

# Addressing Customer Needs

Facilitator Guide



## Preface

The first step in improving customer service is to determine what customer's value in their interactions with your organization. What do they want? What do they need? The most obvious way to find out what customers want and need is to ask them. Businesses spend lots of time and money surveying customers, and they often come up with valuable feedback. But the people on the front lines of customer service, people who interact with customers on a daily basis, can gain useful insights into what customer's value just by simply listening to them

*Revisit the Perfect Experience principals Know Me ~ Show Me You Care ~ Make it Easy ~ Help Me*

## Understanding the Customer's Situation

Customer needs are usually fairly self-explanatory, at least on a basic level. Customers will come in many different forms, and each of these forms will present certain challenges. There will be some customers who are very clear about their questions. There are others who have only the vaguest idea of how to ask but know they need your help filling in the blanks. There are some who will have a lot of questions, and others who will simply want you to do what they ask. In the first few sentences a customer says to you, you will be able to identify their needs or situation and can operate from there. The benefit of experience is in how it allows you to make quick decisions and satisfy the customer in an efficient and courteous manner.

## Staying Outside of the Box

Many people argue that the quickest way of judging a situation is to pre-judge it. Those who trust their instincts to give them the right steer in a situation may often get it right, and find that there is real benefit it doing so. Certainly, the advantages of having good instincts are clearly evidenced by good results in terms of quality monitoring scores. However, it can also be negative to be too quick off the mark in terms of identifying a customer's needs. The results of this course of action can be that you appear either presumptuous or incompetent and you may even insult the customer by being so bold. It is generally worth allowing the customer a chance to let you know what they want.

Apart from any other reason to pause and listen, there is the fact that it is just good manners to do so. Appearing impolite and almost trying to give the impression that you know the customer's needs better than they themselves do, is not a good thing. What you really want to portray is that you have the wisdom to recognize the customer's needs and the good grace to let them make things clear themselves. You will benefit a lot more from showing consideration than you will from trying to read their minds.

## Meeting Basic Needs

When providing customer service, the priorities of the company should match the priorities of the customer. At a minimum, you should be sure that you are meeting customer's basic needs.

*Reinforce the Perfect Experience principals Know Me ~ Show Me You Care ~ Make it Easy ~ Help Me*

- **Friendliness:** Friendliness is the most basic of all customer needs, usually associated with being greeting graciously and with a smile. We all want to be acknowledged and welcomed by someone who is glad to hear from us. A customer should never feel they are an intrusion on your work day
- **Understanding and Empathy:** Customers need to feel that you understand and appreciate their circumstances without criticism or judgment
- **Fairness:** We all need to feel we are being treated fairly. Customers may get annoyed and defensive when they feel they are subject to unfair treatment
- **Control:** Control represents the customer's need to feel they have an impact on the way things turn out
- **Options and alternatives:** Customers need to feel that other avenues are available to getting what they want accomplished. They realize that they may be in uncharted waters, and they depend on us to be "in the know"
- **Information:** Customers need to be educated and informed about our products and services, and they don't want us leaving anything out

Every customer who makes a call provides you with a chance to provide perfect customer service. Every customer will have certain needs that have to be met in order to feel that they can hang up satisfied. The customer's needs fall into two main categories – basic needs and specific needs

## Basic Needs

Basic needs are those needs which are absolutely essential to the inquiry. It's the reason they are calling in the first place. Their basic need may be something quite specific or something vague. A basic need might be something like "I really need to find participating providers near my home, can you help?" Over and above this there may be additional things that they need, but the basic requirement is the thing that they state in their approach to you.

## Intersections

Conversational waste is rooted in focusing on differences or disagreements with no attempt to find intersections, or common ground. A basic pattern or architecture for interaction that produces value is composed of three segments: 1) Align, 2) Act, and 3) Adjust. Picture these three elements as parts of a wheel. In this paradigm, each turn of the wheel (or conversational cycle) increases and strengthens relationships and value.

- "Align conversations" to unite people by finding the point at which separate purposes *intersect* to find a shared purpose.
- "Act conversations" make commitments and launch action to resolve the issue at hand. If someone perceives you are aware and respectful of his/her purposes, concerns, and circumstances, he/she will share information needed to find a beneficial solution thereby creating value.
- "Adjust conversations" translate experience into guidance and improvement; in other words, capitalizing on teachable moments to better educate consumers

## Going the Extra Mile

**Once you have met that customer's basic needs, what could you do to show that you are committed to providing perfect service?**

Going the extra mile is important for the very reason that is not necessary. The customer will remember the things that someone did for them that were completely unexpected that another organization might not have done. The thing about providing customer service above and beyond is that it allows you to show just how good you are at providing a perfect customer experience. It is easy to pervade a certain, expected level of customer service – by many people's estimation it is a minimum consideration. It is the extras that will make the difference, much of the time. So remember, as far as those extras go, it is important to consider how you can best provide the customer not only what they need, but something extra which will stay in their memory for some time.

## Addressing Complaints

Customer complaints should always be taken seriously. You can turn a negative situation into a positive by treating complaints as opportunities to show customers how much you care about providing perfect service.

### Customer's Bill of Rights:

- To be taken seriously
- To be listened to
- To be respected
- To receive a resolution



No business, no matter how big or small likes to have customers complain about the service they have received or the product they purchased. Mistakes happen in life, and in business, and so much of what we are about is shown by how we deal with the consequences of these mistakes. The situation which a customer is complaining about may not even have been your error to begin with, but regardless of who made the error, taking ownership of it and dealing with a complaint in a gracious, helpful manner can turn an awkward situation into one which showcases the best of your abilities. There is, in many cases,

## Group Activity

a tendency to become defensive when someone is complaining – especially if they are doing so in a very forthright manner. Maintaining a professional tone at these times can be difficult, but managing to do it and solve the problem can showcase a positive side of you and the business. Even if you think the issue about which the customer is complaining is trivial, not a cause for complaint, or not your company's fault, it is wise to give the customer their chance to speak, show that you take them seriously, and offer to do whatever you can. It's also good to close calls by thanking the caller so they know you are sincere about wanting their feedback and the opportunity to be their partner in resolution of challenges.

<b>Estimated Time</b>	10 minutes
<b>Topic Objective</b>	To develop a positive approach to handling complaints
<b>Materials Required</b>	None
<b>Activity</b>	<p>Ask participants to break into small groups to come up with ideas for a customer's Bill of Rights. After five minutes, ask the groups to report on their ideas. Write their ideas on a flip chart. Be sure their ideas include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To be taken seriously</li><li>• To be listened to</li><li>• To be respected</li><li>• To receive a resolution</li></ul>