

# WE ARE THE COURT SYSTEM



*A FOCUS ON CUS-*

*TOMER SERVICE*

## EMPLOYEES HANDBOOK



**Nineteenth Judicial Circuit  
Circuit Court of Lake County**

Greetings:

Quoting Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Life is not so short but that there is always time enough for courtesy” sets the tone for this handbook. The courts promote peace, stability and democracy through conflict resolution. Unfortunately, most people who come to court are often overwhelmed by the experience and anxious about what to expect. The core mission statement of the 19th Judicial Circuit Court is to serve the public. We have made this commitment in the very first sentence of our mission statement. This commitment has not changed. All members within the organization have the responsibility of providing excellent quality service in order to fulfill our mission to those that we serve.

Trust and confidence in the courts, especially the Circuit Court of Lake County, is often shaped by the public’s personal experiences within the justice system. Our Strategic Plan identifies five goals and a number of objectives, each of these statements are grounded in *customer service*. In order for us to enhance our rich history of service, we have created a handbook that embodies our mission of excellent customer service and acts as a reminder that in the Circuit Court of Lake County we are committed to the people we serve.

The Judges of the 19th Judicial Circuit encourage everyone within this organization to embrace the philosophy and goals laid out in this handbook so that every individual who seeks out our services is treated with the courtesy and respect that they deserve.

Sincerely,

Chief Judge  
Nineteenth Judicial Circuit

"Change your thoughts, and you change your world."  
-Norman Vincent Peale (1898-1993)

# Customer Service Manual

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# 19th Judicial Circuit Customer Service Standards

## ► TREAT ALL CUSTOMERS WITH RESPECT.

*The Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Or stated in the modern version, treat others the way you want to be treated.*

## ► MAINTAIN A NEUTRAL AND FAIR ATTITUDE TOWARD ALL PEOPLE.

*Everyone entering the courthouse should receive impartial treatment, free from bias. Fair and equal treatment must be afforded to all customers.*

## ► DEMONSTRATE APPEARANCE AND BEHAVIOR THAT REFLECTS POSITIVELY ON THE COURTS.

*How we dress makes a statement about our attitude. All judicial employees should wear attire appropriate for their respective court. Remember, what you wear sometimes has an effect on how you feel and care about what you are doing and how the customer will react to you.*

## ► FOCUS YOUR ATTENTION ON THE CUSTOMER.

*Focus on the customer with a clear and open mind. Make yourself 100 percent available. Your body language tells a lot about how you really feel.*

**RESPOND KNOWLEDGEABLY AND PROVIDE CURRENT AND ACCURATE INFORMATION.**

*The Courts should strive to assist the court customers to the best of their ability. Every customer is looking to the Courts for assistance through the judicial process.*

► **GO THE EXTRA MILE TO BE RESPONSIVE TO THE CUSTOMER'S NEEDS.**

*The Courts should strive to make the customer's experience as pleasant as possible. Think ahead of what is needed while a person is in the courthouse. If provided all of the necessary information on the first visit, the customer may not have to return. Always remember, to put yourself in the customer's shoes.*

► **MAINTAIN A PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDE.**

*Professionalism is exhibited by work performed in an ethical, competent and positive manner.*

► **PROMOTE TEAMWORK.**

*Teamwork...Is the ability to work together towards a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishment toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.*

► FOLLOW THROUGH ON COMMITMENTS.

*Remember an important ingredient in quality customer service is matching customer needs and customer expectations. Make your court services legendary.*

► RESPOND IN A TIMELY FASHION.

*Give the customer the time that is deserved. Research shows that the most frustrating aspect of waiting is not knowing how long the wait will be.*

► MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO YOUR ORGANIZATION.

*Establish your own vision of customer service based on what you know. Your style of customer service should be a reflection of you. Develop a style that fits your comfort level so that you can be sincere and consistent day in and day out. Move your vision forward so that over time you will be 100 percent better than when you started. Remember, the quality of an individual is reflected in the standards you set for yourself.*

# Customers of the Courts

## WHO ARE OUR CUSTOMERS?

Most organizations have two main sets of customers:

*"A Customer is anyone who is affected by your work output."*

*\*\*\* Karl Albrecht\*\*\**

**Internal Customers:** Internal customers are the individuals or departments within your organization who use your products or service.

**External Customers:** External customers are the people or organizations who purchase or use your products and services. In government, these are the people who use your services, along with the taxpayers and donors who support you.

Customers are not just the people who come to the window or the front counter. Other people who work in the court, such as attorneys, clerks, as well as other departments are also our customers.

### **External Customers**

General Public  
Jurors  
Attorneys  
Law Enforcement  
Plaintiffs  
Victims  
Defendants  
Children  
Other Agencies  
Customers' Family Members

### **Internal Customers**

Judicial Staff  
Clerical Staff  
Program Staff  
Administrative Staff  
Maintenance  
Personnel  
Probation Officers  
Other Governmental  
Departments & Agencies

## WHAT DO OUR CUSTOMERS WANT?

We all have heard comments such as:

*"Treat customers with dignity and respect."*

*"Make customers feel important and appreciated."*

*"Let customers know that you understand their concerns."*

Have you ever asked yourself what quality customer service is and why it is so important to give to our customers?

Think about yourself when your supervisor commends you for doing a good job when you have worked hard on a project or receive an extra incentive for superior work, you probably feel a sense of self-satisfaction.

You feel good about yourself and the fact your work was recognized. Remember, regardless of who we are, we all have basic human needs that need to be nurtured.

Customers are no different; they have the same needs as employees. It is our responsibility as a service provider to satisfy these needs and at the same time handle the concern or problem professionally. Remember, customers want to be treated with the same respect that you expect to receive from others.



### CUSTOMERS HAVE THE FOLLOWING 4 BASIC NEEDS:

1. the need to be understood;
2. the need to feel welcome;
3. the need to feel important;
4. the need for comfort (physical and psychological).



# Quality Customer Service

## WHAT IS QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE?

Quality customer service consists of two major aspects:

1. the Procedural side

*"Quality only happens when we care enough to do our very best."*

*\*\*\* Author Unknown\*\*\**

2. the Personal side

Each is critical to the delivery of quality service.

## THE PROCEDURAL SIDE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

The systems, equipment, facilities, rules, regulations, and policy and procedures we follow to deliver service.

### Quality Customer Service

Convenient  
Organized  
Timely  
Uniform

### Poor Customer Service

Slow  
Inconsistent  
Disorganized  
Inconvenient

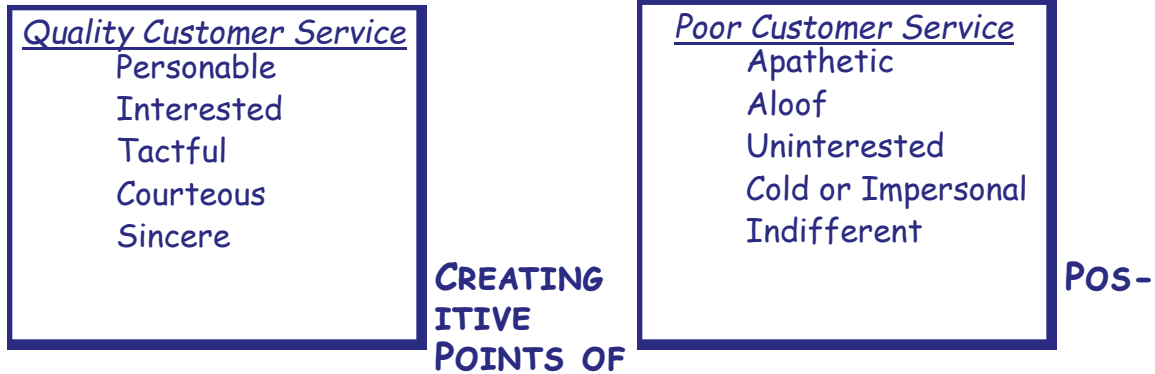
*"My personality is 90%*

*attitude."*



## THE PERSONAL SIDE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

The actions and behaviors we use to interact with customers and associates. This includes attitudes, behavior and verbal skills.



### CONTACT

#### Remember:

Customers form an impression of your organization at each point of contact.

These impressions can be good (positive or winning points of contact) or bad (negative points of contact).

#### POSITIVE POINTS OF CONTACT:

- ☺ A caring and friendly atmosphere
- ☺ Ownership of problems
- ☺ Quick solutions
- ☺ Clean, neat surroundings
- ☺ Returning phone calls promptly
- ☺ Giving everybody special attention

#### NEGATIVE POINTS OF CONTACT:

- ☹ Letting your phone ring 5 or 6 times before answering
- ☹ Not identifying yourself when you answer the phone
- ☹ Putting your customer on hold for a long period of time
- ☹ Poor signage
- ☹ Dirty surroundings
- ☹ Being unfriendly and dismissive



*"Don't ask me.....I just work here."*

**DID YOU KNOW?**

- ... customers whose complaints have been resolved tell 5-6 people.  
**however**
- ... the average person who has a complaint tells 9-10 people.
- ... 13% tell more than 20 people.

**PROVIDING GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE IS MORE THAN JUST THE RIGHT THING TO DO!**

- How you treat your customers and co-workers has a direct relationship on how the public perceives the court.
- You can make everyone's experience with the court less confusing and frustrating.
- You can affect how other people (such as your associates, attorneys, law enforcement, probation officers, social workers) are able to do their job.

**PROVIDING QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE ALSO BENEFITS YOU!**

- It can make your job more enjoyable.
- It is a never-ending challenge that keeps a job interesting.
- Success with customers may lead to opportunities for promotion.
- Having good customer service skills can make you more marketable.
- Improving interpersonal skills helps you communicate better with all people in your personal life.

# First Impressions

## THE INITIAL GREETING

*Take a moment to reflect on your image.*

*How do you think others see you?*

*What do you think you should change?*



tone

When a customer enters the office, you can set a positive by:

- Stop what you are doing.
- Face and acknowledge the customer.
- Give an open and eager offer of help.
- Speak clearly.
- Be genuine — not phony.
- Use Mr., Mrs., or Ms. and the customer's name when possible (unless you are on a first-name basis).
- Avoid terms of endearment and diminutive terms.

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARE LASTING IMPRESSIONS

- Do it right the first time ALL THE TIME.
- Be sensitive to jokes and remarks that may be offensive.
- Evaluate current posters, signs, etc. in your work area
  - what impression do they give?
  - are directions clear and concise?
- Customers remember the little things that are done to make their experience a favorable one.
- Remember, what you wear sometimes has an effect on how you feel and care about what you are doing and how the customer will react to **YOU**.

*Taking charge of our lives is only half the equation....*

**LEADING THE CHARGE** is the other.

The Different Drummer

## TIPS FOR QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

- Give prompt service.
- Be aware of other customers in line. If they appear frustrated or upset, acknowledge them and assure them that you will help them as quickly as possible.
- Be aware of people who look lost and offer assistance.
- Give priority to customers over work tasks.
- If you are unable to help customers within 3-5 minutes because you are on the phone or helping another customer, get extra assistance or give the waiting customer a choice to wait or come back.
- Offer to assist your co-workers if customers are waiting. Pick up the phone if it is ringing and designated staff are busy with other customers.
- Avoid leaving the front counter unattended if you are designated as the primary customer service contact person.
- If you have to step away from the customer, tell him/her why and when you will be back.
- If you are unable to respond immediately, explain the situation and tell the customer when you will be able to respond.
- If you are unable to provide the information or service the customer wants, tell them where they can get the information or service.
- Provide consistent, quick, and efficient customer service that shows you value other people's time. Keeping others waiting sends the message "You're not important".
- Always remember put yourself in the customer's shoes.



# The Importance of a Positive Attitude

## THE MAGIC OF A POSITIVE ATTITUDE



and

### A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TRIGGERS ENTHUSIASM

- Simple observation reveals that those who become negative depressed lose much of their energy.
- When people are positive, their energy reservoirs appear to be endless.

### A POSITIVE ATTITUDE ENHANCES CREATIVITY

- Being positive helps your mind think freely.
- Ideas and solutions rise to the surface.
- Being positive helps your mind think freely.

### A SERENDIPITOUS ATTITUDE CAN CAUSE GOOD THINGS TO HAPPEN

- Serendipitous: "Discovering desirable or valuable things accidentally or unexpectedly".
- When individuals are in a lighthearted/positive mood, good/positive events tend to occur in their lives.
- A positive attitude can create a positive environment for them.
- The "magic" comes into play when we realize our lighter approach can cause something good and unexpected to happen.



*"Your attitude speaks so loudly I can't hear what you say."*

## THE MAGIC OF A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

### THE FIVE C'S OF A POSITIVE ATTITUDE

#### **C**uriosity:

Curiosity is what motivates us to find out about things thus helping us make better decisions. So allow and encourage your curiosity to let you try new approaches.

#### **C**reativity:

Use your imagination in examining ways to bring about improvement in your lives or work. Re-train your imagination to look for the positives in new approaches.

#### **C**ourage:

Using courage is the key to overriding fears which can freeze us into inactivity. Courage allows us to live life to the fullest and the more you use it the easier it will become to take calculated risks.

#### **C**ommunication:

Few things can bring about positive change more quickly than good communication. Find opportunities to speak with other people with a positive attitude and you'll find it boosts your own!

#### **C**ommitment:

Commitment can be your powerful ally. It will help you tap into that positive attitude inside you and develop the qualities to maintain a positive attitude.

*"When we seek to discover the best in others, we somehow bring out the best in ourselves."*

*\*\*\* William Arthur Ward\*\*\**

## BE IN CHARGE OF YOUR ATTITUDE

*"The currents that determine our dreams and shape our lives, flow from the attitudes we nurture every day."*

*\*\* Author Unknown\*\*\**

- We have a choice every day of our lives regarding the attitude we embrace for that day.
- Your style of customer service is a reflection of you.
- The quality of you as an individual is reflected in the standards you set for yourself.
- There are only two things you can control: yourself and how you respond.
- People who feel good about themselves produce good results.
- Gain strength from the positive and don't be influenced by the negative.



# Projecting a Professional Image

## PROFESSIONAL IMAGE

- ▶ Demonstrate appearance and behavior that reflects positively in the workplace.
  - ▶ Whatever your job duties may be, you are considered a professional, and it is important to project a professional image.



- ▶ Projecting a professional image increases your credibility and effectiveness with your customers and co-workers. It often affects how others will react to you. Only you control the image you project to others.

Your professional image includes:

### Demeanor

*"It is a fact that you project what you are."*

*\*\*\* Norman Vincent Peale\*\*\**

- Be aware of your behavior and conduct towards others.
- Be sincere.
- Be respectful of all people without regard to your personal feelings.
- Carry yourself with pride.
- Be friendly.
- Be genuine.

### Attitude

- Treat all customers with respect.
- Maintain a neutral and fair attitude towards all people.
- Demonstrate a high level of empathy and concern.

- Refrain from inappropriate joking and kidding.
- Never make derogatory comments about a customer or other employee.
- Be courteous — use “please” and “thank you”.

### Voice

- Have energy and openness in your voice.

### Language

- Refrain from using technical terms.
- Avoid acronyms.
- Explain technical terms when you have to use them.

### Body Language

- Maintain good posture as it reflects on how you are feeling about your job.
- Refrain from crossing your arms.

### Presentation

- Focus your attention on the customer.
- Make eye contact.
- Learn to listen carefully and actively.
- If you are on a first-name basis with a judicial officer, use his/her title and last name in formal work settings.
- Refer to customers by name or by terms, such as “customer” or “client”.

### Knowledge

- Give current and accurate information.
- Provide consistent information to all customers.
- Look for alternative solutions.

### Attire/Hygiene

- Dress appropriate for your job.
- Wear clean and neat clothing.
- Be particularly attentive to personal hygiene.

## Work Areas

- Keep your work area neat and organized.
- Remove negative or inappropriate pictures, cartoons and screensavers.

## Work/Habits

- Seek to improve job knowledge and skills.
- Be prepared and ready to work on schedule.
- Limit personal conversations with co-workers and customers.
- Keep long personal conversations for the lunch hour in areas away from the public.
- Limit personal telephone conversations—both in length and number.
- If you are allowed to have food at your work area, keep it out of public view.
- Do not assist customers with food or gum in your mouth.

*Local governments must work toward satisfying the needs and expectations of customers by providing effective, efficient, and personable service.*

# The Importance of Communication Skills

## COMMUNICATION ELEMENTS

### VERBAL, VOCAL AND NONVERBAL MESSAGES

Good communication skills are essential to providing quality customer services. If the receiver's understanding is the same as the sender's idea... effective communication has taken place.....Easy, you think!

Let's look at the 3 elements that make up communication:

#### Element:

**Verbal**....message constitutes only 7% of the total message in person and 13% on the phone.

#### It includes:

content of message	jargon
slang	vocabulary
choice of words	

#### Element:

**Vocal**....constitutes about 38% of total message in person and 87% on the phone.

#### It includes:

tone	speed
volume	pronunciation — pitch
enunciation, accent	

#### Element:

**Nonverbal**....message constitutes about 55% of the total message in person and 0% on the phone.

#### It includes:

voice volume & voice tone	space	voice rate
time	facial expression	manners
gestures	posture	eye contact

### **Nonverbal Cues:**

- Nonverbal clues give indications about a person's feelings and thoughts.
- A person's body generally expresses how the person is feeling: nervous, embarrassed, playful, friendly, etc.
- Nonverbal clues are often referred to as "body language".
- To communicate better, you need to be sensitive to your body language and the other person's body language.

### **Body Language:**

- Allows us to interpret messages that others send nonverbally. We act as receivers and are provided with a constant source of information.
- Cannot be shut off. Each of us is a transmitter that cannot be shut off. No matter what we do, we send out messages that say something about ourselves.
- Has many interpretations. We will not always be correct or accurate in our interpretation of another person's body language. This is **important** to keep in mind — refrain from making hasty evaluations about people you do not know.
- To communicate better, you need to be sensitive to your body language and the other person's body language.

### **Distance:**

- Refers to the physical distance between people. Be aware of the distance between you and your customers. Recognize that different cultures may affect one's perception of distance.
  1. *Intimate Distance* begins with skin contact and ranges out to about 18 inches. We usually use intimate distance with people who are emotionally very close to us. Most people are uncomfortable when strangers or even acquaintances invade this space.
  2. *Personal Distance* is 18 inches at its closest point to 4 feet at its farthest.

3. *Social Distance* is 4 to 12 feet apart. This is the distance at which conversations usually occur between service providers.
4. *Public Distance* is 12 to 25 feet. At this distance, two-way communication is almost impossible.

*"To be listened to is to be validated."*

*\*\*\* Eric P. Jensen\*\*\**

## IMPROVING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Effective interpersonal communication skills can be learned, developed, and sharpened by understanding what creates barriers.

Here are guidelines to help you facilitate communication with others:

1. *Get ready to listen.*
  - Give your full attention to the person facing you.
  - Avoid distractions.
  - Put away other work and focus on the needs of the person.
2. *Be prepared.*
  - Whatever paperwork you need, be organized.
3. *Show that you are listening.*
  - Maintain eye contact.
  - Give "minimal encouragements" - head nodding, smiling, etc.
4. *Hear the entire message, asking questions if you need more information.*
  - Paraphrase or clarify the message.
  - Take notes if necessary.
5. *Avoid making judgments about the customer or his concerns.*
  - Customers who are angry may vent their anger on you - don't take their anger personally.
6. *Recognize biases or inferences in customers' comments, but don't point them out to the individual.*
  - Stay neutral.
- 7.

Use a pleasant tone of voice.

- Remember voice intonation and body language reflects your attitude.

#### 8. Give appropriate feedback.

- You should be able to express your thoughts about the customer's message clearly.
- Describe what you've heard, but don't evaluate.
- Be specific.
- Make sure that your feedback is helpful and designed to clarify the situation.
- Focus on the citizen's point of view.

## STEPS TO ACTIVE LISTENING

### REMEMBER:

*CUSTOMERS HAVE NEEDS BEYOND COMPLETING A BUSINESS TRANSACTION —THEY HAVE EMOTIONAL NEEDS AS WELL. THEY NEED TO FEEL WELCOME, IMPORTANT, VALUED, AND UNDERSTOOD.*



- ▶ Really listening to customers shows them respect, concern and understanding.
- ▶ There is a difference between listening and waiting for your turn to talk.
- ▶ Don't conclude you know what your customer wants after the first few sentences. If you don't actively listen, you may assume that you know what they want, but you could be wrong.
- ▶ Listening is not the same as hearing.
  1. Hearing is the physical act of processing sounds.
  2. Active Listening means trying to find the real meaning of the words as well as the unspoken message behind them.
- ▶ In addition to the facts, you evaluate the speaker's:
 

1. Tone of voice	3. Emotional state
2. Body language	4. Context of the situation
- ▶ Give encouraging responses. Let the speaker know you want to help solve the problem. This can be done both verbally and nonverbally.

### **Empathizing is...**

- Trying to understand what the speaker is feeling because you have felt the same emotion before;
- Trying to understand the person from his/her perspective (putting yourself in the other person's place) and remembering that what is best for you may not be best for the person;
- Remaining in a position of control to be better able to help solve prob-

lems.

*A man walking down the street notices the cover off a manhole and hears a voice from within crying "Help, Help!" The man continues walking with out any further notice.....*

**That's APATHY.**

*Another man approaches the hole and also hears the crying "Help, Help!" from below. This man gets down on his hand and knees and begins sobbing, "Oh, my gosh, it's terrible that you are stuck in this hole. Oh, my! I feel so sorry for you....."*

**That's SYMPATHY.**

*A third man strolls by and hears the pleas for help and exclaims, "Oh my, we do have a problem here! You must be terrified. I'll bet you are very anxious to get out of that hole. Let's see what we can do about it.".....*

**That's EMPATHY.**

*A fourth fellow walks by the hole, hears the plea for help, sees the man in the hole and jumps in with him.....*

**That's LUNACY.**



# Telephone Skills

## THE IN-COMING CALL

### Remember:

Local government employees' ability to use the telephone to communicate effectively is crucial to customer relations.

When communicating over the phone you have only your voice with which to communicate. You cannot rely on eye contact, body language or other visual tools to get your message across.

## TIPS FOR IMPROVING YOUR TELEPHONE SKILLS

- ▶ Answer the telephone promptly. Many companies recommend that the phone be answered by the third ring.
- ▶ Initial greeting
  1. In a department or office: Identify the department or office, your first name and offer to help.

*"Court Administration. This is Mary. How may I help you?"*
  2. Try smiling when you answer the telephone. This will help ensure you are in a positive frame of mind.
- ▶ Providing "one voice for your customers"
  1. Customers want to identify with you as the voice of your organization - they want to feel that sense of responsiveness.
  2. Customers are going to be much more satisfied if they are handled by the first person they talk to and their question resolved.
  3. Whenever possible, try to avoid transferring customers.
- ▶ If a call must be transferred
  - State what you can do, not what you can't do.
    1. Turn a negative into a positive by letting customers know you are acting for their benefit:

*"I can help you by letting you talk to someone in the clerk's office."*
    2. Give the caller the name and phone number of the person to whom you are transferring the call.
  - Pass along customer information.

When transferring a call, pass along the customer's name and any facts you know. This will help the customer feel listened to if they don't have to repeat their information.
  - Ensure the call is connected.

- If you are uncertain to whom to transfer a call, collect as much information as possible from the caller and advise them you are not certain but believe the office you are connecting them to may be able to assist them."
- ▶ Putting a call on hold  
If you must put a call on hold, follow these 4 steps:
  1. Ask permission.  
Always ask, "Will you hold, please?"  
There is nothing more annoying than being asked and then hearing the phone click to hold before you've had time to respond.
  2. Get back to the customer as quickly as possible.
  3. Always say, "Thank you for holding."

### REMEMBER

- ▶ A telephone dialogue between you and a citizen/customer is different from face-to-face communication in at least two important ways:
  1. Both parties in the conversation must rely solely on the spoken word to convey their thoughts. If either party has difficulty in articulation or listening — communication suffers.
  2. The telephone is an impersonal instrument. Someone who might hesitate to show anger in person may feel justified in saying exactly what he or she feels into a telephone receiver.

### Taking messages

How you take a message will.....

1. Help the person for whom you are taking the call better respond to the caller and.....
2. It sends a message to the caller that you are a professional and that the caller is important.

#### Remember these simple things:

- Before taking a message, ask the caller if you can assist them.
- Get the customer's name and the correct spelling.
- Note the time and date of the call.
- Clearly summarize why the customer is calling.
- Ask if there is a good time for the call to be returned.
- Note the customer's phone number.
- Write your initials or name on the message.
- Post the message where the person to whom it is directed will see it.

#### ▶ Electronic messages

Electronic messages include voice mail and e-mail. They can be a valuable service to both you and your customers. However, the following are important tips to remember:

**Be sure....** your personal voice message includes the name and phone number of an associate for callers who wish to talk to someone immediately .

**Be sure....** to change your message if you will be out of the office for more than a day. Indicate when you will be back in the office to return their call or the number of someone they can talk with immediately.

**Be sure....** your message includes information if your office is going to be closed because of a holiday or other reasons.

#### ▶ Handling the difficult caller

Remember they may be angry at the system or with their own personal circumstances. Avoid taking personal responsibility for your caller's anger.

- **Avoid the build up of anger.**
  1. Ask open-ended and simple questions.
  2. Avoid using "you should" and "you have to..."
  3. Anticipate the questions the caller may not ask.
  4. Provide the caller with options, even if they are unpleasant options. Focus on what you can do—not what you cannot do.
  5. Identify the problem by rephrasing what you think the caller is saying.
- Let the caller vent. Hear them out.
- Lower your voice.

- Be empathetic and acknowledge the caller's situation.
- Use names when possible.
- Help the caller identify short cuts.
  1. Often anger arises because the caller becomes frustrated attempting to "maneuver" the system.
  2. For example, if the caller has the wrong number, give the caller the correct number.
- Refer the caller to a supervisor. If none are available, give the caller the name of your supervisor and let them handle the difficult customer.
- If you must hang up.
  - Before you hang up—warn the caller that his or her continued behavior may result in termination of the conversation.



# Handling Difficult People & Com-

## plaints

### Why Customers Get Upset

Although there are many different reasons why customers may become dissatisfied, they generally have one thing in common:

*The perceived value of your product or service was less than the customer expected.*

The 4 shortcomings that can cause a customer to view your product/service negatively:

1. The customer did not get what was promised or what was expected.
2. The customer perceived they were treated rudely.
3. Someone was indifferent to the customer.
4. No one listened to the customer.

Of all 4 reasons this last one is the most troubling for the customer and the organization.

#### ► The S.T.O.P. Method

To calm an angry customer, you must stay calm yourself. Use the **S.T.O.P.** method to help deal with stressful situations.

**S.T.O.P.** stands for:

**S**ignal  
**T**ake Control  
**O**pposite  
**P**ractice



- **Signal:**

Look for your own early warning signals of stress.  
 These are some of the early signs that you are feeling anxious.

- Do you clench your jaws?
- Does your heart pound?
- Does your face flush?
- Does tension build in your neck and shoulders?

- **Take Control**

After you have identified your early warning signals, you can take con-

trol of your own mind and body.

- **Opposite**

Do the opposite of your early warning signal.

If your jaw is clenched, relax your face muscles.

If your pulse is racing, breathe slowly and deeply.

The act of swallowing will also help relax your throat muscles and relieve a dry mouth.

- **Practice**

Practice these actions whenever you feel tense, whether at work, on the drive home during rush hour, or during a family emergency.



Once your emotions are under control.....turn your attention to calming the customer by....

- **Remain calm yourself.**

Do not react emotionally, no matter how upset the customer gets.

- **Let the customer vent.**

Don't interrupt—let the customer say the things he needs to say. Wait until the venting finishes—be patient. If you offer a solution to the problem before he is finished venting, he/she will not be ready to hear it.

- **Deal with emotions first.**

Acknowledging the customer's emotions makes the customer feel valued and allows you to develop a partnership with the customer.

This partnership is the foundation for the problem-solving task you are about to begin.

There are 3 ways to acknowledge your customer's emotions:

1. *Restate what the customer said.*

By paraphrasing, you let the customer know you heard and the customer can clarify his/her concerns.

2. *Show empathy.*

When you show empathy, you show concern.

3. *Find agreement.*

When you find agreement, you clearly identify the real problem, and working in partnership, you get on the same side as the customer—The enemy is now the problem, not you.

● **Avoid emotional trigger phrases.**

Avoid using a trigger or "no" phrase.

The use of calming or "yes" phrases further strengthens the partnership with the customer. Use calming phrases to describe what you can do for the customer to solve his/her problem.



TRIGGER PHRASES	CALMING PHRASES
Policy	Here's what we can do...; Here's how we can handle this... (quote the policy; Just don't call it "policy")
Can't	Can
Sorry	Thank you
No/I don't know	I can find out
But	And
You should have	Let's do this (move to the future, not the past)
Why didn't you	I can see why
The only thing we can do	The best option, I think

**►Set limits with abusive customers.**

If you have a customer who is loud or abusive or cannot be calmed down, gently set limits:

- If you know the customer's name use it.
- Use a sympathetic tone of voice to request the customer's cooperation and include a help statement, such as:

*Mr. Young, I really want to help you. I am finding it difficult as long as you continue to use this language. I can help you resolve this. Will you let me help you?*

This type of statement clearly and respectfully communicates your desire to help if the customer will let you.

Firmly explain that you are unable to continue the conversation until the customer is in control.

- Thank the customer for bringing the problem to your attention.

Whether in person or on the phone, dealing with distraught or difficult people requires special skills and a heightened sense of awareness. Remember to use these skills with your associates as well as your customers.

**REMEMBER**

**Be conscious of your attitude and nonverbal messages.**

- **Don't buy into it:**  
Take it professionally, not personally.  
Stay calm and do not get angry when dealing with angry people.
- **Watch your body language:**  
Do not back away.  
Do not use negative body language (for example, crossing arms).  
Drop your shoulders to create a more relaxed stance.  
Maintain a neutral attitude.  
Look at the person.



- **Listen to your vocal message:**

Project the volume and pitch that you want the other person to emulate. Lower your voice!

Speak a little slower, this can have a calming effect.

► **If A Customer is Out of Control**

**When dealing with demanding or aggressive people, instead of arguing, simply repeat a brief statement of action without justifying it or offering excuses.**

If  
a

customer is out of control or appears to be intoxicated and moving on is not a solution, politely but firmly ask the customer to leave or terminate the phone conversation.

Do not hesitate to ask for assistance or call for court security whenever you feel endangered or feel the situation is getting out of control! Ask your supervisor or co-worker what you should do in these types of situations.

If the customer continues asking or arguing, repeat what you said politely, yet firmly. You may have to do this several times. Eventually most people will quit arguing.

**HINT: Avoid Cannot**

"Sir, What you are asking for is legal advice and I am not qualified to answer that question. I can give you the attorney referral phone number."

**"Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow."**

**\*\*\*\* Author Unknown\*\*\*\***



## Going the Extra Mile

- If you receive several complaints involving the same type of situation, is there anything you can change to eliminate the problem?
- If not, let your supervisor or co-worker know.
- It may be time that someone looked at the procedures or dynamics of the situations to determine if system changes are needed.
- Find out how your department is doing, and help to prevent problems from occurring by sending surveys to your customers.
- Always remember to put yourself in the customer's shoes.



### Go that extra mile....

If you are unable to provide information because it exceeds what you are authorized to provide, help the customer find the answer.

- Explain that the information the customer is seeking is a type of legal advice that you are prohibited by law from giving and suggest that the customer seek the assistance of a lawyer or....
- That the information the customer is seeking is the specialty of another department or area in the courthouse.

### Then, offer OPTIONS:

- Give the customer information about how to find an attorney. Explain available resources such as brochures, forms, attorney referral number, law library, etc.
- Refer the customer to the correct department within the courthouse and don't forget to give directions.
- Give the customer the telephone number to the department they are requesting or may be of assistance.

## How to Become a Customer Service Star

### How to Become a Customer Service Star

## ► What makes a Customer Service Star?

### Remember.....

Customers expect local governments to deliver services from initial point of contact until their needs have been satisfied. In addition to basic human needs, customers expect superior service delivery.

Stars set the standard for customer service in any organization. They work to develop their customer service skills, and they continue to improve them every day. This means that anyone can become a star by taking on the challenge of being exceptional.

#### Customer Service Stars:

- ★ Become internally motivated to serve.
- ★ Convey a sincere interest in others.
- ★ Maintain a positive attitude.
- ★ Remain energized and enthusiastic.
- ★ Know their organizations inside and out.
- ★ Track their own performance.



**"Our beliefs about what we are and what we can be precisely determine what we will be."**

**\*\*\*\*Anthony Robbins\*\*\*\***

Take initiative. Let us look at these traits a bit closer.....

#### Becoming internally motivated to serve

- People are not motivated by external sources.
- Motivation can only come from inside a person.
- Customer service stars maintain motivation to exceed their customers' expectations.

#### **TAKE A MOMENT**

**The next time you have an especially successful customer service contact, pay special attention to how you feel. Let this positive feeling become your motivation as you strive to make all your customer contacts equally successful.**

#### Conveying a Sincere Interest in Others

- Stars are genuinely interested in their customers, and they let customers know it by remaining flexible and adapting to meet their needs.
- Stars try to understand what makes their customers tick—they search for the key to each customer's satisfaction.

#### Maintaining a Positive Attitude

- When you feel positive, it's easier to communicate with customers.
- Customers can feel their positive energy, and they come away feeling positive too.

#### Remaining Energized and Enthusiastic

- One of the greatest things you can do for yourself is to be excited about your work and your life.
- If you live enthusiastically every day, you will remain energized and your whole outlook will improve.
- True customer service stars are sincere in their energy and enthusiasm.
- Remember, customers know when you're faking it; customers can detect falseness and insincerity.

#### Getting to Know your Organization

- Stars have an unstoppable sense of curiosity.

- Stars not only learn their own jobs and departments, but also learn about other departments.
- Stars try to see the big picture for the customers - this awareness helps them better serve their customers.

### Tracking Your Performance

- Stars want both positive and corrective feedback - corrective feedback is viewed as being constructive and informative.

#### **TAKE A MOMENT**

**Are there areas of your company that you know little about? What can you do in the next week to learn more about them?**

Try to view all customer feedback as a gift that will help you improve your performance.

If you can change the situation, develop a plan for doing it.

If it is something over which you have no control, pass it along to the appropriate person or team.

- Invite customer feedback whenever possible.
- Remember.....as a service professional, you are the link between your customer and the courts.

### Taking Initiative

- To take initiative means to take action.
- Many organizations empower their service professionals to do whatever it takes to satisfy the customer.
- The organization establishes guidelines—then it's up to you.
- A star is ready and willing to act
- Use whatever power you have been given on behalf of your customers.

### Keeping Your Attitude Up All Day Long

A true star maintains these characteristics all day long, despite the stress and pressure that come with the job....but....how can you be consistently nice....concerned about....and interested in a customer....and then do the same thing over and over, day after day, after day?.....

Here are some survival techniques that will help you do just that.....

1. Remind yourself to engage in positive self-talk.
  - Practice healthy thinking.
  - Don't clutter your mind with negatives.
2. Get a calming object.
  - Use a photo, cartoon, or positive note that reminds you that this too shall pass.
3. Focus on successes rather than negatives.
  - Track the things that go right.
4. Use your break effectively.
  - Do something to keep yourself going—relax and clear your mind
  - Listen to music, play motivational tapes, take a walk or read.
  - Don't use your time for complaining
5. Develop a buddy system.
  - Learn from each other, and share the load. Work with your coworkers to give each other breaks from stress.
6. Take care of yourself.
  - When the details are getting you down, step back and look at the big picture.
  - Exercise, volunteer, spend time with friends and family, and do other things that add value to your life.
7. Bring your sense of humor to work.
  - Take your work seriously, but don't take yourself too seriously.
  - Learn to laugh at yourself.
  - Don't forget to take your sense of humor back home with you — your spouse, children and even your pet will appreciate it.

**So what is the message here.....**

Thoughts have power

- Our thinking influences our feelings.
- Thoughts shape our behavior.
- We tend to find what we expect.
- Our attitudes actually help create conditions.
- Our mindset can become a major asset or..... a serious career problem.
- Your level of energy contributes greatly to your career success.



- Bring some imagination to your work every day - look at your job from "fresh angles".
- A positive outlook energizes, empowers, and actually strengthens you.
- Optimism reveals possibilities that are hiding in the shadows.
- Optimism can be learned and developed.
- Our work includes more responsibility for self-management of:
  - ⇒ Our attitudes
  - ⇒ Our motivational levels
  - ⇒ Our personal morale level
  - ⇒ Our productivity and results
- The need for self-management, self-leadership, personal initiative is growing.
- Become independent problem solvers.
- Always take time to rebalance yourself.
- Learn to handle yourself caringly....learn how to take care of yourself.
- Do something you want to do....daily:
  - ⇒ Let it refresh your mind.
  - ⇒ Let it recharge your spirit.
  - ⇒ Let it prepare you to deal more effectively with tomorrow.

# The Importance of Teamwork

## The Important of Teamwork to Customer Service

### A Common Error

The pace in today's world of customer service is fast and the pressure can be constantly high.

Whether you are dealing with internal or external customers, success must follow success, customer after customer.

Many employees make a common error...

They are more concerned about their job functions than their customers.

**Remember**....our customers are the reason we have a job. Focus your attention on your customer, not your job function.

### Developing Team Strategies

Simply put:

- A **team approach** to customer service means working together as a group with common expectations and goals.
- The **team approach** allows growth at every level.
- The success of long-time service stars inspires new members of the team.
- Service stars gain fresh perspectives from new team members.



*Everyone learns, and everyone wins!*

**Strategies to help you and your team provide exceptional customer service together:**

- Show pride in yourself and your coworkers.
  1. Celebrate others successes.
  2. Let the customer know you are proud.
- Be a customer advocate in you organization.
  1. You are the voice of your organization, but you can also be the voice of the customer to your organization.
  2. Argue on your customer's behalf.
- Keep your supervisors informed and learn from them.
  1. Supervisors are there to give you support and guidance.
  2. Supervisors are a valuable resource
- Support your teammates with information.
  1. Share what you know freely with your coworkers.
  2. Use brief informal meetings—instead of formal meetings when time is limited.
  3. Discuss new policies.



- a. Discuss any new policies with your team.
- b. Implement ways to explain changes to your customers.
- 4. Identify areas for improvement.
  - a. Your team can generate ideas on how to better serve the customer.
  - b. Let ideas flow without judgment. Even the craziest ideas can turn out to be the ideas that work.
  - c. Identify and track the areas for improvement.
  - d. Set goals — determine what's expected of you as an individual.

### **REMEMBER**

**"It's the little things that make the big things possible...Only close attention to the fine details of any operation makes the operation first class."**

**\*\*\*\*J. William Marriott\*\*\*\***

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