



***International Introductory
Award in
Customer Service
(Service Sector)
(8415)***

Delegate Workbook



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By the end of the workshop you will be able to:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of the provision of good customer service in all sectors.
2. Identify customer and organisational needs and expectations in respect of service levels delivered in all businesses.
3. Describe the differences between strong and weak customer care, particularly relating to a professional image, communication skills and complaint handling.
4. Recognise how to present a professional image and identify techniques for communicating positively and effectively with customers, including verbal and non-verbal communications.
5. Identify the techniques used to handle customer complaints appropriately.

The benefits to YOU will be:

- *Improved job satisfaction in your customer care role.*
 - *Increased confidence when communicating with customers.*
 - *Enhanced future opportunities to develop your career and gain qualifications.*
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Section 1

Introduction to Customer Service

Aims of the section

At the end of this section candidates should be able to:

- *Describe customer service.*
- *Explain why customer service is important to the success of every organisation.*
- *Identify who their customers are.*
- *Identify the drawbacks of poor customer service.*
- *Explain how to promote good service.*
- *Demonstrate an understanding of customer service needs and expectations.*

Indicative Content

- 1.1 Outline knowledge of basic principles - maintaining good customer service at all times; treating all customers with respect; identifying and meeting customer needs; providing the service expected by the company.
- 1.2 Understanding why customer service is important to the company and to you – it helps to make the organisation successful, generates repeat business, assists profit and growth.
- 1.3 Identifying external and internal customers and their importance to the organisation.
- 1.4 Appreciate the drawbacks of not serving internal and external customers effectively, eg poor reputation, loss of business, loss of profit, loss of jobs.



- 1.5 Overview of your own role in customer service. Including, your own, and the company's, image, meeting legal obligations, practising good communication skills and solving problems appropriately.
- 1.6 Identifying typical customer needs and expectations and good practice in meeting these in a variety of situations.
- 1.7 Gaining insight into employer and employee responsibilities in relation to achieving a hygienic, safe and healthy environment for customers, including an understanding of the local health and safety legislation.



Section 2

Effective Communications

Aims of the section

At the end of this section candidates should be able to:

- *Demonstrate some understanding of the importance of developing effective communication.*
- *Describe the effects of ineffective or inappropriate communication.*
- *Start to apply a range of verbal and non-verbal communication and telephone techniques.*

Indicative Content

- 2.1 Consider the impact upon the customer and the organisation of effective and ineffective communications – ie confusion and misunderstanding, annoyed and unhappy customers, loss of business, loss of profit.
- 2.2 Explain the importance of listening to customers and how to demonstrate to customers that you are taking notice of what they say.
- 2.3 Provide an overview of the use of some non-verbal techniques such as the use of eye movements, gestures including the use of body, face and hands, facial expressions, physical evidence ie appearance.
- 2.4 Show an awareness of the use of tone of voice and expression when dealing with customers. For example, how to use the tone of your voice to the best advantage – avoid using raised voices, harsh tones and high pitched voice.
- 2.5 Provide an insight into how to use verbal and non-verbal communications whilst on the telephone.



Section 3

Presenting a Positive Professional Image

Aims of the section

At the end of this section candidates should be able to:

- *Explain the importance of ‘first impressions’.*
- *Explain the importance of presenting a positive attitude and professional image.*
- *Identify some of the appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication methods to be used in different customer situations.*
- *Demonstrate an understanding of the need for personal space.*

Indicative Content

- 3.1 Explain the importance of portraying a ‘positive and professional’ image in the context of customer service - the impact of the way we speak, dress, and deal with people.
- 3.2 Explain why it is necessary to deal with customers promptly and politely and how in doing so it helps the perception of good customer service.
- 3.3 Demonstrate an awareness of the importance of using verbal and non-verbal communications in developing a positive and professional image to instil confidence in the customer.
- 3.4 Explain the importance of allowing customers personal space whilst serving them - the negative effect of overpowering the customer.

Section 4

Handling Customer Complaints

Aims of the section

At the end of this section candidates should be able to:

- *Explain why customers complain.*
- *Appreciate the benefits of receiving customer complaints.*
- *Demonstrate an understanding of the techniques involved in handling difficult customer situations.*
- *Explain ways of handling complaints positively.*

Indicative Content

- 4.1 Identify a broad range of reasons why customers complain eg faulty goods, poor levels of service, time delays, rudeness, service not meeting expectations.
- 4.2 Demonstrate the importance of listening to the complaint and not making early judgements.
- 4.3 Appreciate the benefits of customer complaints in terms of supporting efforts for continuous improvement within the business.
- 4.4 Explain how to avoid the use of defensive behaviour in stressful situations.
- 4.5 Show an understanding of how to gain support and assistance from line-managers when handling complaints.
- 4.6 An overview of various techniques of handling complaints positively, including consultation /listening, discussing proposed actions, keeping customers informed of actions/timings and ensuring that complaints are resolved satisfactorily.
- 4.7 The role of customer service departments in supporting the customer service process.



Statement from City & Guilds

The Aims of the Programme and the Recommended Support within the Workplace for Practical Application

The one-day programme aims to develop an awareness of the key knowledge and techniques which promote and support good customer service practices. The objectives of the programme are knowledge based and will be carried out in a classroom environment with no real-life practical workplace experience included. It is therefore important to ensure that delegates gaining practical experience in a realistic working environment are supported, closely supervised and monitored following the programme.

The Benefits to the Employer

By supporting the practical sections of good customer care practices back in the workplace, employers will be able to benefit from competent, motivated employees who will provide exceptional customer care to their organisation's customers.

Candidates will gain a theoretical perspective of the importance of customer service and will be tested in a practically applied context, ie 40 objective true/false questions. The assessments are designed to maximise the assessment of knowledge and understanding acquired during the qualification and to encourage candidates to build on their success, both in terms of personal development within the organisation and in achieving further qualifications.



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Section 1

Introduction to Customer Service

Aims of the section

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- *Describe customer service.*
- *Explain why customer service is important to the success of every organisation.*
- *Identify who their customers are.*
- *Identify the drawbacks of poor customer service.*
- *Explain how to promote good service.*
- *Demonstrate an understanding of customer service needs and expectations.*

Customer Service

Think about the questions that follow and, in the space provided, write down your answers to the questions. When complete, discuss and agree your answers in teams, ready to feedback to the rest of the group.



Activity 1 - Defining Customer Service

Using your own words, explain what you think is meant by customer service?

As a customer, when have you experienced poor or horrible service?

As a customer, when have you experienced great service?



What is Customer Service?

It is no secret that some companies aim to look after their customers well, ensuring that the customer is at the heart of their business and everything they do. In marketing terms this is called being customer focused.

It is important to realise that customers can take their business anywhere they want to and if they are not satisfied they will take their business elsewhere. Therefore, it is very important to understand who our customers are, their expectations of the service they experience and how that affects future choices and decisions that they might make.

Companies that are customer focused often like to ensure that the following things are achieved and addressed to make sure the customer experience is positive.

- *Comply with hygiene, health and safety laws in relation to keeping the environment safe from harm for all customers.*
- *Exceed their customers' expectations by always providing value for money and creating a feeling of offering more than expected.*
- *Treat customers with respect by always being polite, honest, truthful and respectful.*
- *Do not just aim to satisfy - they aim to delight.*
- *Provide solutions to problems – never say there is a reason why the customer's complaint cannot be addressed.*
- *Consistently deliver outstanding service to their customers - always exceeding expectations.*
- *Make customers feel that they are the most important part of their business - **which they are.***

Customer Service is about achieving the above and making sure those customers feel that it is a pleasure to do business with you. This means that the customer will return again, a key benefit to the organisation and



Why is Customer Service so Important?

Customer Service has become a very important part of many businesses, and can often make a difference in the choice a customer makes when actually making a purchase. For example, if a customer goes to buy a new washing machine, they will choose the shop that will deliver to them free of charge or who will offer them a free warranty for one year.

Many retailers, including electrical showrooms, hairdressers, vehicle dealerships, solicitors, doctors, dentists and undertakers offer very similar services, and we often go to the place that gives the best service and makes the customer feel valued.

For example if you go to a hairdressers where they never offer you a drink, as opposed to a hairdressers where you can go and you can have a drink from a menu selection, along with nice biscuits or nuts, where will you go? If the hair cut is the same, the atmosphere, the people and the service you get will make all of the difference to your choice.

Customer service is a competitive tool and can make the difference to the customer experience. This can be achieved by staff being:

- *Welcoming.*
- *Helpful to all customers, without exception.*
- *Knowledgeable about products and services on offer.*
- *Courteous, polite and trustworthy.*
- *Willing to listen and act.*
- *Willing to deal with customer problems in an effective way.*

Customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction comes more and more from the way the person is treated by the service deliverer - **you** - you are the person who can make the difference.



When customers become unhappy, it is often because they are not pleased with the way they have been treated. Therefore, it is important to always be aware that customers like to be treated well and with respect.

Service is about providing a friendly welcome for all our customers. We need to make sure that our customers are well looked after, whilst visiting us.


Benefits of Customer Service

There are many benefits to organisations that practice good customer service methods to understand and meet customer expectations. For example, good customer service usually means that most customers are pleased with their experience and return to the organisation over and over again. This is known as retaining customers, a practice that is a lot cheaper for the organisation than continuously advertising and promoting their product or service. In turn this means that the organisation could become increasingly profitable.

Happy customers are like people going out and telling everybody they know how good the local shoe shop is, the local travel agent, the local beauty salon or the local electrical wholesaler. It is like a free form of public relations or advertising. One of the most powerful types of advertising is word-of-mouth! Again, this brings in more people and helps profitability too.

Key benefits of good customer service include:

- *Customers keep coming back (ie repeat business).*
- *Customers buy more.*
- *Customers can create new opportunities.*
- *Customers can create new leads.*
- *Customers develop loyalty.*
- *Increase in sales.*
- *Increased profitability.*
- *Free advertising and public relations.*



The working environment and the customer environment tend to be much more friendly and enjoyable when customer's needs are considered and the way in which they are served is professional and positive overall. It is then that the benefits are felt.

Quality Service Delivery

This is the delivery of a high standard of quality service at all times to meet the needs of customers. It means we must always try to put our customer's needs first whilst running a profitable business. For example, the following punch lines need to become the focus of customer service:

- *'Nobody does it better'!*
- *'The very best of care'!*
- *'On time – every time'!*
- *'You can't beat our service'!*

These are customer expectations and quality service delivery is all about meeting them!



Who are Your Customers?

A customer is a person on the receiving end of our products and services, with whom the organisation has a transaction, ie where payment is exchanged for goods and services. Everyone who pays for products and services offered by your business be it a hairdressers, a shop or a garage service department are external customers. This may be the:

- *Client arriving for a haircut.*
- *Family booking a holiday.*
- *Person arriving for a suit fitting.*
- *Client wanting to have new carpets fitted.*
- *Client wanting to have new spectacles fitted.*

The external customer is central to an organisation's success, as they are the people who generate the income within the organisation that allow the business to pay their staff and continue to invest in growing and improving the business.

Internal Customers

Companies can only offer a truly professional service to external customers if they also offer a professional service to their **internal customers**. Everybody serves someone and in turn is served by someone else in the organisation.

Internal customers include all employees who work for the organisation including the:

- *Receptionist.*
- *Operations manager.*
- *Sales representative.*
- *Retail assistant.*
- *Administrator.*
- *Secretary.*

There are a number of benefits for organisations that look after and serve their internal customers well. These include staff who:

- *Are better motivated.*
- *Are well trained and keen to help everybody.*
- *Are keen to do their job well.*
- *Are rewarded and recognised for their efforts.*
- *Aim to achieve customer delight.*
- *Realise the importance of customer focus.*
- *Create customer satisfaction.*
- *Are more effective.*
- *Generate sales and profits through their actions.*
- *Deliver promises made.*
- *Keep customers informed.*
- *Communicate well.*
- *Listen.*

Drawbacks of not serving internal customers well

Often organisations find it difficult, due to competitive pressures, to do everything they would like to make their staff happy. To look after staff properly organisations should:

- *Train staff.*
- *Communicate to staff.*
- *Keep a safe and health working environment.*
- *Aim to keep staff happy in their work.*
- *Give staff exciting jobs to do.*
- *Be fair to staff.*
- *Be considerate of staff needs.*
- *Pay staff well.*

If we do not do a good job for our internal customers, the results could be disastrous and will almost certainly cause the following problems:

- *Communication difficulties.*
- *Frustration with co-workers.*
- *Non-cooperation between staff or departments.*
- *Time wasting.*
- *Ineffective work practices.*
- *Stress.*
- *Lack of job satisfaction.*
- *Poor quality work.*

Drawbacks of not serving external customers well

When large or small businesses continually fail to serve their external customers properly there is likely to be serious consequences in the long term. For example, the following things may start to happen.

- *An increase in the number of complaints experienced by the organisation.*
- *A drop in sales.*
- *A fall in profits.*
- *Customers will find other places to spend their money, where they feel they are getting good service and good value for money.*
- *Customers tell others when they are not happy with their experience. This means that they put off would-be customers from going to buy from your business.*

Any, or all, of these problems will eventually lead to poor service to the external customer, which eventually leads to reduced profit in the long term.



How to Promote Good Customer Service?

At this stage it is important to understand the things that you can do personally that will improve the customer care experienced by your customers, whatever sector you are from.

- *View customers as the most important part of your job.*
- *Work in a safe and organised way to avoid accidents.*
- *Be responsive to the needs of customers.*
- *Give customers your undivided attention.*
- *Develop a customer friendly attitude.*
- *Show understanding and empathy.*
- *Deliver your promises.*
- *Present a positive image at all times.*
- *Develop your understanding of local and national services that your customers may request.*
- *Solve customer problems.*
- *Always check if there is more you can do.*

Identifying Needs and Expectations

You, your customers and the organisation you work for, will have needs and expectations that will need to be achieved through the delivery of your service.

These needs could include:

- *Getting a product in a specific time.*
- *Being served in a reasonable amount of time because they are in a rush.*
- *Having goods delivered when requested.*
- *Being able to pay without delay.*
- *Being able to find what they need within the store.*
- *Ensuring their appointment is booked in when they need it.*
- *Ensuring that their telephone bookings are confirmed properly.*
- *Having goods packaged when needed.*
- *Gaining advice and guidance on the most appropriate product/service to purchase.*
- *Being confident that they can get what they want, when they want.*



When customers are delighted with the service you provide, they will sing your praises, tell other people of their great experience and it is likely that they will return again and again. Remember this is free advertising!


When customers are unhappy or disappointed with the service you provide, they will tell many more people, may possibly complain formally and will probably never come back.

Activity 2 – Needs and Expectations

What sort of needs do your customers have?

What sort of expectations do your customers have?





Customer needs can be linked to their specific circumstances. For example, busy professional people are often more demanding, as they are often held back by lack of time. Some customers may also have special needs related to their personal circumstances eg mothers with small children needing to have baby changing facilities provided, or people with disabilities needing customer service staff to help and guide them through their service experience.

Customer expectations are based on previous experiences and personal choice, and may include the following demands on the service provider:

- *The service must meet their expectations of quality.*
- *Polite treatment at all times - even when they are being difficult.*
- *To be able to see that attention is being paid to their requests.*

Customers may also expect:

- *To feel their feedback is important.*
- *Mistakes admitted to and rectified.*
- *Promises, made by your organisation, are honoured.*
- *To be treated with respect.*
- *To be treated as an individual by being given a personalised service.*
- *Your time to be given to them for explanations.*
- *To be informed when a problem arises.*
- *You to know about your job and your company.*
- *You to be able to answer questions.*
- *You to find solutions to their problems.*
- *You to provide a safe and hygienic environment.*
- *You to know how to assist them in any emergencies.*

Customers do not want to hear “No” or “I don’t know” - customers want to feel secure in the knowledge that you have the answers, or that you are able to quickly contact someone who is able to help.

When you can meet the needs of your customers and exceed their expectations, the customer will be surprised and delighted with exceptional service that they did not expect. The customer is then more likely to remember the service they received and return.

** Back in the workplace remember to surprise your customers with your exceptional customer service everyday.*

Creating a Safe Environment for Customers

Large numbers of days can be lost each year through accidents, injuries and diseases in the workplace. Many countries have introduced regulations/legislation covering aspects of health and safety at work covering areas such as: handling hazardous systems, management of health and safety at work, noise pollution, hygiene and the use of hazardous substances to name but a few.

Both employers and employees have responsibilities in relation to health and safety. It is important that you understand your responsibilities as an employee. You should look closely at the health and safety manual in your workplace or the health and safety guidance provided in your own personal employment manual if you have one, to make sure that you are fully aware of your responsibilities.

Examples of employer and employee responsibilities follow.

Employers have specific duties that may include:

- *All systems (work practices) must be safe.*
- *The working environment must be safe and healthy (well-lit, warm, ventilated and hygienic).*
- *All plant and equipment must be kept up to the necessary standards.*

Employees also have duties and these may include:

- *To take reasonable care of himself/herself and others (ie your customers and colleagues).*
- *To allow the employer to carry out his or her duties (including enforcing safety rules).*
- *Not to interfere intentionally or recklessly with any machinery or equipment.*

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These are very broad statements and will be described in more detail, from the view of your own organisation, in internal manuals. Ensure that you look closely at your own organisation's regulations and that you follow them.

Below is a list of some examples of the things that employers and employees should do to make sure that their organisation demonstrates best practice with regards to health and safety:

- *All equipment is properly maintained.*
- *The temperature in the building is at the correct level – not less than 16°C.*
- *The floors, passageways and walkways are clear and not obstructed in any way.*
- *There are no objects that could fall and hurt the customer.*
- *All necessary doors and gates are closed to avoid danger.*
- *All washing facilities are clean.*
- *Suitable clothing is worn.*
- *All staff know the fire regulations.*
- *Some staff have the appropriate first aid experience.*
- *Staff maintain the record book when accidents take place.*

Where accidents happen in the customer environment because of negligence of the management and employees it can have a very negative impact. For example:

- *Customers may wish to have financial compensation for their injury.*
- *It can damage a company's reputation – because it is not accident proof.*
- *It can create unhygienic environments where infection can spread.*
- *It can be disruptive to the organisation.*
- *It can be costly.*

Staff in a customer service environment should be trained so that they become:

- *More safety conscious.*
- *More confident in giving instructions in emergency situations.*
- *Competent in the handling of accidents.*
- *Efficient and effective in maintaining their own work environment.*

Whatever the business, sector or organisation, it is important that the customer's whole service experience is positive. In part, this can be achieved by ensuring that customer facing staff have the following characteristics:

- *Positive attitude.*
- *Good personality.*
- *Competent.*
- *Smart.*
- *Helpful.*

It is also important that the environment in which they operate is one that customers are comfortable with. The environment should:

- *Be a good temperature.*
- *Be comfortable.*
- *Have good lighting.*
- *Have good seating.*
- *Have good furnishings.*
- *Have comfortable noise levels.*
- *Have safe equipment.*

One thing to remember is that customers bring expectations with them, based on past experiences with your organisation. So, steps should be in place within your organisation to train staff to deliver customer service.



Section One Summary

This unit has focused upon introducing you to the concept of customer service and how important it is to make customers, both internally and externally, feel valued through the way you treat them.

Customer service is one way in which an organisation can compete against others and often customers will make their choice based upon that.

It is very important that customers are valued, respected and that the organisation provides a service that meets their needs, no matter how different those needs might be.

Ultimately, developing a good company image that reflects a caring organisation will be essential, along with one that is safe and healthy for them to be in.

Companies must develop a good image, reflecting a caring organisation that is safe and healthy for customers.

Section 2

Effective Communications

At the end of this section candidates should be able to:

- *Demonstrate some understanding of the importance of developing effective communication.*
- *Describe the effects of ineffective or inappropriate communication.*
- *Start to apply a range of verbal and non-verbal communication and telephone techniques.*

Why is Effective Communication Important?

It is important that an organisation demonstrates 'good and effective communication', as there are many benefits in doing so. Some of these benefits include:

- *Increasing the quality of service to the actual customer.*
- *Saving time.*
- *Improving customer care.*
- *Avoiding misunderstandings.*
- *Working towards achieving goals.*
- *Building a good reputation and relationships.*
- *Creating a positive atmosphere.*
- *Encouraging open discussion.*

The Impact of Ineffective Communication

If a company fails to communicate well with its customers, there are many negative effects that it could experience:

- *Hampers relationships.*
- *Wastes time.*
- *Affects customers and colleagues.*
- *Destroys morale.*

- *Creates a negative atmosphere.*
- *Encourages rumours.*
- *Builds a negative reputation.*
- *Works against meeting goals.*

** Back in your own workplace, be aware of the barriers to communication, such as noise and time restraints. Practice effective communication every day, to overcome workplace barriers and enjoy a two-way communication with colleagues and customer.*

How to Develop Effective Communications

The main purpose of communication is to transfer information from one individual to another. When we are communicating we want to:

- *Be listened to.*
- *Be understood.*
- *Have our ideas accepted.*
- *Have some action taken as a result.*
- *Have a follow-up check, to make sure that the action did take place to the receiver's satisfaction.*

Activity 3 – Effective Communication

Make a list of things you can do to communicate effectively with customers.



Listening Actively

If you are going to ask customers questions, then it is important that you listen carefully to their responses. If you keep asking your customers to repeat themselves, they will feel that you are not listening at all and may begin to get annoyed with you.

To improve your listening, use the checklist below and ask your colleagues for feedback on your listening.

Listening Checklist

- *Look at people - use your eyes to show that you are listening.*
- *Turn off any negative thoughts you have about people.*
- *Lean towards them.*
- *Start listening with the first word and listen intently.*
- *Think at the speed they are talking - do not jump ahead.*
- ***Do not** interrupt, make comments or give opinions. Most customers just want you to listen to what they have to say!*
- *Take key notes, so you can repeat back what has been said.*
- *Nod in agreement - use facial expressions and body language to show you understand.*
- *Ask closed questions when the person has finished talking, so you can check your understanding of what has been said.*
- *Use their name and use “you” when checking understanding.*

In addition to this, whilst you are on the phone, you may need to use what is known as “verbal noises” as your nodding will not be seen. This demonstrates to the person on the other end that you are listening and shows interest, without interrupting them during their flow.



Different Types of Questions

One of the most effective ways of getting a customer to talk and to establish their needs and expectations is to ask questions. This will enable you to find out more about what they require and how they feel.

Open Questions

One of the most useful styles of questioning is an open question. Your sentence will need to start with: **Who, What, Why, Where, How or When**. By using open questions you will find out more information during the conversation. Open questions encourage people to open up about their thoughts and feelings.

Examples of open questions:

- *“What types of shoes are you looking for?”*
- *“What made you come to this salon to have your hair cut?”*
- *“Why did you choose this dental practice?”*

The Closed Question

This type of questioning encourages a short, specific answer, normally **yes** or **no**. Closed questions are also a good way for you to check that you have the right information and fully understand it.

Examples of closed questions:

- *“Is this shampoo acceptable?”*
- *“Did you say that you want a 20,000 mile service sir?”*
- *“So the sofa should be delivered to.....is that right madam?”*
- *“Is there anything else that you require, besides?”*

Remember to avoid asking too many questions close together, without allowing your customer time to answer.

Importantly, questions should help you when listening, as you can use them to check your understanding of what the customer is saying. Use them wisely and they will be helpful to you, but do not bombard the customer.

Non-Verbal Communication Techniques

People often think that when they are speaking to us that is all we hear – their voice? How wrong can they be? One of the most noticeable things about us is our body language, our smile, our frown, the way in which we use our hands and our arms. Think about being told off as a child – think about how an adult may have used their hands and their faces to look at you – the pointing finger, the furrowed brow, all of this associated with the loud voice shouting!

In turn, we are going to look at each of the different aspects of non-verbal techniques and how they can be used.

Eye Contact

- *Lets your customer know that you are interested, receptive and attentive to what they are saying.*
- *Allows you to listen to customers' feelings as well as to their words.*
- *The moment a customer walks up to you, regardless of what you are doing, make immediate eye contact.*

Facial Expressions

Your facial expressions will show everyone around you if you are happy, or sad. Customers are not interested in the fact that you might have had a bad day. As far as the customer is concerned they are the first person you are dealing with that day. Make sure your facial expression sets a positive tone before you speak.



Posture and Gestures

Be careful of your posture and gestures and the impression they might give to customers. Let's look at some examples of posture and gestures and what the various actions and movements we take mean:

- *Arms crossed and avoiding gaze - suggests suspicion.*
- *Clenched fist - suggests anger or determination.*
- *Doodling - suggests boredom.*
- *Finger tapping - suggests impatience.*
- *Hands behind head while leaning back in office chair - suggests territorial dominance.*
- *Hands behind head when in an authoritative situation - suggests confidence.*
- *Occasionally covering mouth with hand while speaking - suggests nervousness or lying.*
- *Open hands - suggests open mindedness.*
- *Open hand and arms - suggests acceptance.*
- *Pointing index finger - suggests wariness and can be threatening behaviour.*
- *Rubbing nose - suggests suspicion.*
- *Rubbing palms of hand together - suggests expectancy.*
- *Stroking chin – suggests person is thinking or evaluating*
- *Tugging at ear – suggests nervousness.*
- *Wringing hands – suggest nervousness or frustration.*



The Use of Voice in Customer Service Settings

We must be aware of the combined use of our voice and facial expression, and the effect it can have upon the customer in a service delivery setting. As you will already be aware often our actions speak louder than words. However, the combined force of our actions and words are all the more powerful.

The following statistics identify the following proportions of the use of words, voice, tone, pitch and body language that we use when communicating in face to face customer service settings:

- **7%** *Actual words*
- **38%** *Voice, tone, pitch, pace and quality*
- **55%** *Body language*

Therefore, we should look at the way we use our voices to aid the customer service provision within our company.

Voice – It is important that you always use your voice properly. Avoid raising your voice unnecessarily or indeed shouting. You should always aim to use a clear, calm voice, to raise your concerns in a conflict situation. Below is a list of tips for using your voice in customer service delivery.

- *Avoid the use of harsh or high pitched tones, as this generally makes the situation worse.*
- *Speak in a clear, calm voice.*
- *Avoid over usage of your own voice, as it appears as if you love the sound of it too much.*
- *Keep your voice steady and level.*
- *Do not let your voice rise and show frustration.*



Verbal and Non-verbal Communications Whilst Using the Telephone

Often people do not realise that when you answer the telephone you can tell whether they are smiling or not, or whether they are happy or not.

From a customer service point of view the telephone is a very useful tool, and can be used for the following purposes:

- *Customer care.*
- *Taking bookings.*
- *Making arrangements.*
- *Information gathering.*
- *Finding new customers.*
- *Solving problems.*

The **advantages** of using the telephone include that it:

- *Provides quick and effective communication.*
- *It can be used in almost any location in the world.*
- *It is a convenient method of communication.*
- *It is difficult to ignore a ringing phone so customers generally get a response.*

The **disadvantages** of using the telephone include:

- *The telephone does not provide a lasting record of communication.*
- *No visual impact or communications.*
- *People often hang up if they do not like what you say.*



Answering the Phone

- *Smile as you pick up the phone.*
- *Aim to answer within 4 rings - If you do not answer within 4 rings say to the customer “Thank you for waiting”.*
- *Do not ask people to hold as you answer the phone*
- *Offer a greeting - “Good Morning” or “Good Afternoon” as appropriate.*
- *Offer your department name so the caller knows they are through to the correct place.*
- *Offer help by saying something like - “How may I help you...?”.*

Handling the Call

- *When you have found out the caller's name, use it.*
- *Deal with the specific query.*
- *Ask if any other assistance is required.*
- *Say thank you and goodbye.*
- *Let the caller put the phone down first in case they wish to ask anything else.*

Putting Calls on Hold

- *Explain what you are going to do if you are asking a person to hold.*
- *When a person is holding, use the hold button at all times*

If customer appears in front of you, waiting to be served, when you are taking a call, make sure that you acknowledge them, so they do not feel ignored while you finish the call.

** Back in the workplace; remember to check-out the guidelines on telephone handling and how to transfer calls correctly. You may find that your organisation employs mystery customers who listen to staff responses to check the quality and to make sure that company guidelines are followed.*



Handling Messages

- *If someone is not available, explain **positively** why the person is not available. Offer to take a message.*
- *Take all the details; name, phone number, message details and the time of the call. Ensure that awkward names are spelt back to the customer.*
- *Repeat messages and any information back to the caller - always act on the message quickly.*
- *Check whether a return call is required. Ensure that a contact telephone number is taken including an Area/STD code, where applicable.*
- *Advise the caller that you will call back/pass the message on - specify a realistic time period for this to happen.*
- *Consider recording all messages on a message sheet.*
- *Take personal responsibility to make sure messages are passed on quickly to the correct person/section.*

Responding to Messages

- *Always respond to any messages from a caller, whoever they are. Remember you are projecting the image of the company.*
- *When you receive messages, do not wait for callers to call you back. You will be less in control of the situation if they ring you back first.*
- *Get as much information as possible about the situation before you call people back to create a professional image.*

Answer Machine and Messages

- *Make sure the correct message is on the answer machine whenever you are not available to answer the phone.*
- *Take messages off the answer machine regularly and respond to them as quickly as possible.*



Section Two Summary

Clearly, you should never underestimate the power of non-verbal behaviour in the messages it gives either deliberately or not deliberately.

However, one word of warning – whilst folding arms appears to be quite defensive, many people sit with their arms folded as a matter of comfort, so, do not read something in to everything a person does. Although at times, you should be sensitive to a customer's body language and gestures, as it will prepare you for a negative or positive response from them.

The spoken word combined with the non-verbal gestures is always interesting – and certainly provides much more of an idea of what a person is thinking, meaning and saying. It is a much stronger and more reliable combination.

In the next unit we will look further into using both verbal and non-verbal language in a professional way, and how to use it to create the right image, indeed a professional image, in front of the customer.



Section 3

Presenting a Positive Professional Image

Aims of the section

At the end of this section candidates should be able to:

- *Explain the importance of 'first impressions'.*
- *Explain the importance of presenting a positive attitude and professional image.*
- *Identify some of the appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication methods to be used in different customer situations.*
- *Demonstrate an understanding of the need for personal space.*

First Impressions

Do you know it takes just '3' seconds to make a first impression!

So, the next time you deal with a customer I am sure this will give you something to think about! If on that day you are miserable, scruffy or unhelpful, that customer will go away with that as a permanent image of you, something which could be difficult to overcome.



Activity 3 – First Impressions

Why is it so important to create a good first impression?

How can you create a good first impression?





Developing a Winning Attitude

Negative remarks and behaviours do not often lead to success. The more you talk and behave like a winner, the more you are likely to succeed.

Think about the negative thoughts that you have and turn them into something more positive which will make you a winner.

Negative Thoughts

Positive Thoughts

We all have a mental image of how we see ourselves. This is formed from what people have said to us in the past – particularly during childhood. It's known as the conditioning process.

Be Positive – Be Confident

“You are what you think you are.”
“You can if you think you can.”

Spotlight on You





How to Present Positive Attitude and Behaviour in Customer Services

Behaviour is a choice and will affect the way in which you deal with customers. You can choose behaviour that will help you deal with the customer, or behaviour that will hinder you.

If someone is happy, smiling and helpful towards you, you are likely to be happy back. If someone is short-tempered, unpleasant or even aggressive, then it is likely that you will behave in the same way.

When you deal with customers, your behaviour should be:

- ***Professional***

Hide your personal feelings - try to leave your own worries and strife in a parcel outside the door when you go into work.

- ***Understanding***

You are in the “people business” - they want your help. They will turn to you for that help and you will need to show them that you fully understand their needs.

- ***Patient***

*Yes - you may have to say the same thing hundreds of times - but it is the **first** time this customer has asked, isn't it? Be patient and remember that the customer is an individual and not part of a crowd.*



How to Present a Professional Image

The way you greet a customer reflects your company image and has a tremendous effect on how customers see you. Remember, the first impression is made within 3 seconds of meeting someone!!

When dealing with customers you should always:

- *Acknowledge them as soon as possible.*
- *Smile.*
- *Apologise for any delay.*
- *Be friendly and welcoming with your greeting.*
- *Be well mannered - it costs nothing.*
- *Use their name - ask for their name and use it - but make sure you have their permission before you use their first name.*
- *Show them that you are really listening.*
- *Ask open questions.*
- *Reassure them.*
- *Explain things fully to them.*
- *Lean forward with an open body posture.*

Take responsibility for helping the customer:

- *Be enthusiastic - it's catching.*
- *Be confident - it increases a customer's trust in you.*
- *Be welcoming - it satisfies your customers' basic desire to feel liked and approved of.*
- *Be helpful - customers want that more than anything else.*
- *Be polite - always be well mannered.*
- *Show you care - make all customers feel they are important and individual.*
- *Comply with hygiene, health and safety guidelines.*



How to Project a Professional Image

When dealing with customers they will notice the way in which you communicate with them, and different parts of your communication will have an impact on them. When we do communicate, we communicate in three ways:

- Words - **Verbal** Communication
- Tone of Voice - **Vocal** Communication
- Body Language - **Visual** Communication

If these 3 areas add up to 100%, can you remember in percentage terms how does each of these impact on your face to face communication with customers?

	FACE TO FACE
WORDS	
TONE OF VOICE	
BODY LANGUAGE	
TOTAL	100%

Remember that non-verbal actions can be sensed even when speaking to a customer over the phone – note the difference when talking to a customer when smiling and frowning. Also, actions such as typing and tapping can all be heard on the phone.





Personal Image – Customer Friendly Body Language

It is possible to learn a great deal about a person's feelings and attitudes by observing his or her actions, body language, posture and gestures.

By recognising and understanding the non-verbal clues ie gestures, body movements or facial expressions that customers will give you, you will be able to react to them in a positive way.

Non-verbal communication may be defined as the exchange of messages without the use of verbal language.

Activity 5 – Customer Friendly Body Language

How can you always project a positive image to customers through your customer friendly body language?

<i>Appearance</i>	
<i>Eye Contact</i>	
<i>Facial Expressions</i>	
<i>Posture and Gestures</i>	
<i>Personal Space</i>	

* Remember to observe the different cultures of customers in your workplace and be sensitive to their concept of personal space.





Personal Image – Using Customer Friendly Body Language

Body language tells you what people really mean - it is the art of seeing what others are thinking. By focusing on other people's body language, you can discover their true feelings towards you and what you are saying. It has clear value in social as well as business situations, and is extremely important when dealing with customers.

For example:

- *If you look untidy and your uniform has many stains or marks on it, customers will think you do not care about your work and have sloppy standards.*
- *If you are slumped behind reception in an undertakers office, people will think you are tired and do not particularly want to help them.*
- *If you get too close to a customer, or start touching their arm they may feel uncomfortable, and will try to move away from you. This is particularly important to consider when involved in providing personal services.*

Using body language successfully involves four stages:

1. *Learn what to look for.*
2. *Recognise it in other people so you can read them better.*
3. *Recognise it in yourself.*
4. *Control it and use it to your advantage so you give the right messages to other people.*

In the first stage, learn what to look for, be careful how different cultures may interpret body language. At some stage, in most businesses you will come across many cultures and you need to make sure that you do not give or take offence because of these differences.

* Remember to check the correct dress code for your organisation and the requirements expected of you, as outlined in a customer care policy, charter or staff handbook. Be aware of your own body language and practice reading your customers' messages through body language.

Positive and negative behaviour

To provide examples of positive and aggressive behaviour sets, see the table below:

<i>Negative/Inferior Behaviour</i>	<i>Aggressive/Superior Behaviour</i>
<i>Wobbly speech</i>	<i>Harsh voice</i>
<i>Slow speech</i>	<i>Rapid speech</i>
<i>Worried expression</i>	<i>Extremes of expression</i>
<i>Evasive looking down</i>	<i>Excessive eye contact</i>
<i>Defensive - arms crossed</i>	<i>Dominant posture</i>
<i>Mouth covered with hand</i>	<i>Finger wagging/jabbing</i>
<i>Excessive distance</i>	<i>Invasions of a persons space</i>

Positive and Smart Appearance

- *Personal grooming has a big impact on customers. Customers expect us to look appropriate for the job we do – for example if you work in a fashion outlet then it is likely that you will be expected to wear clothes from within the store. If you work on a reception desk it is likely that you will be expected to wear smart clothes.*
- *Ensure you meet the required hygiene, health and safety standards. This is particularly important if working in personal services, such as hair, health and beauty or dentistry etc.*
- *Customers will also make decisions about how organised and competent you are by the way your work area looks.*



Personal Space

Personal space is the distance that feels comfortable between you and another person. If another person approaches you and invades your personal space, you automatically move back without a thought. It is also about how you position yourself in relationship to the customer you are dealing with.

Remember to:

- *Avoid hiding behind a desk - be on equal sides when communicating.*
- *Either sit down or stand up together. Avoid being on unequal levels.*
- *Do you want to be formal or informal? Have you reflected this when dealing with customers?*
- *Always keep a customer at arms length literally – ie about three feet away.*
- *Culture - consider the different cultures of different nationalities.*
- *Status - people keep a "respectful" distance from people they consider to have a higher status than themselves.*
- *Sex - women talking to women stand closer than if they were talking to men, or indeed men to men.*

Body Language and Customers

Never forget that while you are reading the body language of customers they are also reading yours. You are constantly being judged by your facial expressions, your tone of voice and your non-verbal messages, through body language. For instance, if you raise your shoulders, lower your head, seem impatient, speak with a tired, bored or irritated voice, then the customer could think you:

- Do not like your work.
- Are feeling under pressure.
- Are not friendly.
- Do not show respect for other people.
- Do not want to help - when you do help, you do so reluctantly.



Section Three Summary

In the last unit we highlighted the combination of verbal and non-verbal communications as being particularly important in a customer service setting. The combined factors of verbal, non-verbal and appearance combined, make even more of a statement.

In order to present a positive image a combination of factors must be taken into account and a good balance should be found.

Section 4

Handling Customer Complaints

Aims of the section

At the end of this section candidates should be able to:

- *Explain why customers complain.*
- *Appreciate the benefits of receiving customer complaints.*
- *Demonstrate an understanding of the techniques involved in handling difficult customer situations.*
- *Explain ways of handling complaints positively.*

Customer Complaints

It is a known fact that no matter how hard an organisation tries, there will be people who will never be satisfied. However, there are those people who have a real cause for being dissatisfied, maybe a product is faulty, or a meal delivered is really cold, or a hair colour went really wrong.

There are three types of customers who complain:

1. *Those who are genuinely upset by a situation and deserve your sympathy.*
2. *Those who complain purely for the sake of it.*
3. *Professional complainers, who are out to seek compensation or intimidate sales staff with threats of legal action.*



Activity 6 - Complaints

What is a customer complaint?

Why do people complain?

What behaviours have you seen when faced with a customer who is complaining?

Why do some customers keep quiet and never complain, even though they are unhappy with the service?





What Causes Conflict and Makes People Complain?

Our day to day lives are often full of conflict, full of dealing with difficult situations and unhappy customers across all sectors. One sector is not better or worse in respect of complaints. The number and level of complaints is about the individual company rather than the industry sector.

There are many causes of conflict, but beneath them there are root causes that you should be aware of and watch out for when dealing with customers and colleagues. They include:

- *Misunderstandings.*
- *Personality factors.*
- *Expectations.*
- *Lack of communication.*
- *Frustration.*
- *De-motivated and unhappy people.*
- *Stress.*
- *Personal circumstances.*
- *Factors beyond your control and often even the control of the organisation.*

It is said that whilst complaints can be difficult to deal with it can be a benefit to an organisation. This is because it keeps an organisation aware of customer needs and often highlights the need for change in working practices to avoid future difficulties. Therefore, if acted upon correctly, it can lead to improvements in service and help to ensure that customers' expectations are met.

From the other side, it is also important to realise that there are issues directly relating to the organisation, and its approach to dealing with customers, that can cause poor performance and hence poor service, which also drives customers to complain. In fact these are the main causes of complaints, rather than personal issues relating to the customers.

To a point, the personal issues mentioned previously do affect the way in which customers respond in difficult situations. However, below is a list of possible things that can happen within the organisation, that can affect the service delivery standards and cause customers to complain.

- *Too much work and not enough people.*
- *Disputes about authority – ie disputes about who is in charge.*
- *Personal differences – ie differences in opinion between staff.*
- *Personal friction – personal relationships breakdown.*
- *Lack of communication – management within the organisation fail to tell staff what is going on.*

Handling Complaints

Did you know that...?

- *96% of dissatisfied customers do not go back and complain.*
- *but they do tell 7 other people how bad you are.*
- *13% will tell at least 20 others.*
- *90% will never return.*

It probably costs 5 times as much to attract a new customer as it does to keep an existing one.

The message is clear:

- *Companies need to encourage their customers to complain - it is better to handle a complaint than lose that customer.*
- *Handle complaints professionally - turn complainers into ambassadors.*

The benefits of complaints

Most organisations find that there are times when customers are not satisfied and need to complain or make comments on the service they have received. More and more organisations realise that complaints can be a valuable source of information. Many have set procedures to deal with complaints so that they are dealt with in a consistent and appropriate way.

The advantage of recognising that things do go wrong instead of seeing complaints as an irritation, is that they can help identify ways that we can do things better and point us in the direction of providing an improved customer service.

Resolving complaints appropriately usually means that customers are happy that you have listened to them. Customers tend not to stay dissatisfied for long if their complaint or comments are taken on board and dealt with. These customers often become more loyal in the long term because we have taken the trouble to listen to them and put something right that was wrong.

How to encourage customers to complain

It is important that we make it easy for customers to comment on the service they have received. We should never make it difficult for customers to complain.

The best way to find out how customers feel is to ask them what they think about the service they have received.

Examples of questions we can ask:

- *It that everything you need sir?*
- *Is everything to your satisfaction?*
- *How can I be of service madam?*
- *Are you happy with the way in which that is packed sir?*



Other methods of obtaining feedback

- *Make it easy for customers to comment on happy sheets or short questionnaires that can be left in their hotel room or by leaving tick box cards with their restaurant bill etc.*
- *Providing a reward such as entry to a competition if customers give comments on how products and customer service can be improved.*
- *By using mystery shoppers to find out what it is like to be in your customers' shoes. (These are often independent people who are employed to ring up to make a booking or go into a restaurant or hotel to experience what it is like to be a customer there).*

Calming customers who are angry and upset

When customers are angry or upset they usually want to:

- *Get the problem off their chest.*
- *Voice their opinions.*
- *Feel they are being listened to.*
- *Feel they are being taken seriously.*
- *Get the problem sorted out.*
- *Feel that their business is valued.*

How could you calm down a customer?

- *Listen.*
- *Talk to them.*
- *Show empathy.*
- *Avoid being defensive.*
- *Agree common ground.*
- *Agree to solve their problem.*





Approaches to Handling Complaints

When handling complaints, always remember to follow your organisation's complaint handling guidelines, check your authority levels and the acceptable response times.

One way of handling complaints is to use the following process:

- ***Listen***
- ***Apologise***
- ***Solve***
- ***Thank***

Listen to the complaint.

Apologise

Apologise in a very positive way and thank them for bringing the problem to your attention. (Remember to check-out the guidelines for suspected food poisoning complaints at your workplace. You will need to be very careful how you apologise in these situations; such cases are normally dealt with by managers.)

Solve

Find out the facts. Complaints often get blown out of proportion – what exactly is the complaint about? By putting the complaint into your own words you will show the customer that you have understood what they have said. Let the customer know what you intend to do and then ACT immediately. Do not delay! You are on your way to putting things right.

Thank

Thank them for bringing the problem to your attention. Stress that it is the only way you can find out about any problems and put them right.

*Remember that support is often available in the workplace to help you with customer complaints; do not feel you must always do this alone. You will need to practise under supervision and shadow other people, until you develop your own appropriate style and feel comfortable and confident.

Other approaches to handling conflict with customers include:

- **Compromise** - *bargain or negotiate with the customer to get to a point where the customer is satisfied. For example, if the customer is unhappy with the level of service received, find a compromise with them, ie free drinks, a voucher for a meal to encourage them to come back, a discount from their bill - compromise with them, agree with them and do something that makes them happier and more satisfied with the service received overall.*
- **Co-operate** - *Listen to the customer and co-operate with their demands. Do as they say, if you feel it is reasonable and appropriate.*

Keep the Customer Informed on the Progress of the Complaint

Whenever you are dealing with a complaint of any nature you should always aim to keep your customer informed at every stage. Let the customer know what is happening to their complaint, how it might be dealt with, who is dealing with it and the time it might take to deal with it. This is good practice and by keeping the customer informed you are more likely to gain their co-operation as opposed to increasing their dissatisfaction at the level of service being received.

It is therefore important that you keep in touch with them at all times, and most of all ensure that the problem that caused them to complain is resolved to the satisfaction of all concerned. Never walk away from a problem, but always aim to ensure that even if you cannot resolve it, somebody else does and that you remain with the customer throughout.



Avoid Defensive Behaviour

When conflict arises, our natural human instinct is to defend ourselves, our colleagues or our organisation. This is a practice that should be avoided as it often deepens the conflict and creates further problems.

One of the key things you should remember in customer service is that 'the customer is always right' even when they are wrong! It is a little like innocent until proven guilty.

The important thing is that you do handle the complaint, you do listen to it and you do act on it. At all times, complaints should be handled with politeness, dignity and an interest in ensuring that the customer is satisfied. Remember, a happy customer is more likely to come back and spread the good word in a positive way. An unhappy customer could do untold damage to a business by spreading a bad word in a very negative way.

Practical Tips for Handling Complaints

Every complaint must be dealt with on an individual basis and each organisation will have their own methods and procedures for complaints handling. However, the following are a number of general approaches that can be adapted to individual circumstances:

- *Use appropriate body language to show empathy with the customer.*
- *Use diplomatic phrases to calm angry customers, for example, "This is obviously an unsatisfactory situation" or "I'm sorry that you're upset about this ...so here's what I'll do..."*
- *Apologise for the fact that there has been a problem and show you are taking the customer seriously.*
- *Do not interrupt the customer.*
- *Use effective listening skills to get an overview of the problem so you know what action to take next.*
- *Clarify details by repeating what has been said; for example, "So you say that the delivery van turned up 5 hours late".*
- *Make brief notes of the complaint - this will help you identify staff that you may want to talk with later.*

- *Be positive and encourage the customer so they do not feel embarrassed. For example, "Thank you for bringing this to my attention, hopefully I can sort out this situation".*
- *Inform the customer of the action you intend to take.*
- *In serious cases, you will have to explain that you cannot just take the matter at face value and must investigate to confirm the allegations and to deal with the matter fully.*

Who to Go to in Time of Trouble?

It is important that you understand the way to handle conflict within your own organisation, your level of authority in any given situation and when it is important to call your line manager in to support you and aim to resolve the situation.

Every organisation should have a way of doing this, perhaps a flow-chart that shows what you should do when a customer complains.

Often, as a junior member of staff, your role will be **'handling'** the complaint rather than **'managing'** the complaint, because you will not be in a position where you are able to make decisions about how to ensure that the customer is satisfied. Therefore, when a customer complains and you know that you cannot deal with the complaint, listen to them, apologise, thank them for bringing it to you attention and then find somebody who can solve the problem for you.

The Role of the Customer Services Department in Supporting Customer Services Activities

The role of the customer services department is traditionally to support front-facing staff in managing customer service delivery to a high standard, ensuring that customers are pleased with their overall experience.

The work they do will include planning for customer care and the development of customer care programmes. All of this will be based upon the organisation's willingness to be marketing oriented and customer focused. Therefore, when planning customer service departments should take the following issues into account, as they are important to the overall view the customer will have of the organisation:

- *Time taken to deal with the customer.*
- *How important is customer service and customer care relative to other aspects of the relationship?*
- *The importance of service to the customer.*
- *The degree of risk associated with delivering poor service.*
- *The dependence on staff and equipment.*
- *Contact with staff.*
- *Degree of control and responsibility of all staff involved in the care process.*
- *Skills and expertise required to successfully deliver customer care.*
- *Degree of routine in customer contact.*
- *Number and complexity of service contacts.*
- *Emotional behaviour of customers.*



Section Four Summary

The important thing to realise with customer complaints is that they are not always a bad thing. In fact they can be a good thing, in that they help organisations to learn about what displeases customers, and how to put the situation right.

To ensure that customers do not just walk away and never come back again, complaints must be taken very seriously and should be dealt with efficiently, effectively and in line with the customer's requirements. There used to be an old saying in marketing, which you still hear today 'the customer is king' or 'the customer is sovereign' meaning the customer is the most important person to the organisation.

Think back to the beginning of your learning where we highlighted to you that the customer should be at the centre of the organisation. This is very important, even in a complaints situation. It means that ultimately there is a desire to satisfy the customer, which will hopefully mean that their custom will be kept by the organisation.

Remember, retaining customers is much cheaper than getting new ones, so it pays to sort out customer complaints.