

TRAINING MODULE: CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customer service is the act of taking care of the customer's needs by providing professional, helpful quality service and assistance before, during, and after the customer's expectations are met. A customer can be both internal and external to the organization. This can include patients/residents, visitors, team members, medical staff, volunteers, and more. Customer service is something most people don't consider or appreciate until there is a problem. Customer service experiences can change the entire perception a customer has on an individual or even the entire organization that an employee represents. It can be an important factor in making your organization the healthcare facility of choice for the people in your service area. Good customer service will improve customer satisfaction and cooperation, and improve outcomes.

MEETING CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

Customers expect certain things when they walk into a healthcare facility, and the facilities with the highest level of customer satisfaction know how to identify these expectations and meet them. Some of the most common expectations that customers have for healthcare facilities are similar to other businesses. These include fast, efficient and accurate service, friendly and helpful staff, prompt responses to questions, trained team members that can handle their immediate questions without being transferred or placed on hold, and attentiveness to a customer's problems or complaints. The best way to determine how well you met your customers' expectations is to simply ask the question. Your organization may also provide a formal customer satisfaction survey. The goal of both is to discover ways to improve your customers' experiences. Remember, customers are savvy enough to take their business elsewhere if they are not receiving the service and attention they seek.

MEETING AND GREETING

- Your customer will make early decisions about you and perhaps the organization based upon your appearance, attitude, body language, facial expressions, what you say and especially tone of voice.
- Making a strong, positive first impression will help you develop a good customer relationship.
- Be sure to make eye contact, display a nice warm smile, provide a friendly greeting, give the customer your undivided attention and listen to their needs and questions with empathy and compassion.
- The words you use will set the hospital apart as well. Using words such as "May I" instead of "Can I", and "Yes" instead of "Yup" as well as avoiding absolute extremes such as "every", "all", "never" and "always" will help.

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Good customer service begins with a positive attitude. It is not just what a person says; it is how they say it and how they behave while they are saying it. Your tone of voice and behavior speaks loudly to those we serve. It reinforces your competence and commitment to providing excellent, quality care towards the task at hand.

- To display a positive attitude pause, take a deep breath and think before you speak.

- Self-talk can also have a dramatic affect both positively and negatively. You have a choice about what you say to yourself.
- Positive words include “I can do it”.
- Negative words limit our potential and are self-defeating. Choose to be positive.
- Be flexible and adapt to new challenges.
- Providing customer service is not easy but with making good choices about one’s thoughts, anything is possible. Sharing negative thoughts about your job, the organization, or other team members with the customer leads to doubt, anxiety and a negative experience for the people we serve. Avoid sharing these thoughts as many times we invite the type of behavior that we show to others.

ACTIVE LISTENING

Hearing is not the same as listening. Active listening displays a concerned attitude, enhanced understanding and better customer satisfaction. It allows for greater productivity with fewer mistakes. Information that the customer provides is vital. You may even want to take notes. Active listening takes focus, energy, and attention. To do this you must recognize and remove physical barriers (such as turning off screens that could distract you), minimize internal barriers (such as allowing your mind to drift or make assumptions), use nonverbal encouragers (such as eye contact and head nods), and verbal encouragers (such as hmm, oh, ah...) to show that you are paying attention, ask open-ended questions, listen with purpose, and recap your understanding of the issue. Everyone can overcome these obstacles. Remember, listening is not passive, it is active. Stay alert and be energetic about listening, if not you may miss important information.

HANDLING CUSTOMER SERVICE STRESS

Many people allow events to shape how they feel and what they do. However, events can only control your attitude if you allow it. When providing customer service, it is important to not allow stressful events to govern your attitude. If you are unprepared and unfocused when providing customer service, you may be caught off guard and perceive the event as a threat. Your natural reaction will be to respond to the threat either by fighting or running (also known as the fight or flight stress response). Most of the customer service events that you experience at work are not life threatening and therefore you must change your perception of the encounter.

- Good customer service does not include fighting with the customer or running away by making excuses or prematurely ending a conversation.
- Your primary role in a stressful customer service encounter is to keep the situation under control and prevent things from getting worse.
- Always take into consideration the customer’s frame of mind at the time of the event.
- Disarm a difficult customer with a greeting and an invitation to help.
- Smile even if the event takes place over the phone.
- Respond by conveying the truth and invite the customer in a two-way discussion with words like “I understand, I see, or I hear what you are saying, etc.”.
- You are not in control of every event but you are in control of your own behavior and response to these events.
- There is no place for anger in customer service. Choose to stay calm.
- Be prepared. Pause, take a deep breath, slow down your pace of speech, allow the customer to vent, take notes, listen actively, be emphatic, think rationally and focus on what you can control. Remember, the real problem is whatever is causing the customer to behave that way, not the customer’s behavior.
- The root cause of the behavior must be fixed in order to meet the customers’ expectations.

INTERNAL CUSTOMER SERVICE

We often think of the importance of customer service in regards to individuals who visit our organization such as patients/residents and visitors. However, those you serve internally should be provided the same consideration. While all of the principles previously discussed can be applied, there are additional concerns when servicing those who work for the organization.

WORKPLACE CONFLICT

Workplace conflict is a normal and natural part of any workplace and can occur when there is a disagreement or opposition of interests or ideas. It has been estimated that managers spend at least 25 percent of their time resolving workplace conflicts. By learning to constructively resolve conflict, we can turn a destructive situation into an opportunity for creativity and enhanced work performance.

There are many causes of conflict in a work setting including ineffective communication, differences in values and interests, scarce resources, personality clashes, and poor performance. Sometimes what we are trying to communicate gets lost in translation despite our best intentions. These conflicts can be resolved through active listening, asking the appropriate questions, and making sure both parties are understood.

- The failure to accept or understand one another's differing values can lead to conflict.
- The way a person views or addresses a situation is not wrong just because it does not match your own. You may have differing interests as well.
- Sometimes an individual's personal goals can be at odds with your goals or even the organization's goals.
- This conflict can be addressed by finding a common ground and negotiating goals that work for everyone.
- Scarce resources can make employees feel they have to compete for available resources in order to do their job.
- This can be alleviated by teaching prioritization of time and resources, as well as ways to negotiate with one another.
- Personality clashes can cause conflict. All organizations are made up of different personalities and team members must strive to understand and accept each other's approach to work and problem-solving.
- Conflict can also occur when team members are not contributing their share of effort or not performing at the expected level of quality.
- This can cause extra work and frustration for others. This issue can be resolved by their manager through coaching, feedback and evaluation.
- Arriving at a positive resolution to conflict is always the ultimate goal.
- In resolving conflict, it is important that you clearly state the cause of the conflict and why and how you recommend it being resolved. It is best to address conflict face-to-face and stick to the issue at hand.
- Sometimes our emotions may interfere with arriving at a resolution. If this happens, take a time-out and continue resolving the conflict at another designated time.
- Avoiding conflict is often the easiest way to deal with it; however, it does not make it go away.
- By actively resolving conflict when it occurs, you can create a more positive work environment for everyone.

WORKPLACE BULLYING

Workplace bullying refers to any repeated, intentional behavior directed at an employee with the purpose of degrading, humiliating, embarrassing, or otherwise undermining their performance. Bullying can come from team members, supervisors, or management, and is a problem for workers at all levels. By learning to recognize and address workplace bullying behavior, you can help to create a healthier, more productive environment for yourself and your co-workers.

- Bullying is more than a simple misunderstanding or personal disagreement.
- Workplace bullying may include shouting, whether in private, in front of team members, or in front of customers, name calling, belittling or disrespectful comments, excessive monitoring, criticizing, or nitpicking someone's work, deliberately overloading someone with work, undermining someone's work by setting them up to fail, and excluding someone from staff room conversations and making them feel unwelcome.
- If you feel singled out unfairly, or feel you are being picked on, form a plan to stop the bullying.
- Never escalate the bullying.
- Shouting counter insults or yelling back might end up making the situation worse.
- Use a calm and collected tone of voice and tell the person to stop.
- Keep a record of the bullying including specific times, dates and locations.
- Ask co-workers if they will serve as witnesses to bullying incidents.
- Set up a meeting with your supervisor or human resources representative.
- Bring your written evidence, your witnesses, and present your case in a calm manner.
- If the bullying continues, you have the right to go to higher management.

BATES COUNTY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL STAFF WILL ALWAYS:

- Knock before entering a patient's room and wait for a response.
- Use the 10 and 5 rule – acknowledge patients/visitors by making eye contact within 10 feet; acknowledge patients/visitors with a warm greeting at 5 feet.
- Acknowledge everyone present with the patient and use good eye contact.
- Refer to the patient as Miss/Mr./Mrs. unless they ask to be called something different – don't use "cutesy" names such as "hun", "sweetie", or "buddy".
- Assist patients/visitors if they appear lost. Take them where they need to go or find someone who can instead of simply giving them directions.
- State your name and department when answering the phone – ask "how can I help you."
- Tell the caller what department you will be transferring them to before your transfer a call.
- Introduce yourself and your department to patient/family.
- Wear your nametag.
- Introduce the new caregiver when a change is made. Ask the patient if they need anything before you leave.
- Speak positively to patients/families about physicians and other staff members.
- Speak positively about patients and their families.
- Explain what you plan to do and why before you touch the patient with the exception of emergency situations.
- Tell the patient/family how long you expect something to take such as tests or results.
- Inform the patient/family when there is an unforeseen delay – then check on them periodically to see if you can make their wait more comfortable.
- Take the time to listen to patient/family concerns. Sit at their bedside when possible.
- Tell the patient when they can receive their next dose of pain medication.
- Personally answer patient/family questions or find someone who can. Don't tell them "you'll need to talk with...." Follow up with the patient/family later to make sure their questions were answered.

- Assist patients and visitors with special needs. Look for opportunities to be helpful.
- Use language that a patient/family can understand.
- Explain the purpose of each medication the patient is taking.
- Explain side effects of medications.
- Give the patient easy to understand discharge instructions.
- Use teach-back methods to make sure patients understand what you have told them.
- Explain white boards to patient/family – keep them updated.
- Assist patients when they need to contact someone.
- Ask patient/family if they need more explanation or have questions.
- Ask patient/family every time you leave the room if there is anything else they need. Let them know you have the time.
- Be professional in conversations – don't talk about personal issues in front of patients/visitors.
- Address pain, personal needs, positioning, and patient education safety during rounds.
- Stay with patient while in bathroom or on commode.
- Ask patient/family if room is clean – ask if you can do anything to make it cleaner.
- Ask patient/family if room is quiet – ask if you can do anything to make it quieter.
- Ask patient/family if they have care preferences.
- Ask family sitting with patient if there is anything they need to be more comfortable – offer them something to drink or snack.
- Thank patient/family for their patience.
- Thank patient/family for waiting.
- Thank patient for allowing us to care for them.
- Thank patients for making you aware of a concern.

PUT THE PATIENT FIRST!