

CUSTOMER SERVICE TECHNIQUES

CANTERBURY EDUCATION SERVICES

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS'

CHRISTCHURCH CONFERENCE

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Customer Service

Customer service is to customers one of the most visible and significant aspects of school performance. For many schools however customer service is one of the most challenging and sometimes neglected areas of management.

High-profile customer acquisition activities, plus systems, policies, procedures, training, etc., all play a major role in running a high-quality school, but the glue which holds it all together for the customer - and often the only thing that really matters to the customer, is **the quality of customer service that the customer feels and experiences.**

GROUP ACTIVITY

Outline a list of customers with whom you deal.

Divide into:

- **internal customers**
- **external customers**

Highlight those you would regard as your core customers.

What are the difficulties you have with these core customers?

What do you believe to be the important characteristics you need to build effective customer relations?

DEVELOPING A SERVICE CULTURE WITHIN A SCHOOL

A school culture is:

“the pattern of beliefs and expectations shared by the school’s members which produces norms which shape, in a powerful way, the behaviour of individuals and groups within the school”

The prevailing culture of a school determines the way the aims of the school are achieved. If one of the school’s philosophy’s is that of providing excellent customer service then this must be translated into the culture.

A school with a poor culture exhibits the following symptoms or signs.

Do you see any of these in your school?

	Yes	No	Sometimes
Poorly defined goals			
Poorly designed jobs			
A focus on personalities rather than on the jobs			
Insufficient emphasis on merit and performance to motivate achievers			
No positive reinforcement			
Low productivity			
High staff turnover because of lack of loyalty & commitment			
Apathetic staff, gossip & negativism			
Staff members who believe they do not matter			
No real team work and little co-operation between departments			
A lack of trust & a high degree of rivalry between staff			
No experimentation, innovation or risk taking			

To create a service orientated culture within a school do managers and team leaders do these things with your team?:

	Yes	No	Sometimes
Constantly articulate (communicate) the culture they want to develop throughout their school			
Select staff who have values which are consistent with a service – orientated culture			
Have clear goals and plans which must be communicated to the staff clearly; then informing them as to how successful they are in achieving these goals			

	Yes	No	Sometimes
Supervise staff properly which involves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> clearly defined high but realistic goals performance is reviewed regularly constructive ways are used to improve 			
Giving staff responsibility and authority to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> make decisions solve problems pursue targets set for the team 			
Rewarding excellent work performance, both financially and in other ways			
Do not reward poor performance to solve the problem			
Investing resources in the development & training of staff			
Having clear and specific (with a service flavour): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> school structures roles priorities 			
Encouraging legends and/or stories about successes within the school			
Using internal and external communications media to create achievement and service values			
Fosters, encourages and rewards experimentation			
Devises and develops symbols, mascots and logos which communicates the school culture			

There are two additional ways of developing a service culture.

1. Leading by example
2. Gaining staff commitment

Leading By Example

Staff tend to treat customers/each other according to the way in which they are treated by their Managers/HODs and team leaders/supervisors.

Many Managers/HODs and team leaders/supervisors are unaware of the influence their own behaviour has upon their staff. Managers/HODs, team leaders and supervisors who appear disinterested, unmotivated or too busy to be involved with providing service cannot expect staff to show a high level of commitment.

To ensure excellent customer service it is vital that senior staff treat their staff well.

Gaining Staff Commitment

Staff need to be committed to the school, its aims and its mission statement. Staff become committed when they receive excellent leadership.

An additional way of gaining staff commitment is to involve them in the decision making process.

Some ways to develop staff involvement in decision making include:

- * training supervisors/ team leaders in constructive discussions with staff
- * introducing a staff suggestions box
- * introducing a Total Quality Control (TQC) approach where the team or a group of staff discusses and analyses service performance problems in attempt to find solutions to problems

The following three underlying reasons need to be considered in difficult situations resulting in people we identify as difficult: **POT:**

People

Organisation and

Technical

In examining techniques for dealing with difficult people we shall examine the causes or factors which could exacerbate a situation causing conflict or difficulties.

People: let's examine ourselves as individuals to see if we contribute to difficult situations with customers.

Question	Yes	No	Sometimes
Do we work under constant stress?			
Do we have an imbalance in our own lives?			
Do we organise our time effectively?			
Do we understand our own personalities or habitual responses which could contribute to difficult situations?			
Are you too accessible?			
Do you block out time to accomplish deadlines and projects?			
Do you classify tasks into maintenance and progress?			
Do you delegate upwards?			
Do you take time out at the end of each day to briefly organise your desk and look at your priority lists and diary for the next day's plan?			
Can you identify your personal biases and prejudices when dealing with some clients?			

List in order of occurrence (**1 = most, 7 = least**) those situations which cause you the most stress or an imbalance in your life. These can affect your perception of a client situation and your behaviour.

Emotion and Change

The two factors which make communication in difficult situations seem difficult are:

- **Emotion**
- **Change**

Customer Service Techniques

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Emotions are often considered as being positive or negative. Emotions are a natural response to situations in which we find ourselves and we should consider whether the emotions portrayed are appropriate or inappropriate. In communicating information which may have an emotional effect upon another person we need to consider what that effect might be and plan what we need to say or write appropriately?

Do you consider the message to be given and is it given in a manner which can be received by the recipient?

What style are you using when communicating: Assertive or Aggressive?

Change

Often difficult situations are about some sort of change. Change is inevitable but what about unplanned change; change forced upon people who then have to adapt their lives considerably. For many people the change is difficult and full of problems rather than solutions e.g. interruptions, changing schedules/procedures/processes/plans, changes in supply chains, changes of personnel,

If there is a way to consider the positive side to the change or circumstances and any potential opportunities that the change could bring this could assist in minimising the stress and anxiety for both parties dealing with the situation deemed to be difficult

Skills for Dealing with Difficult People and Situations

There is a skill in achieving a balance between communicating difficult information and being as sensitive as possible which appears contradictory as you need to be both firm and gentle in your approach as well as assertive in your manner and words used.

1. Gather Information

- Ensure you have the facts
- Know what you are going to say
- Know why you are going to state the information
- Try and anticipate any questions or concerns from the recipient
- Think carefully about your answers

*“Say what you mean,
mean what you say
and
do not be mean when you say
it”*

2. Active Listening

- **Clarification** – ask questions to clarify your uncertainty
- **Paraphrasing** – rephrase the content
- **Reflection** – rephrase feelings
- **Summarisation** – listen for themes and main point
- **Physical cues** – use head nods, eye contact, open body posture; indicates to the listener that you are attentive

3. Know Your Limits

- You are not able or responsible to solve all problems

- When you have done all you are capable of achieving do not flog yourself with guilt of misgivings if the outcome is not totally satisfactory to both parties
- You are there to problem solve not to take on the other person's problem so that it becomes your own; keep a professional distance

4. Additional Tips

- **Be Realistic** – change takes time; appreciate the achievements
- **Stay friendly & personable** – do not make negative comments; focus on the positive; what you can do for the client
- **Be optimistic**; remember what you have achieved about the situation which will help you move forward
- **Try and see the good aspects of the person with whom you are dealing**
- **Try not to generalise criticisms**; do not use 'always' or 'never'
- **Say things in a way that will be easy to hear**; ensure that you understand what is being said, 'what I heard you say was.....' 'is that what you meant' 'so are you saying that.....'
- **Learn some relaxation techniques to use before dealing with someone believed to be difficult**; slow controlled breathing; count to 10 or more before speaking with someone showing signs of stress, frustration, anger ; also helpful if you are feeling angry, frustrated or annoyed.
- **Step back from the intensity of a situation**; a brief pause can help; step back and clear you head, give yourself time to consider your options. You may have to adjourn the meeting or conversation, review the information gathered, re plan; consult with another for a fresh pair of eyes and return to the situation with a fresh and possibly different perspective.
- **Be prepared to admit a mistake or the fact that you have reviewed the situation and can offer different options**; it is not about winners and losers.
- **Act in a trustworthy fashion at all times**; consider your reputation and that of your school; you are your school's best advertisement

“You will be remembered for only two things:

the problems you solve and

the problems you cause.”

Customer Service Code of Practice

The following have been identified as the most important elements of service delivery according to customers:

- timeliness
- appearance
- courtesy
- quality and efficiency
- ease of doing business
- problem-solving

In addition are the Three Rs:

- responsive
- reliable
- respectful

These should assist schools in:

- Establishing effective customer service mechanisms
- Improving competitiveness
- Differentiating their offering via innovative customer services
- Building customer loyalty through positive customer service experience
- Attracting new customers via word of mouth
- Reducing marketing costs
- Increasing service efficiency
- Reducing complaints and associated costs e.g. time spent solving problems
- Improving services and accountability
- Developing and sustaining the school's focus on customers and quality
- Making it easier for customers to deal with the school

This Code of Practice can be attributed to both **Internal Customers** as well as **External Customers**

These **Customer Service Principles** are outlined and regarded as essential:

- Commitment (at all levels)
- Credibility (keep promises)
- Culture (customer service ethos)
- Competencies (of staff - in recruitment, training and assessment)
- Responsibility (clear and supported with suitable authority - with at least one person responsible for customer problems)
- Resources (adequate for effectiveness)
- Identification and management of all customer service issues
- Quality (of customer service - relevant input and review)
- Feedback (enabled for customers and employees)
- Continual improvement (to meet or exceed customer expectations)
- Internal customers (establish concept and communications)

The **Customer Service Staff Competencies** are summarised as:

- Interpersonal and empathy
- Communication
- Handling stress
- Active listening
- Team-working
- Problem-solving and complaints-handling
- Product and organization knowledge
- Commitment to aims and values of organization

Appendix One (1)

THE DO'S & DON'TS OF LISTENING

DO	Become aware of your own listening habits. What good listening skills do you have? What are your faults?	DON'T	Mistake not talking for listening.
DO	Share responsibility for the communication. Whenever you are unclear about what a speaker is saying, it is your responsibility to let the speaker know this; ask questions	DON'T	Be silent when you do not understand what the speaker is saying.
DO	Be physically attentive. * face the speaker * sit or stand to put the speaker at ease * adopt an accepting attitude to the speaker	DON'T	Fake listening. * disinterest or boredom inevitably shows through
DO	Concentrate on what the speaker is saying. We have short attention spans and listening requires deliberate concentration.	DON'T	Interrupt needlessly.
DO	Listen for the total meaning. * listen for feelings as well as information	DON'T	Pass judgment too quickly.
DO	Observe the speaker's nonverbal signals. * watch the speaker's facial expressions * their eye contact * tone of voice * rate of speech Does the body language reinforce or contradict their spoken words?	DON'T	Make arguing an "Ego trip". (i.e. tendency to look forward to your turn to talk)
DO	Close the 'loop' by taking appropriate action.	DON'T	Ask too many questions. In some communications this moves control from the listener to the speaker.
		DON'T	Tell a speaker "I know exactly how you feel". This remark probably serves to justify your own efforts rather than to convince someone that you are really listening
		DON'T	Overreact to emotional words.
		DON'T	Use listening as a way of hiding yourself. They are not listening as much as not talking.

Scale:

- YOU ALWAYS DO THIS
- YOU SOMETIMES DO THIS
- YOU NEVER DO THIS

THE BEST THINGS TO SAY

1.	I'd be glad to ...	I'd be glad to help you. Let me finish with this client and I'll be right with you.
2.	I can see how you'd ...	I can see how you'd be upset that I am unable to give you the information you require. Let me see what we can do to obtain the information without breaching the confidentiality/privacy procedures.
3.	Thank you for ...	Thank you for bringing this to my attention. I shall deal with it today and send you the answer to you by 5.00pm today.
4.	You're right ...	You're right! Your instructions did say back to back for the photocopying. I shall rectify this immediately.
5.	We appreciate ...	We appreciate your opinion about this policy however I am sure you appreciate our position. Let me get hold of the Head of Department and you can express your dissatisfaction about this policy to her.
6.	I will personally....	I will ensure that this is corrected by me personally.
7.	I'll find out ...	I'll find out the answer for you. When is the latest deadline for you to receive it?
8.	You might wish to ...	You might wish to take this to John Linton as he is the specialist in this subject. Please mention that we have referred you to him.
9.	For you, I'll.....	I am unable to do this for you today however I'll put this with my high priority work for tomorrow which will still meet your deadline of the Wednesday payments schedule.
10.	I'll do my best ...	Yes, I'll do my very best to help you in this enquiry, however I shall need to search the Internet and this may take a period of time. When do you need this report?

THE 10 WORST THINGS TO SAY

1.	We can't ...	We can't give you a refund without a receipt.
2.	You're wrong ...	You're wrong, we don't have that facility here.
3.	You'll have to ...	You'll have to wait your turn; there are other people here before you.
4.	I don't know ...	I don't know, I'm just the casual/temporary worker.
5.	That's not my department.....	
6.	Call back later ...	Call back later when the Office Manager will be back from tea.
7.	Sorry, there's ...	Sorry, there's nothing I can do. It's not my responsibility!
8.	Now, calm down ...	Now calm down, there's no need to get upset.
9.	Are you sure ...	Are you sure that's what they said?
10.	No!	

Moments of Truth

A moment of truth is any point of contact between a school and its clients in which the clients gain an impression of the service.

Managing moments of truth is a useful way of thinking about the endless small impressions which our clients get about our service.

Managing moments of truth means managing the little details.

It is the little details about which the clients makes a judgement as to the level of service the school provides.

Managing moments of truth will result in a comfortable feeling for the clients about the school.

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Moments of Truth Jan Carlson

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