



Customer Service to Build the Public Trust



Disclaimer

This course is intended as general information only and does not carry the force of legal opinion.

For legal guidance, contact your county attorney.



Thanks to

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service would like to thank

Renee Evenson of Bullseye Publishing

for graciously permitting us to base this course on the
content of her book,

Powerful Phrases for Effective Customer Service.



Welcome

This course is designed to help you build the public's trust through effective customer service.

After this course, you will be able to

- Recognize effective customer service strategies
- Apply effective customer service strategies in challenging situations
- Choose an effective customer service strategy when a customer interaction has gone wrong

One hour of continuing education will be offered upon completion of this course.



Unit 1

Customer Service Best Practices



How customer service builds trust

Everyone who comes in to the tax office has their hand in their pocket to give up some of their hard-earned money.

This strains customer interactions from the outset.

If customers leave the tax office smiling because they had an excellent customer service experience, it builds the public's trust in the tax office.



For internal clients, too

Internal clients should be treated with the same attention to excellent customer service.

If government partners served by the tax office walk away smiling, it builds intra-governmental cooperation and effective public service.



Meet and Greet





Meet and Greet Critique

What was done well

- Smiling at customer
- Enthusiastic response to customer
- Offer of timely service

What could have been better

- Keep appearance neat
- Eat and drink away from public's view
- Be aware of how illness impacts customer experience – be mindful of not passing germs



Meet and Greet Best Practices

- A positive first impression will often diffuse any negative feelings and thoughts a customer may have.
- Do this by:
 - Smiling (even if talking on the phone)
 - Giving phone-in customers your name
 - Addressing customers you know by name
 - Looking customers in the eye
 - Speaking in a positive tone of voice
 - Maintaining a professional appearance
 - Keeping good posture



Understand and Assist





Understand and Assist Critique

What was done well

- Asking a clarifying question
- Giving guidance
- Offer of timely service

What could have been better

- Let customer finish what they are saying without finishing it for them
- Examine the need before jumping to a conclusion about the service needed
- Keep personal technology and communications separate from your workspace and time



Understand and Assist Best Practices

- Block out all distractions when serving customers.
- Listen carefully and repeat back to them your understanding of what they need.
- Let the customer finish their statement even if you have heard the same request time and time again.
- Ask clarifying questions to show you are trying to understand their exact need.
- You may want to take notes so the customer does not need to repeat information you should have gotten the first time.



Agree and Acknowledge





Agree and Acknowledge Critique

What was done well

- Gaining agreement from customer even though he hesitated and was unsure
- Proactively addressing a solution to the need
- Smiling, enthusiasm

What could have been better

- Explaining the situation thoroughly to help the customer understand what is needed



Best Practices

- Find the best solution as quickly as possible
- Don't assume they have given you all of the information you need to help them get what they really need. Use your knowledge and experience to get them the best solution.
- Focus on what you can do, not on what you cannot do.
- Ask phone customers if you can put them on hold if addressing the best solution requires you to search for a while
- Handle email requests and requests from internal partners in the same way you would handle the customers in front of you



Customer Service Basics Quiz



Unit 2

Customer Service Challenges



Handling Challenging Customers

When serving the public, you need to be prepared to handle all kinds of situations.

Not all customers are happy, agreeable and easily pleased.

You should try to leave every customer with a smile despite their challenging behaviors. Just because a customer behaves badly does not give you permission to respond in the same way.



The Deal Maker





Who are the Deal Makers?

Deal Makers think they can convince you to give them a special deal.

They may make you think that others have given them special deals in the past, or may appeal to a “celebrity” aspect to their character.

Other Deal Makers may try to appeal to your sympathies by sharing their story so you will feel bad for them and give them a break.



Rise to the Challenge

Never let a customer guilt you into compromising your ethics or standard operating procedure. Stand your ground and be firm.

Keep your cool. Don't hesitate in standing up for what is right.

Stay in control of the situation by expressing that what they are asking is outside what can be offered – come back with an offer of what you can do.

Offer a solution that calls their bluff. Once the Deal Maker sees that you are standing firm, they will often back down.



Dealing with Deal Makers Quiz

A woman comes to your window with two small children and a baby. She looks like she has not slept for days. The children are not clean. She proceeds to describe her situation. She does not have the right paperwork because of her situation. She then asks for you to help her out with the cost and to watch her children while she goes back out to the car to get something. What's the most appropriate response?

- A. Stand firm, express your sympathy and ask her to follow procedure.**
- B. Send her to the local food bank.
- C. Watch her children, complete the right paperwork for her while she heads to the parking lot and help her with the cost of the service.



The Dissatisfied





Dealing with the Dissatisfied

Often, a dissatisfied customer has tried to meet their needs by trying things that would not work.

For example, customers can become dissatisfied if they think they should be able to complete a task online, only to discover that the system is not designed for that task.

Additionally, if customers have been able to perform a task in a certain way in another county, but are not able to do that same task in the same way in this county, they can become easily dissatisfied.



Rise to the Challenge

Empathize with the customer. Show that you understand their frustration.

Demonstrate confidence and competence. Show that you are in control and can get a solution to their problem.

Ask questions so you can get the full picture of what the customer needs so that perceived “misses” are not repeated.

Some customers will not be satisfied regardless of what you do. Do not take this personally. Move on to the next customer.



Satisfying the Dissatisfied Quiz

A woman comes in to your office. Every time you begin to speak, she speaks over you. She has recently moved to this county. She had tried to pay online, but the system would not let her do what she wanted. She assures you that your county needs this online service because her old county had it. You kept trying to offer her help, but she continued to talk over you, getting louder and louder with every response. What is your best choice?

- A. Ask her to calm down or you'll call security.
- B. Listen quietly, express that you are sorry the online system didn't work for that particular service, offer her help with the solution she's needing, smile and take care of her needs quickly and thoroughly.**
- C. Write down the web link where she can perform the task and send her on her way.



The Demeaning





Dealing with the Demeaning

Demeaning customers find ways to get under your skin through their comments or their actions.

This comes from a skewed sense of self and their place in the world.

Customers may demean you for how you look, how you dress, your race, or your gender, among other things.

They often have the idea that they are being helpful to you by offering unsolicited advice.



Rise to the Challenge

Resist the urge to respond in kind. Do not sink to their level. Do not agree with them, even jokingly.

Keep in mind that the customer is the one with the problem, not you. Do not let their actions influence your handle on the situation or your self esteem.

A brief, “Thank you for your advice” can stop the commentary right in its tracks, especially if you are finished with the interaction and it’s time for them to go.

Always be respectful, even if people are not respectful to you.



Dealing with the Demeaning Quiz

A customer comes in wearing fitness gear, looking like he just came from the gym. He has a full sleeve tattoo and is wearing a shirt that says “I heart CrossFit”. Through the course of your interaction with him, he mentions his gym, how much he loves it, then looks at you and says that you might benefit from losing some weight. He goes on and on about how extra weight is terrible for your health. He spots the blended coffee drink on your desk and hits you right where it counts: “You know, if you gave those up, you could drop that belly off of you, and I think you’d just feel better about yourself.”

What is the best response?

- A. Go into your family history of thyroid problems, how you broke your foot last fall and can’t even walk a mile, how much weight each of your kids made you gain and agree to join his gym.
- B. “You know, it’s rude to comment about someone’s weight, and to assume that I feel bad about myself because of it. Don’t judge. You don’t know me!”
- C. **Take a deep breath, and say, “Thanks for that advice. Looks like you’re all set to go. Have a wonderful day!”**



The Angry





Dealing with the Angry

Angry customers are usually angry because of a mistake. This can be a real mistake or just a perceived mistake.

The customer could be angry at something else, and you are just catching the brunt of it.

The customer could also be the type of person who is angry with everything, and that includes the tax office. In this case, no amount of good service will make them happy.



Rise to the Challenge

Before taking care of the need, you must diffuse the anger. Apologize for what has happened, even if you were not responsible. Say, “I’m so sorry that happened.”

Assume your customer has a valid reason to be angry. Respond in such a way to try to cool that anger. Say something like, “I’d hate it if that happened to me.”

If the customer goes on and on, try to bring them to a point. Say something like, “I hate to cut you off, but I need to ask you a few questions so we can get to the bottom of this – is that ok?”

Resist the urge to speak to them in the same tone of voice. Keep your cool and stay respectful.



Dealing with the Angry Quiz

A man in a camouflage jacket walks in to your office. He unzips his jacket so you can see his “Doomsday Preppers do it better” t-shirt. Embroidered on his hat is the slogan, “Come and Take it” over a canon. During the course of your interaction with him, he makes several snide remarks about taxation, small government and the end of the world as we know it. He gets pretty fired up and loud, especially when it comes time for the financial transaction. He leans over the counter, points his finger at you and launches into a long speech about the purposes our forefathers wanted government to fulfill, the ills of the welfare system, and the evils of the nanny state. What is your best response?

- A. Agree and say “Amen, brother!”
- B. Take a long drink out of your “Proud to be a Texas Democrat” coffee cup, strategically held in your hand to point that slogan his way.
- C. **“It sounds like you’re pretty excited about that. Thank you so much for coming in today. I hope you have a great afternoon.”**



The Obnoxious





That was so obnoxious!

Obnoxious behavior comes in many forms. These customers can be disrespectful, demeaning, demanding or just plain crass and rude. They take these behaviors to an extreme level.

Many customers will not back down even with a clear explanation of the limitations of you can do to meet their needs.



Rise to the Challenge

Stay above the fray. Do not take any of this personally.

Do not let your feathers get ruffled by their behavior. Their behavior is about expressing some emotion they have or drawing attention to themselves. Don't give in or agree because it will only encourage more of the same behavior.

Use a positive tone of voice and keep your body language open and friendly. They are looking to rile you up. Don't let them.



Dealing with the Obnoxious Quiz

A caller requests a service in an unreasonable timeframe. She want a service that typically takes two-days performed by 5:00 this afternoon. You have explained a number of times that this cannot be done. The customer insists on having the service performed immediately. She begins to call you names. What is your best response?

- A. Hang up the phone. She will probably call back. Let someone else deal with her.
- B. Take a deep breath, remember that obnoxious behavior is not going to ruffle your feathers. Let her know the limits of what you can do and gain agreement that this is the best solution.**
- C. Defend yourself from her verbal attacks.



The Overly Friendly





Dealing with the Overly Friendly

Overly friendly customers are often flirtatious. They want to tell you their life story. Often, they want to catch up on gossip or news if they know you outside the office.

These overly friendly interactions interfere with smooth customer service for other customers.



Rise to the Challenge

Ignoring flirtatious customer advances. Openly redirect their behavior by saying, “I’m going to help you with your request, but please, I’d prefer we stick to business.”

If a personal friend engages you in a long conversation, offer to meet them later or give them a call after hours.



Overly Friendly Quiz

A high school classmate comes in to your office for a service. When you are taking care of what she needs, she proceeds to give you the rundown on what each of her kids are doing, what your high school ex-boyfriend's children are doing, what her aunt's medical dramas have been, how her mother is fed up with her job, and when her brother leaves for his next military deployment. She takes a breath to launch into her next story. What is your best response?

- A. Let her go on – there's no one waiting in line right now, anyway, and she doesn't get out very much.
- B. Tell her you will be in trouble with your boss if you are caught spending too much time with one customer.
- C. **Before she catches her breath, offer to catch up with her later over lunch or at your kids' soccer game that evening. You've got some things to catch up on for work.**



The Pushy





Dealing with Pushy Customers

Pushy customers see their needs as more important than the needs of others. They do not care that you are taking care of another customer, they will interrupt you anyway.

Pushy customers may show impatient behaviors like foot tapping, crossed arms, deep sighing or eye rolling.

Pushy customers may begin the conversation before you are ready.



Rise to the Challenge

If a pushy customer interrupts your service to another customer, politely excuse yourself from the first customer, communicate to the pushy customer that you will get to them in a reasonable amount of time, then complete the transaction with the first customer.

If a pushy customer cuts you off, give them a chance to cool off, speak their mind, then continue the transaction.

If a pushy customer cuts in line, give a reminder that others have been waiting to be served, and direct the person to the end of the line.

Be firm. Stay respectful. Keep your cool.



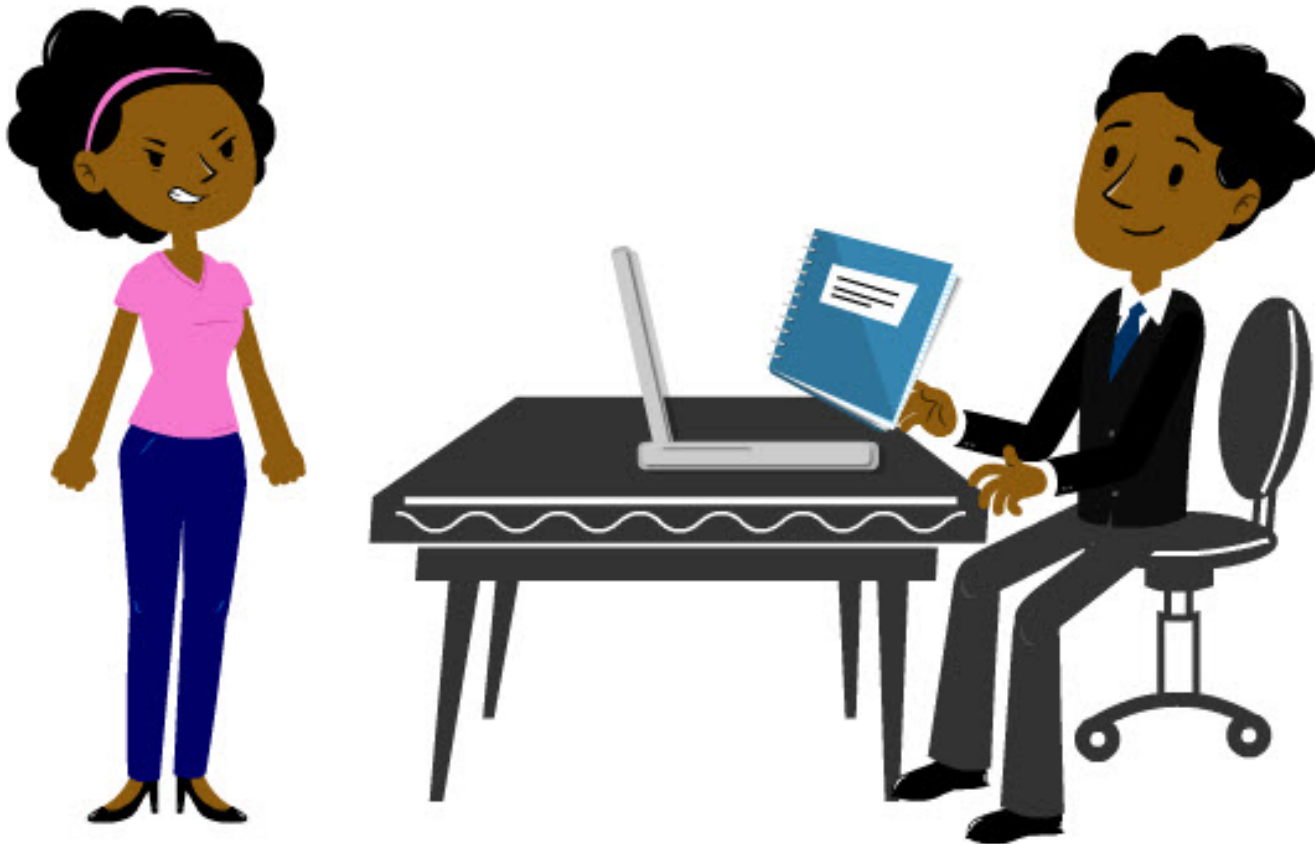
Pushy Customer Quiz

You receive an email request from a local government partner. They missed a deadline. You have been handling a big project, so you respond that you are not able to help them because they have missed a deadline. Immediately, you receive several emails from that same partner that ask for exception after exception. What's your best response?

- A. **Be clear about the deadline and the limitations of what you can do for them.**
- B. Give in – this is a long standing relationship and the staff has turned over, so they were not aware of the consequences of missing the deadline.
- C. Do not respond to the request.



The Swearing





Dealing with Swearing Customers

Customers may not recognize that they are using profanity because it is a part of their everyday language.

They may not be able to recognize that profanity is not appropriate in a business setting.

Angry customers may swear because they are lashing out.



Rise to the challenge

Ignoring profanity often works. Sometimes a raised eyebrow is all that it takes to let a customer know that they have spoken inappropriately.

When you do need to call it into the open, say something like, “I want to help you, and I think I would understand your needs much better if you could stop using profanity.”



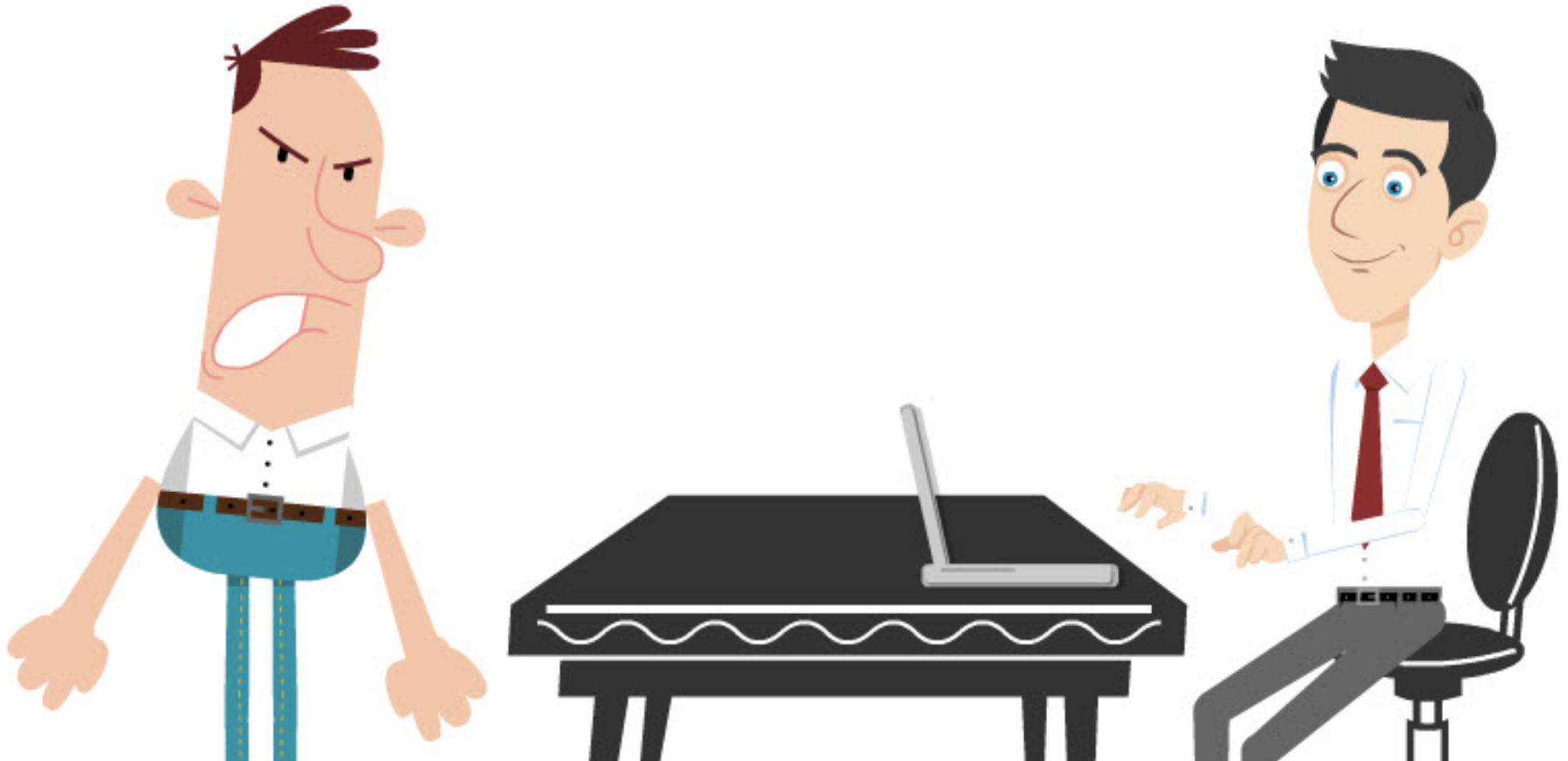
Swearing Quiz

A man comes in with two small children. The children are loud and making a scene. He seems unconcerned until a woman in line asks him to get a hold of his kids. He curses under his breath, then curses at the children. This starts a string of cursing that is eventually aimed at you. How should you respond?

- A. Let it go. He will be gone after you serve him.
- B. Curse back at him to show him how ridiculous he sounds.
- C. Ask him politely to stop cursing so you can help him get what he needs.**



The Threatening





Dealing with Threatening Customers

Customers who threaten you personally, any public office or the government in general must be taken seriously.

Assume the threat is real.

Threats can come from people who are angry, mentally unstable or who are feeling like they are not getting what they want.

Customers may threaten as a last-ditch effort to get attention.

Phone customers feel more free to speak their mind and may threaten more readily than in-person customers.



Rise to the challenge

There may be protocols at your place of work that provide direction for dealing with threats. Follow those protocols.

Let them know you take threats very seriously.

Stay calm. Do not show fear.

Say nothing that might escalate the situation.

Say something like, “I’d like to help you, but I can only do that if you stop threatening me.”



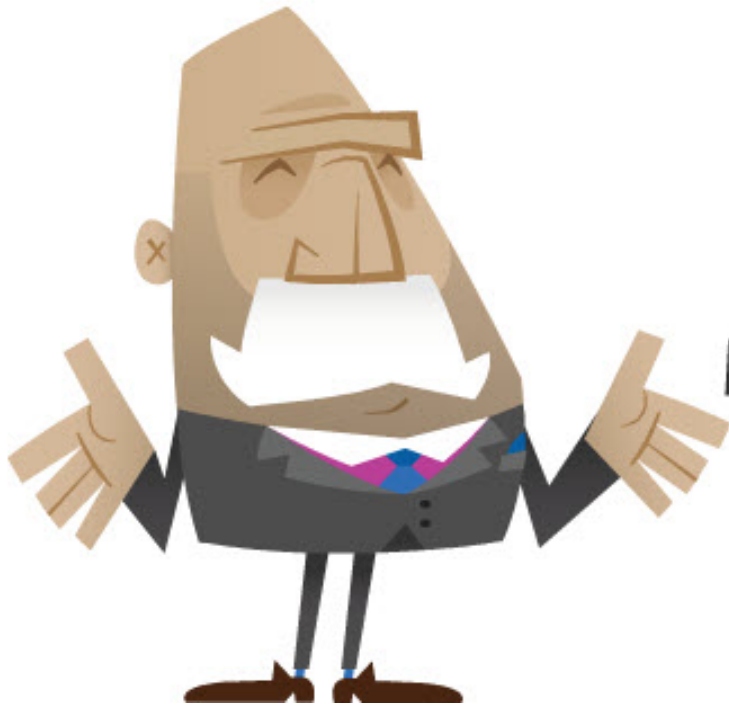
Threatening Quiz

A phone customer is not getting his way. He threatens to come to your office and “teach you a lesson.” What is your best response?

- A. **“Mr. Jackson, we here at the tax office take threats very seriously. If I am going to help you, please stop threatening me.”**
- B. “Mr. Jackson, Id’ love to see you try. Now, on to business.”
- C. “Mr. Jackson, that was out of line. I’m having police sent to your house right now.”



The Confused





Clarifying for Confused Customers

Confusion can come from many sources like a language barrier, a lack of understanding of the system, inexperience, or a medical condition.

Confused customers may look perplexed and may not make eye contact with you.

Listen for statements from the customer that sound like questions, or for questions when a normal customer would be responding with statements.

They may ask no questions because they are afraid of looking stupid.



Rise to the Challenge

Experts often assume that everyone else knows what they mean. Be clear in your communication, especially with new people or those with a language barrier.

When a language barrier exists, speak slowly and clearly (not necessarily loudly) using words that are easy to understand.

Ask questions to determine the source of the confusion, then address that source.

Feel free to point to text on a page or draw to address any further misunderstanding.



Confused quiz

An older man has waited patiently in line, and he steps to your station with a smile. During the interaction, you pick up on the fact that he does not know where he is or what he really needs. He is in the wrong place. What's the first thing you should do?

- A. Patiently ask him some questions to figure out what he really needs.**
- B. Get him a cup of coffee and offer to call his wife or children. They are probably very concerned about him and do not know that he is here.
- C. Tell him he is in the wrong place and point toward the right place down the hall and six doors down, then take a right across the parking lot to the other building where the right place is.



Unit 3

Customer Service Do-Over: Rescuing a Bad Situation



Oops: Poor First Impression

When someone gets a poor first impression, you have to work harder to interact successfully with them.

Customers may frown or cross their arms when they have a bad first impression of you.

They may look down or away from you, or at the thing that is giving them a bad impression (something on your shirt or a messy workspace, for example).



Rescuing Poor First Impressions

Rescue a poor first impression by giving a heartfelt greeting.

Apologize for what has caused the impression. If possible, treat it with humor.

Move quickly to serve the customer.

Stay positive throughout your interaction. Smile and act confident.



Oops: I can't understand you

When you can't understand a customer, it's difficult to serve them.

Misunderstandings come from language barriers, conversation full of slang or lingo, or from those who speak at a low volume or with a speech impediment.



Rescuing Misunderstandings

It is your job to get customers what they need. If you can't understand what they need, you should ask them.

Say, "I apologize, but I'm having trouble understanding – would you mind repeating that, please?"

Make eye contact.

Look for body language signals that may add to your understanding.

Repeat what you understand as the need before proceeding with service.



Oops: Someone made a mistake

Everyone makes mistakes. How they are handled makes a difference.

Mistakes can be made when you are distracted, have too much to do, when you're new, or just plain tired.

Sometimes you will need to fix a mistake someone else made. Some mistakes are bigger than others, especially when considering the long-term impact of some mistakes.



Rescuing a Mistake

Never blame the customer. Never blame a co-worker. You may want to discuss the error later with the co-worker that made the mistake. Do not talk about co-worker's mistakes in front of other co-workers.

When dealing the customer, own the mistake.

Apologize for it even if you did not make the mistake.

Just do what is needed to fix the error.



Oops: I have no clue what to do

New employees that are not fully up to speed in their job duties can easily have no clue what to do.

This happens especially when special cases or small exceptions occur.

It also happens when you are asked to fill in for someone else's duties while they are away.



Rescuing Your “No Clue” Moment

Own the moment – tell the customer you are new and that it might take longer for you to get the transaction just right.

Do not get flustered. Stay cool. Give yourself a moment to think.

If you need to locate someone to help you, let the customer know that you will be asking for help before you leave to find help.

Say something like, “I’m not sure how to do that. This will be a great learning opportunity for me!”



Oops: I'm having a bad day

Everyone has bad days. If you have a bad day on the one day each year that a customer comes in to the tax office, you run the risk of giving them a year's worth of bad impression about your office.

Your day can sometimes turn in an instant – a bad customer interaction, an alarming text message from an ailing parent, feeling ill,



Rescue Your Bad Day

Customers deserve to be treated well regardless of how you are feeling.

Leave your emotional baggage at the door.

Focus on your customers and your service to them. Help them have a better day – it will make your day better.

Take a break to give yourself a pep talk, get a drink of water or a snack and decide that things will get better.

Smile and move forward with your day!



Recap

Keep your cool.

Take a deep breath before interacting with challenge customers.

Don't let customer behavior impact your self-esteem.

Be honest and use humor to deflect a bad situation you have caused.

If a customer treats you a certain way, it does not give you the right to treat them that way, too.

Decide that one bad experience won't ruin the rest of your day.



Customer Service Basics Final Quiz



Thank you for taking the time to complete the “Customer Service to Build the Public Trust” online course.

If you have any questions or comments, please call the V.G. Young Institute at 979-845-4572. Your feedback on our brief survey is appreciated and will be used to improve the course material. Please click **HERE** to open the survey in a separate window.

After completing the survey, come back to this window and proceed to the next course page for your Certificate of Completion instructions.