there is a good chance that you will create a good impression and that customers will feel confident in your abilities.

Dress appropriately

If you are suitably and appropriately dressed your customers will feel confident in your abilities. This means that you are dressed in clothes that look neat and are well suited to your work.

If you are not sure as to what qualifies as 'suited to your work' – ask! All clothing must be kept in good order so that it looks not only clean, but neat and tidy, too. The way you look reflects the image and standard of the organisation when you are dealing with customers – you are the organisation. Therefore it is important to monitor the condition of your clothing, uniform and footwear and renew and repair it as the need arises.

Personal grooming and hygiene

Personal hygiene is especially important when dealing with the public as you can spread germs and consequently affect the health of colleagues and customers. Being hygienic is not just important from a health and safety point of view, it also means that customers and colleagues can see that you are a clean and tidy person who cares about his appearance and is not unpleasant to be around.

In an industry where staff interact with members of the public often, all tourism employees must have an extremely high level of personal hygiene and grooming.

Appropriate personal grooming and hygiene involves:

- Taking daily showers/baths
- Wearing freshly laundered clothing every day
- Having clean, manicured fingernails
- Cleaning teeth and flossing, together with regular dental checks
- Ensuring any open cuts or wounds are covered with a clean bandaid or bandage

Be responsive and attentive

Even if you don't have an immediate answer, acknowledge receiving an e-mail or voice message within 24 hours or less, and let the person know you're considering the request or taking action on it.

When a customer or employee calls and you choose to answer, it implies that you have time to talk. Far too many people continue to work during phone conversations – it is not polite. Give your customers and employees your full attention. Greet them like you're sincerely excited to hear from them. And if the time isn't right, be professional enough to set a later time to give them.

Be welcoming

No matter what sector you work in you should welcome your customers appropriately. For example it would be appropriate for a tour guide to:

- Meet visitors in the assigned place.
- Provide welcome beverages and cold water.
- Welcome visitors using the best welcome words on their arrival.
- Provide visitors with welcome beverages and cold water.
- Talk to visitors.
- Wear national clothes when meeting visitors to reflect his pride of his national clothes

Don't forget to smile – your customers will appreciate it.

Use the phone correctly

The telephone is a major means of communication in the tourism industry. Frequently, the first contact with a tourism business is via a telephone call – it is as important to make a good impression on the phone as it is in person. Guidelines for handling telephone calls professionally are given below.

- Answer the telephone promptly.
It is accepted practice not to let the phone ring more than four times before answering it.
- Identify yourself politely and clearly. For example:
Good morning or good afternoon, this is Aziz.
Good afternoon from the Palms Hotel, this is Aziz.
- Be ready to talk – block out distractions and do not continue working while you are talking to a customer
- Be courteous, helpful and responsive.
- Include a smile in your voice.
- If you can't handle the enquiry take the caller's details and give him a time when you will get back to him with the requested information.
- End the call politely – let the caller hang up first.

Make a good first impression - Summary



You only get one chance to make a first impression. Your interaction with your customer will make an impression on your customer – an impression of both yourself and your company.

Make sure you:

- Greet the customer with a smile
- Introduce yourself
- Offer an appropriate welcome
- Wear appropriate clothes
- Follow good personal hygiene and grooming regimes
- Are responsive and attentive to your customers

Deal with customer dissatisfaction and complaints

In this section of the training program you will learn to deal with customer dissatisfaction and complaints.



03

From time to time you will have a customer that is dissatisfied with either the product or service you have provided him with.

Here are some examples of customer complaints:

- You don't have a product in stock
- You are unable to board the customer on the aircraft as they arrived late
- You have delivered the wrong cargo to the customer
- Your customer records are in correct
- The rules of the tour package have been changed by the wholesaler
- You don't understand the customer and they become frustrated
- A customer is late back to the coach and is holding everyone else and the tour schedule up.

You should never judge the situation but rather see every situation through the eyes of the customer who is making the complaint.

Six-step method of complaint resolution

Even though preventative measures may be taken, there is a possibility that a difficult situation may arise. Difficult situations may lead to conflict. As a professional you need to know how to deal with conflict and still maintain customer satisfaction.

A six-step method has proved to be effective when dealing with all complaints:

- Listen
- Acknowledge
- Respond
- Take action
- Inform

- Follow up.

At all times, you need to maintain a positive attitude. You need to remain friendly but firm and offer help to solve the situation. Your customer is looking for reassurance and understanding from you.

Listen

Often what a customer is upset they just want someone to listen to them and hear their grievances. It is essential that you listen carefully and understand everything they tell you from their point of view – even if you do not agree.

Listening is more than just hearing the words. You need to listen to the tone of your customer's voice and watch the body language they are displaying to fully understand the situation.

While listening, it is important that you:

- Do not interrupt the customer
- Stay calm and in control
- Listen and understand the situation
- Listen to your customer's point of view
- Pay attention to body language and facial expression
- Listen to the tone of voice

If you don't listen carefully, you may hear the wrong words and miss the true meaning. This will not help solve the problem and will make your customer even more upset.

Acknowledge

It is extremely important that you listen to the whole complaint before you acknowledge the situation. You have to acknowledge a situation in order to solve the problem. You can't just make the situation go away.

When you have heard everything the customer has to say, you will need to acknowledge the information. While

acknowledging the information it is important for you to remember:

- That the situation must be important to the customer because they have raised it as an issue
- That you should never blame any person involved
- To remain positive and calm
- That you should never judge what you are hearing – always listen from the customer’s point of view
- Show concern and understanding
- Reassure and apologise on behalf of your organisation – even if it is not your fault.

Respond

It is important for you to clarify all issues with the customer immediately. Once your customer has finished talking:

- Make sure you fully understand the complaint
- Repeat the complaint back to them

If you don’t feel you have fully understood the complaint, repeat the points you do understand and then ask the customer to repeat the points you didn’t understand.

Never ask the customer to repeat things over and over. This will cause even more frustration and conflict as the customer will think you are not listening and don’t care.

If you don’t understand the nature of the complaint ask questions and paraphrase the information that you have been provided to ensure you have a common understanding.

Take action

There may be several ways to solve a difficult situation. It is important for you to think clearly and act on the solution that will overcome the situation promptly and

will benefit the customer most. While you are solving a conflict, you will have to make decisions.

Once you have listened to your customer, evaluated the information and clarified the situation with them, it is time to decide on the action you will take.

Action involves:

- Who is involved now and who will be involved in the solution
- What you are going to do about the situation
- When will the situation be solved
- How you will go about solving the situation
- Carry out your action

Often, carrying out your action is the easiest part of dealing with conflict.

When carrying out your action:

- Act quickly and effectively
- Always keep the happiness of the customer in mind
- Never leave the customer without informing them of what is happening
- Do not get side-tracked
- Seek help from others to speed up the action
- Explain the situation to the people who are helping you
- Carry out your actions in a happy and positive manner.

Inform

This step is a direct follow-on from deciding on your action. Once you know what you are going to do to solve the situation, it is important that you inform your customer of your intended action.

There is nothing more frustrating for a customer with a complaint to not know what is happening or what action will be taken. It will only make the customer more anxious and upset. This will lead to a much bigger problem that will be more difficult to solve.

Once you have decided what action to take and how you will do it you will need to inform the customer. Make sure you:

- Explain your actions clearly
- Ask if that will solve the situation
- Reassure your customer that you care
- Never point the finger of blame at anyone, especially your customer
- Apologise for your customer's inconvenience
- Act promptly.

Follow up

It is important, once you have solved the problem that you follow up the outcome.

Following up is important for several reasons:

- It will show the customer that you care about them
- It will show whether or not the problem has been fully solved
- It will assist in preventing the same situation occurring with another customer.

There are two areas of follow up that need to be considered – follow up of the:

- Customer
- Organisational paperwork

The customer will appreciate you caring enough about their feelings to make sure everything is now under control.

Customers also care that you follow up the situation so that it will not happen to other people in the future. You must tell the customer that you will look into the causes of the situation to prevent such a thing from ever happening again. This will often please the customer. In this situation you may still get a good referral from this customer.

Many companies insist that all complaints or difficult situations be written down and handed to management. This is not done in order to punish you, but is for the benefit of the company.

Written follow up is done to:

- Ensure management is aware of any conflict in case it was not resolved and is brought to their attention
- Ensure customer satisfaction
- Prevent the situation from occurring again and making your job easier.

Written reports are often very easy to complete. You need to state the facts and how the situation was solved.

In some instances, you may need to write directly to the customer. The letter may explain how you followed up the complaint and it may also include an apology.

Refer difficult complaints

In any situations where you believe a complaint to be beyond either your expertise to resolve, or outside your area of delegated area of authority, you must refer this type of complaint to the appropriate person.

The appropriate person, in some situations, may just be a colleague who has more experience than you, or it could be the supervisor or manager. In other cases it may be more appropriate to notify security.

Referring complaints is not necessarily an admission of failure on your part – it may quite simply be the most appropriate thing to do in the given situation. You might simply be unable to do, or authorise, whatever it is that is required to resolve the complaint.

Indeed, not notifying the appropriate person could be seen as a poor choice.

A key in referring complaints is to do it quickly: where you have tried to resolve the situation yourself, and are quite obviously getting nowhere - perhaps the situation is even worsening - you must quickly get someone else in to help.

When a compliant situation has arisen, time is critical, and your failure to notify the relevant person has the potential to greatly inflame the situation.

And, as you all know, when you are upset or annoyed, one minute seems like ten.

Finally, no-one expects you to be able to manage all complaints on your own, so don't try to battle on when you feel you're out of your depth.

Deal with customer dissatisfaction and complaints – Summary



- Listen to the client's complain
- State the important points in the complaint
- Review the remarks with the client
- Compromise a mid-solution with the client
- Inform that the client when he will be contacted (specify the time) with a solution or proposed solution.

Assessment Activity

Office-based activity

1. Ask your on the job training supervisor to complete the customer service checklist below.
2. Fax the completed form to your trainer together with a copy of your company's customer procedures to your trainer.

Trainee Name:			
Customer Service			
CUSTOMER SERVICE CHECKLIST			
This customer service checklist has been designed as a guide to help you check that the trainee can meet or exceed customer service expectations.			
1.0 COMMUNICATION			Tick answer
1.1	Does the trainee talk to customers in a professional and courteous manner?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
1.2	Does the trainee record customer's details and information where necessary?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
1.3	Does the trainee talk to customers on the phone politely and appropriately?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
1.4	Does the trainee talk in a language which the client feels comfortable with?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
1.5	Does the trainee use simple language and words to help him find out what the customer's requirements are?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
1.6	Does the trainee use the correct company procedures for answering the phone?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.0 PERSONAL PRESENTATION & ATTITUDE			Tick answer
2.1	Does the trainee convey a willingness to assist customers?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
2.2	Does the trainee wear neat and tidy clothes?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
2.3	Is the trainee's personal hygiene and grooming appropriate?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
2.4	Does the trainee portray himself positively and honestly?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
2.5	Does the trainee smile warmly when he greets customers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.6	Does the trainee follow the company dress code?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

3.0 IDENTIFY CUSTOMER NEEDS		Tick answer	
3.1	Does the trainee greet and welcome customers appropriately?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
3.2	Does the trainee listen carefully to the customer's requirements?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
3.3	Does the trainee listen with his full attention to the customer??	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
3.4	Does the trainee use questions to determine what the customer needs?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
3.5	Does the trainee refer customers to the appropriate person to serve him if he does not have the required skills or knowledge to help the customer appropriately?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
4.0 PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE		Tick answer	
4.1	Does the trainee make it his business to know what products and services you provide to customers?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
4.2	Can the trainee answer questions about products confidently and accurately?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
4.3	Can the trainee answer client enquiries confidently and accurately?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
4.4	Does the trainee use questions to determine what the customer needs?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
4.5	Is the trainee about to talk about the products and/or services you offer confidently and accurately?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
4.6	Is the trainee able to offer your customers alternative products in the event that you cannot provide the customer with the particular product or service he requires?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.0 CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS		Tick answer	
5.1	Does the trainee listen to the client's complaint?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
5.2	Can the trainee paraphrase the important points in the complaint?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
5.3	Does the trainee refer complaints that he cannot handle to the appropriate person?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No