

Easy Way



Teach yourself...

Provide customer service

- ☒ Easy to follow
- ☒ Step-by-step instructions
- ☒ Written in plain English

A Cheryl Price Publication

Easy Way – Provide customer service

This book identifies elements of good service, providing customer service and responding to customer complaints. It contains simple step-by-step exercises to guide you through the learning process.

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Sample Document

Good Customer Service

Learning Outcomes

At the end of this section you should be able to –

- ☐ Understand the terms 'customer care' and 'customer service'
- ☐ Identify participants in the service chain and their role in the customer service process
- ☐ Understand the significance of the customer and good customer service to an organisation
- ☐ Identify personal and interpersonal factors that influence the service situation
- ☐ Apply good standards of personal presentation and grooming
- ☐ Understand how to portray a positive customer attitude, be motivated, interested, and responsive

Introduction to Customer Service

Most jobs require us to have contact with customers.

A job could involve any of the following:

- Selling a product
- Teaching
- Plumbing
- Working on a hotel reception desk
- Providing medical care

..... the list is endless!

All of these jobs involve customer contact, for example:

- Salespeople sell products to customers that come into the shop.
- Teachers teach children or adults, in a school, training centre or from home.
- Plumbers visit factories, shops, restaurants, homes, etc, to install items such as washing machines.
- Hotel receptionists welcome guests, assign rooms and take payment.
- Nurses and doctors examine patients and advise on treatment.



Exercise 1

Write down three jobs and how they involve contact with customers.

1

2

3

If you have a job that involves customer contact, you are a **direct link** between your organisation and its customers. How customers are treated by the people they meet in an organisation determines their first impression of that company – and first impressions count.

Therefore how **you** act will make a big impression on customers and is very important.

Why do Customers Matter?

If you are the person whom customers deal with, it is the standard of your **appearance, attitude, behaviour** and the **service** you offer that will affect what those customers think of you and your organisation. Based on whether they like what they see or not, customers will decide whether or not to come back to your organisation in the future.

If they decide not to come back, your organisation's business will suffer because customers are the people who pay money for products and services, which keeps your organisation in business.

This is why it is of great importance when meeting or speaking to customers to look, sound and act the part. We may not like to be judged on how we look, but it's all part of making customers feel that our company cares about them and the impression it makes.

Consider the following scenarios which show the effect making a *bad* first impression can have on customers.



You go into a hairdressers and the lady on the left offers to cut your hair. What do you do?

OUTCOME: You don't want hair like that, so you make your excuses and walk off to find another hairdressing salon.

You go to the local solicitors firm for help, and the gentleman on the right is at reception. What do you do?

OUTCOME: You don't want to deal with a firm that has such bad-tempered staff, so you look in the Yellow Pages to find another firm.



Both the hairdresser and the solicitors firm lost business because of the way their staff acted or looked. In reality the staff members may have been good at their jobs, but because they made a bad first impression, they weren't given the chance to show it.

These scenarios demonstrate how important first impressions are to the continued success of a business.

Exercise 2



Write down what your initial thoughts would be when first seeing these employees. What would you think of the organisations they work for (even before doing business with them)?

1

.....

.....

2

.....

.....



Sample Document

Who Are Your Customers?

Your customers are all the people that you deal with in your working life.

For example:

- A hairdresser's customers are people who want their hair cut, permed or coloured.
- A dental nurse's customers are patients who attend the dental surgery for treatment.
- A supermarket cashier's customers are shoppers who bring items to the till.
- An animal trainer's customers are pet owners who bring their pets in for training.



Customers can be *external*

Customers can be “external” (or “out-of-house”), which means that they come from outside your organisation.

Some employees may have a lot of contact with members of the public who are buying their goods or using their services, for example

- a supermarket worker
- a doctor
- an electrician
- a waitress
- a nurse
- a hotel doorman
- an airline steward/ess.

Quick Quiz

Can you think of two more employees with external customers?

.....
.....

External customers are essential to organisations. External customers buy its services or products, which keeps the organisation functioning. In effect, external customers pay the wages of the staff.

Customers can be *internal*

Customers can also be “internal” (or “in-house”), which means that they come from within the same organisation as you (eg colleagues in your department or in other departments, branches or regional offices).

Some people may spend most of their time dealing with other workers in the same organisation, for example

- a mailroom worker might spend a lot of time collecting and delivering post within the organisation
- a chef might work with the kitchen staff and the maitre d'.



Are you wondering why your work colleagues are called your ‘customers’? You probably usually think of customers as being people that come to your shop, clinic, centre, etc.

It is because employees are very valuable to a company. It costs a company a lot of money to *find*, *recruit* and *train* an employee. Once trained, an employee has invaluable knowledge about the best and most efficient way to do their job. It is therefore essential that they are respected and treated well at work, by other work colleagues as well as by managers.

Requirements set by Workplaces

Each place of work is different, and each has different requirements (or 'rules') regarding staff behaviour and presentation. When you enter a new workplace, one of the first things you will need to find out is: *How should I look while I am at work?* There are likely to be rules on this set down by the organisation – *these are examples of 'workplace requirements'*.

Requirements on this topic may cover such matters as:

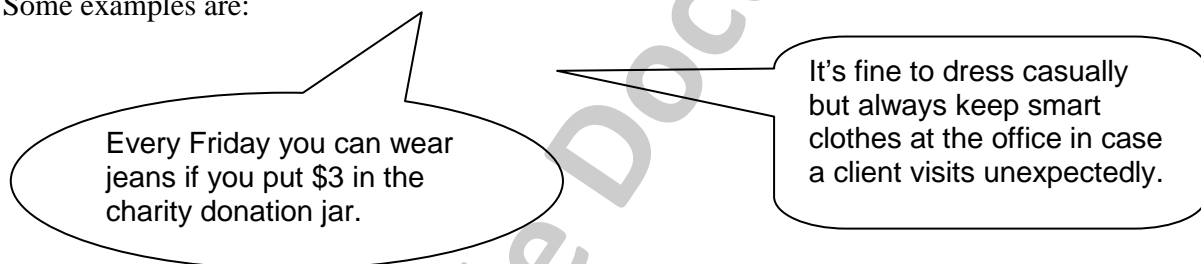
- Whether jeans can be worn at work
- Whether staff can wear shorts in the summer
- How much jewellery is appropriate
- Whether tattoos are acceptable

Workplace requirements give employees a framework so that they know what is expected of them – both by the employer and by customers.

Informal or unofficial rules

Some workplaces will have 'informal' rules. These rules might not be written down anywhere, but everybody knows them. This is most common in smaller workplaces where everybody knows each other, and rules can be communicated by talking to each other.

Some examples are:



New employees learn informal or 'unwritten' rules by watching each other and asking questions.

Formal or official rules

Some workplaces can be very strict with elaborate or in-depth requirements. For example, these could be places where the following are especially important:

- hygiene
- health and safety
- customer contact
- customer satisfaction.

These rules will be written down in a manual for you to refer to.

Examples of workplaces with formal rules on *how you look and what you wear* could include:

- A delicatessen where cleanliness sends customers the signal that staff are meticulous about hygiene.
- A horse-riding stable where staff must wear hard hats and appropriate riding gear to ensure their own safety and the safety of others.
- A beauty clinic where staff must have well applied make-up and be well-groomed to reflect the good effects that their services can have on customers.
- A law firm where smart personal presentation is essential to reflect the staff's professionalism and efficiency.

There will be other rules, not just about how you should look but on how you should act, procedures to follow, etc.

Example of formal rules in the workplace

Garth is a travel agent. The travel agency where he works specialises in expensive cruises, weddings-on-the-beach, honeymoons and 'once-in-a-lifetime' holiday breaks. The agency's customers spend a lot of money on very special holidays and so the travel agency has rules on:

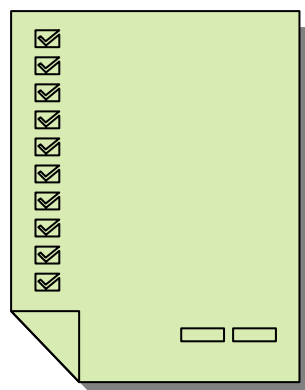
- the personal presentation of the travel agents – smart suits must be worn
- the style of furniture in the office – leather sofas and mahogany desks
- the way that customers are addressed – respectfully and formally, as Sir and Madam
- how customers are greeted – they are always offered a cup of tea or coffee
- the way that enquiries are discussed – customers sit in comfy sofas and are given a slide show of hotels and resorts from the region they are interested in. They are also given colour brochures to take away and offered the chance to meet with satisfied customers who have already taken their holiday.

Where to find information on your workplace's requirements and rules

It is essential that you learn what the particular rules are in your own workplace. Every workplace will be different.

Rules on personal presentation and how you deal with customers could be found in any of the following ways.

- Guidelines
- Job description
- Employment contract
- Workplace manual
- Procedures Guide
- Health and safety manual
- Your workplace internet or intranet site
- On a notice board
- By asking your supervisor or line manager.



If you have a job, ask your supervisor to help you find the rules if there are any. Bear them in mind when you are reading the next sections of this Workbook.

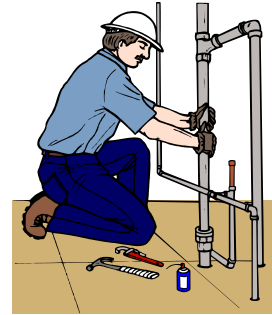
Customer Care and Customer Service

What is customer service?

Customer service is the action of supplying customers with what they need.

Some examples of customer service are:

- A librarian completing the procedures to lend a book out
- A builder laying the foundations of a house
- A telephone company setting up an account for a new client.



Exercise 3

Give three more examples of customer service.

- 1
- 2
- 3

What is customer care?

However, if an organisation only does the bare minimum in providing a service to a customer it doesn't give the customer any reason to want to go back to that organisation rather than any other. The organisation doesn't stand out as special.

Therefore, to ensure maximum *customer satisfaction*, organisations have to provide more than just efficient customer service. In other words, customers need to receive more than just what they have asked for and paid for. That means providing a service that is over and above the minimum necessary to serve the customer. This is called *customer care*.

Examples of good customer care

Taking the examples of *customer service* given above, *good customer care* might involve:

- The librarian telling readers about other books that they might enjoy or offering to order a book that might be of interest to them.
- The builder explaining the building plans to the owner and tidying up after him or herself at the end of each day.
- The telephone company providing information on other services offered and ringing new clients up after two weeks to check that all is well and to see if the client needs any assistance.

In order to provide the best customer care, you must remember that *every aspect* of business has an impact on customer satisfaction.

- Good customer care will earn an organisation a good reputation. Word of mouth is very powerful and works in favour or against a business.
- Satisfied customers will remain loyal to a company that has taken care of their needs.
- Encouraging customer feedback helps to improve products. This will increase profits and help the business grow.

To illustrate this point, picture yourself in the following situation.

Example of customer care

You go into a café as a diner for a meal. The waiter takes your order, serves the food and gives you the bill.

Doesn't sound too bad, does it? After all, you got your table, you got your food and you got the bill.

BUT when you go out for a meal, you want to have fun and you want to feel that others around you are enjoying their evening. So you want the waiter to smile, you might want advice on specials and on drinks. You want prompt service and attention.

These aren't things that you are directly paying for, but they would contribute towards a much better evening out and make you much more likely to return in the future.



Whenever you are providing customer service, put yourself in the customer's shoes and think about how you could do more than the obvious. This sets your organisation apart from other organisations that offer a similar service to you and will ensure better customer care, greater customer satisfaction and – hopefully – repeat business.

Examples of things to say or do to make your organisation special

Waiter: "As it is raining, would you like me to call a cab for you?"

Hospital information desk attendant: "You need to go to Ward 4A. I will draw you a map so that you don't get lost."

Receptionist in a lawyer's office: "May I offer you a cup of tea or a glass of water while you are waiting for Mrs Brown?"

Theatre box office: "Would you like me to add your name to our information mailing list?"

Exercise 4

What could you do to offer the best customer care in the following situations?

- 1 A customer comes into your music shop and asks for a CD that is out of stock.

.....
.....

- 2 A customer asks for pricing information on joining your gym.

.....
.....

The Service Chain

The **service chain** is the process by which your organisation serves its customers. It is literally the chain of people (both within the organisation and in other organisations) that are involved in serving your customers. Everyone in the service chain contributes towards making your customers happy and helping to ensure that they return to give your organisation more business.



The name 'service chain' is a good choice of words because good customer service – as we saw on the previous page – is more than just the process of serving a customer. You might at first think that the only people involved in 'serving' the customer are those people that directly talk to the customer. But there are many more people involved than that.

Summary of the service chain



1. The **customer** is the most important part of any service chain. The customer could be a big business that buys in bulk or it could be an individual who just needs one product or one order a month. A company must provide great service to all its customers, no matter what size they are.

2. The next members of the service chain are **people who deal directly with the customer (the front-line staff)**. These include shop assistants, cashiers, managers, staff who answer calls to the telephone order line, as well as staff in the complaints and refunds departments. Anyone who talks directly to customers is in the front line. Front-line staff members must ensure that the customer is dealt with promptly.



3. The service chain continues with the **back-up staff**, such as the accounts team and the ordering department. These staff don't directly deal with customers but their actions and the standard of service that they offer makes a big impact on the ultimate service offered to the customer. These staff are the 'back-room' people who provide support services to the front-line staff so that the front-line staff can work efficiently.

4. The service chain also includes **suppliers, manufacturers and distributors**. These other organisations will have an impact on how well we serve our customers. For example, if supplies are delivered late or manufacturers increase their prices without prior notice or distributors become out of stock and unable to supply particular products, these can all adversely impact on the quality of service that we are able to offer to our customers.



Manufacturers produce goods to meet customer expectations. The goods are usually sold to distributors.

Distributors buy or import goods from the manufacturer and sell them to Suppliers. These need to be delivered to suppliers on time to meet customer demands.

Suppliers sell goods to the retailer or outlet stores – they generally do not deal directly with the public but are responsible for timely deliver of goods.

What is the Significance of Good Customer Service?

Take the example of a supermarket called FoodCity. If customers think that the people who work at FoodCity do a good job and offer a good service, it will have the following effects.

Customers will be happy with FoodCity and will enjoy shopping there. 'Customer *satisfaction*' will be high.

Customers will show *loyalty* to FoodCity in the future. So, for example, if they move house they may still travel to FoodCity to do their shopping even if going to a different supermarket is more convenient.

Customers will tell their friends about FoodCity enhancing its *reputation* as a good place to shop and more people will come and shop there. This is called 'spreading the word'.

Customers will feel good about FoodCity and are more likely to speak up if they do have a problem. For example, if they find that FoodCity doesn't stock something they would like to buy, they will tell the manager in the hope that she can organise for it to be stocked. They will do this because they like FoodCity and don't want to go anywhere else. *Feedback* like this is very important to an organisation and helps it grow.

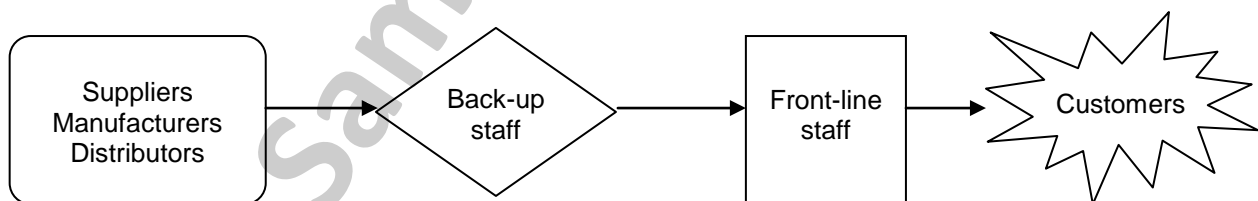
These effects all lead to more business and increased profits for FoodCity. Profitable businesses will grow, which in turn will create new jobs and opportunities for the staff there (you!).

Exercise 5

Take the example of a Leisure Centre. If customers are given good service, what effect might that have on the business?

.....
.....

The customer is king!



Everyone in the service chain must perform to a high standard to provide a customer with good customer service and care. Even if the front-line staff give a good service, the customer will not have a good experience if other members of the service chain are not working efficiently. For an example of this, read the following scenario involving a company called *Write On*, which sells stationery.

Example: How problems could arise in Write On's service chain

Jean Parsons, the office manager of a large shipping company, telephones Write On's telephone ordering line to place an urgent order for some mailing labels. Jean's order is taken by Jake Waka. Jean is very impressed with Jake's service. Jake is polite and helpful and tells Jean about discounts that she would qualify for and special offers that are currently available. Jean asks Jake if her invoice can be sent to her before the end of the financial year as it is important for Jean to balance her budget before that time. Jake knows that the in-house procedures require all invoices to be drawn up on the same day of the order so he tells Jean that that won't be a problem.

Jake processes the order and makes a special point of telling the accounting department that Jean needs her invoice within a week. However despite Jake's best efforts the accounting department are short-staffed and do not invoice Jean in the time frame that she needed it.

Worse still, when Jake follows up Jean's order a week later to check all is well he discovers that the order hasn't even been despatched as Write On's suppliers had had flood damage at their premises and hadn't been able to supply Write On with any labels (and hadn't let them know in advance).

Jean is understandably dissatisfied with the service that she has received and Jake is disappointed as he thought he had done a good job.

Why was there such a poor outcome when Jake had given such good customer service?

In this case, problems occurred further down the service chain – after Jake had performed his part.

The accounts team did not deal directly with the customer, but their failure to get Jean's invoice to her on time would have impacted badly on the way that Jean viewed Write On.

In addition the suppliers didn't make their usual delivery and didn't tell Write On that they had a problem at their factory. This meant that Jean did not receive the goods that she had ordered despite Jake having taken all the details down correctly.