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Introduction

The person on the receiving end of your company's product and service is often referred to as "customer," "guest," "client," "tourist," and "visitor." One thing is certain; these people are looking for a quality experience from the beginning. In fact, they are expecting it! If their expectations are not met, they become disappointed and often take their business elsewhere. So we can clearly see that quality does have value.

Quality is a process. There are performance standards that must be in place. These must be communicated and implemented at all levels in the establishment. They require leadership from the manager or owner. These customer service standards need to be monitored, reviewed, and updated regularly.

Customer expectation must be recognized and acted upon. Ask yourself if your definition of quality is the same as what the customer expects. Our customers are educated, perceptive and demanding. When they make a reservation, order a meal, book a guided trip, or check into a room, they have certain expectations. You must identify whether you are falling short, meeting or exceeding their expectation of quality.

Your success is built on how well you deliver!

This customer service handbook attempts to provide tips, popular dos and don'ts, helpful hints, and checklists as well as proven best practices in a customer setting. It addresses the view from management, staff and the customer and their role in the chain of the Quality Service Experience.

A Customer is:

- ▶ The most important person we do business with
- ▶ Not dependant on us; rather we on him/her for their business
- ▶ Not an interruption of our work but the purpose for it
- ▶ A person who expects satisfaction and value for money spent
- ▶ An educated consumer who is aware of your competition
- ▶ A person who should be treated with respect and cared for to the best of your ability, no matter who they are
- ▶ A person to build a future with
- ▶ A source of information to help improve our business
- ▶ A pleasure to serve
- ▶ An opportunity, not an imposition
- ▶ Handle delicate situations with common sense.
- ▶ Be sensitive to special needs.
- ▶ Be an honest person.
- ▶ Take responsibility for both good and bad service.
- ▶ Treat all customers equally.



For the Owner, Manager and Supervisor

Two of the biggest downfalls of customer service training are that the subject is either swept under the “welcome mat” or it is treated as a special training event only.

Hospitality operations are particularly aware of the challenges. Due to the nature and diversity of most operations, and other factors such as budget and time constraints, there just never seems to be any time or money allocated for this purpose.

The importance of creating successful customer service standards cannot be overemphasized and relies upon the initial implementation of the ideology. Training is crucial, and perhaps the most difficult step is maintaining and monitoring the customer service process and results.



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Creating Good Customer Service Standards

Twelve Keys to Developing Good Customer Service

01

Start at the top

Management and ownership not only have to ensure that the service ideology is reflected in the mission statement, but they must first and foremost lead by example and be visible on a daily basis. Their words and actions must correspond accordingly that the line staff can model implementation based on their clear example.

02

Measure First

Before embarking on a major customer service safari, assess your current service level and identify what needs attention and improvement. Traditional data such as customer letters, complaints, feedback and surveys are tools to get you started. Don't forget to approach your staff because they have firsthand experience in the matter.

03

Make training and skill building part of your strategic plan

Goals related to customer service need to be a foundational component of short and long-term strategy. They are usually set out as core values in mission statements and make their way to the training floor. Make service a priority in your business.

04

Train management and make them accountable

Since most managers work in a customer service environment and are involved in the day-to-day, hands-on scheme of things, they play a critical role in the service challenge and are responsible for providing leadership. Managers must be of the mind and skill set to deliver this, and also be present and visible during peak service activity to support the process.

05

Choose the right program

Whether you design your own, or adopt and outside provider, a training program meant to improve your service should include proven standards.

06**Launch**

Get behind it from the beginning and make it an exciting priority. An effective launch will probably fail!

07**Deliver Quality not Quantity**

Facilitation is paramount. You may or may not have someone on staff that is trained or capable of leading the training. A boring, rambling or insincere lecture will be of no value.

08**Identify your barriers to excellent service during training**

When staff and management go through a training process, participation and spirited discussion will occur. Issues will arise that will not be resolved during the training. Staff are not shy in giving their feedback once encouraged to do so. To properly address these issues, keep a record of the comments on a flipchart or blackboard as they come up so that staff can see that their views are being considered for evaluation.

09**Measure Results**

Usually, improvements will be observed immediately following the training. Your employees and the work environment should appear more positive. The true test of results is the level of staying power of the changes implemented.

10**Create a Process Improvement Team**

Acquire a volunteer or assign a staff member to handle the follow-up of issues addressed in the training. Management will work with these team members on the day-to-day service monitoring also.

11**Include Customer Service Training in the new employee orientation**

Equip and empower new employees with the skills and values reflected in the training program. By establishing them from the start you align them with other trained staff and clearly indicate to them what your expectations are.

12**Reward and Recognition**

Acknowledge your returns on a daily basis. Staff want and deserve to know that they are doing well and also that they are worthy of your investment in their training.

Elements of a Good Training Program

Whether you design your own or adopt a proven outside provider, a training program meant to improve your service standards should include some of the following characteristics:

- ▶ Behavior changing activities
- ▶ Service standards that are customized for your own organization and work environment
- ▶ Specific modules for managers that may include leadership, standards development, etc.
- ▶ Interactive and enjoyable
- ▶ Enthusiastic presentation
- ▶ Skills building
- ▶ Relevant comparisons to the current service experience

Presentation: What you say is important. How you say it is equally as important.

A strong presentation usually contains the following:

- ▶ Dynamic start and throughout
- ▶ Animated, enthusiastic presentation
- ▶ Leadership skills
- ▶ Passions for excellent service
- ▶ Knowledge of organization's vision
- ▶ Role-playing exercises
- ▶ Visual aids
- ▶ Break-out group activity

Customer Service Standards

► Communication

The following are good tips that help provide acceptable service levels in the area of telephone/voice mail and inquiry management. They pertain to any small business as well as home-based operations.

Voice Mail/Telephone

Telephones should be answered as promptly as possible. Try to set a specific number of rings, and make it your goal to answer before the 4th ring, for example.

All employees or family members should be trained to answer the phone properly. If there are children answering the business phone, they should be able to give the minimum key information.

Answer all calls in a courteous manner. A scripted consistent greeting works well and sounds professional. An example would be, "Good morning, Iceberg Outfitters. Joe speaking. How can I help you?"

During business hours, a person should be answering the main number instead of having voice mail or an automated message.

Staff should listen, understand, and acknowledge the nature of the request before transferring any calls.

Where possible, give the client the option to go to voice mail or leave a message verbally.

All staff and management should adhere to a policy that sets timelines to returning calls and responding to enquiries. Same day is recommended.

All outgoing voice mail (recorded greeting) messages should be brief, current and accurate. An example would be: "*Hello, You have reached Joe at Iceberg Outfitters. I'm out of the office until Oct 1st. Please leave a message and I will return your call*"

A good outgoing voice mail message will contain the person's name, department, telephone numbers and time available.

Outgoing voicemail messages should have an optional number or extension to call for urgent enquiries. This could be especially important in the case of relatives trying to contact guests of a hotel, or someone who wants to purchase your services immediately.

Learn how to prioritize your daily messages and enquiries. Answer the most important ones first.

If a caller is on hold, be aware of the length of time and set a standard for this. It is acceptable to take that person's number and call him back if you are multi-tasking at that time.

When leaving town or being away from your business, change your voicemail to provide that information so that your potential clients are informed.



Written Correspondence - Letters, E-Mails, Faxes

The exchange of information comes in many forms. To respond accurately and timely is key. The inconvenience of repeating or re-sending information or unreasonable waiting time can be interpreted as poor service.

Any written communication should be reviewed before you send it out by email, fax or mail. To send incomplete or incorrect information causes delays and could cost you time and money.

All responses should be timely. For e-mails, within 24 hours is acceptable but the same day is best. For regular mail, within five business days is good.

All correspondence should contain a “signature block” that includes company name, person’s name, complete address, telephone number, fax number and e-mail address.

In Person

Make your first impression a positive one.

A timely, courteous acknowledgment including eye contact gives a good first impression, especially if the staff person is on the phone or engaged with another client.

If you are busy with a client and the phone rings, or something takes you away from serving the client, excuse yourself and then address the new situation. To serve both clients efficiently - take a message, phone the person back or delegate the new enquiry to a co-worker and then return to the initial conversation with the first client.

If a station is not staffed, such as the front desk of a hotel, have the hours posted at that station as to when a person will be there and/or leave instructions as to where the person could find immediate help.

Customer Service Standards

► Housekeeping













Always a constant concern! Cleanliness and tidiness are first foremost in the eye of the beholder. A customer's first impression is always visual.

Building and Public Amenities

Properly maintained facilities, which are sanitary, completely operational, fully stocked and supplied, accessible and meet health and safety standards is a key element to your customer's impression of your ability to provide continuous good customer service. Hours of operation, timely and accurately posted information such as room direction, menu specials, and special announcements, are also good indicators of a well-managed business. Good housekeeping can be over-emphasized. Your standards for cleanliness reflect your commitment to showing your customers excellent service.

Avoid the following inappropriate housekeeping situations in your food service areas:

In the Restaurant

-  Food Particles on the floor or on tables and chairs
-  Unclean cutlery
-  Dishes left on tables for too long
-  Washrooms unattended
-  Stained linen and napkins
-  Dirty Floors
-  Carpet Odour
-  Cluttered and untidy workstations
-  Stained and unclean glassware
-  Stains on the wall
-  Dust on the ceiling, lights and fans
-  Dirty and food splattered menus

Customer Service Standards

► Restaurant/Dining Room

Below are common problems and solutions to situations that occur in the food and beverage environment.

Speed of service

Don't be afraid to inform customers at your table if things are taking longer than expected. They will appreciate being kept informed on the status of their order.

Professional appearance

Make sure your uniform is clean and you are properly groomed. Your appearance contributes to the first impression the customers makes about your establishment. Chewing gum or eating in front of guests is not professional.

Quality checks

Pay attention to the body language and facial expressions of your guests. You can tell if something is wrong right away. Visit the table after you have delivered the meals as this will give you an opportunity to correct any problems before it is too late.

Mistakes

If you get the order mixed up, or something is incorrect with the meal, don't be afraid to recognize the error and inform the guest that you will fix it immediately.

Customer focus

Rather than gathering at the staff table or staff area in the dining room, focus on making trips to your customers' tables to be visible and available to serve your customers as needed.

Appropriate discussion

Limit your conversation with your coworkers to work-related subjects and use professional language and a proper voice level. Guests do not want to hear the latest gossip or what's going on in your personal life.

Hide your frustration

Sometimes things can be hectic. When there are problems behind the scenes, keep them quiet and don't let your customers see your frustration.

Workplace issues

It is not appropriate to discuss work-related problems or issue with your guests. Direct your concerns to the management or ownership and give them the chance to solve your problem.

Closing time

Don't rush the guest but rather continue with your responsibilities. The guest can usually tell when it is time to finish up and pay their bill.

These customer service standards need to be monitored, reviewed, and updated regularly.



Customer Service Tips

▶ for Outfitters

Good customer relations can leave a lasting positive impression that leads to increased return business by word of mouth. The following are ways to ensure customer satisfaction and prevent disappointment:

- ▶ Follow-up on all enquiries and sales opportunities efficiently.
- ▶ Advertise only what you can guarantee to deliver. Be realistic.
- ▶ Inform client of any changes to agreement as soon as possible.
- ▶ Confirm all details of contract or service prior to start date. This will prevent confusion and disappointment of something that was expected but not delivered.
- ▶ Have handy checklists ready and refer to them prior to activity to eliminate oversights.
- ▶ Develop a client information sheet that is complete with such things as names, ages, origin, language spoken, medical conditions, experience level, special needs and contact numbers.
- ▶ Make sure your communication system, schedule and equipment is failsafe and meets industry standards.
- ▶ Be on time.
- ▶ Welcome your clients in a professional and confident manner.
- ▶ Brief clients completely before activity starts.
- ▶ Be aware and follow all licensing and legislative guidelines.
- ▶ Share knowledge in the areas of culture, history, land and other pertinent information as often as possible.

The Hallmarks of Hospitality

Customer service is the pillar for success in almost every business. The relationship between the supplier, the product and the consumer requires dedication to his ideal every step of the way. Include the following elements of customer service in your day-to-day interactions.

Acknowledgement

This is the first step for creating respect and confidence between the employee and the customer. It's as simple as making eye contact, smiling and taking time to speak to a guest. Whether in passing, or directly dealing with the customer, this primary focus goes a long way.

Recognition

Make your customers feel welcome and important by remembering their name, and referring to them in a professional and appropriate manner.

Anticipation

Impress your guest by staying on top of their needs before they have to ask you for them. Re-filling a water glass or offering a wake-up call and taxi service the night before a person checks out are good examples of this in a hotel.

Flexibility

Be prepared with alternative options to clients' requests. Sometimes thinking outside the box is required to manage your customers' needs to solve problems.

Knowledge

Both employee and employer should make sure that they have the information required to complete the goals of the job. Missing pieces of the puzzle can cause delays and other problems contributing to an inferior service experience.

Skills

Along with knowledge, skills are developed through training, then monitored and utilized in the ongoing customer service process.

Listening

Have a “guest first” focus. Give your customers your total attention to make them feel valued.

Recovery














Mistakes are bound to occur; how you deal with them is important. Empower and train staff to handle negative situations. Remember that the worst of situations can have a positive outcome if handled properly.








General Dos and Don'ts of Hospitality

The busy work environment of a customer service setting can be stressful. We are always under the watchful eye of our boss, co-workers and most importantly, our customers. Sometimes we are not aware of our own behaviour or what we look and sound like when working.

Dos:

-  Do make sure you are presentable and meet the uniform standards of your company.
-  Do come to work with a positive attitude.
-  Do prepare your work area. Set yourself up for success.
-  Do your job to the best of your ability.
-  Do respect your co-workers. Be a team player.
-  Do act professionally at all times.
-  Do call in when you are going to be late or sick.
-  Do make your guest feel welcome. Greet them pleasantly
-  and treat them with respect.
-  Do have a general knowledge of your community.
-  Do know where to find answers to questions if you
-  don't know them.
-  Do check the washrooms regularly to make sure they are clean and stocked.

Don'ts:

-  Don't leave your work area without having someone look after your customers.
-  Don't eat or drink while providing service to a customer.
-  Don't have friends visit you while you are working.
-  Don't lose your temper when things aren't going smoothly.
-  Don't allow others to bring you down.



How well do you know your community?

Both business travellers and tourists are often interested in spending some time learning about your community and its history and culture. If you can answer these common questions without hesitation, you will no doubt impress your customer.

- ▶ How did your town get its name?
- ▶ Where is the hamlet office?
- ▶ Do you have a Chamber of Commerce?
- ▶ What is the population of your community?
- ▶ Where are the library, high school, and college?
- ▶ How do I get to the clinic or hospital?
- ▶ What are the points of interest within walking distance?
- ▶ What restaurants are available?
- ▶ What is the lunch/dinner special?
- ▶ What is in this menu item – re: allergies?
- ▶ What accommodations are available?
- ▶ How do I get a taxi?
- ▶ Where can I find tourist information?
- ▶ What time do you open and close?
- ▶ Where is the post office?
- ▶ Where can I find internet access?
- ▶ Do you know any licensed outfitters?
- ▶ What is the weather forecast?
- ▶ Are flights delayed?



What to do when a customer complains?

- ▶ Don't avoid the situation.
- ▶ Have confidence in your ability.
- ▶ Always keep calm.
- ▶ Acknowledge the problem.
- ▶ Apologize when appropriate.
- ▶ Listen to the concern.
- ▶ Evaluate the problem.
- ▶ Ask how you can make it better for them.
- ▶ Evaluate the solution.
- ▶ Explain how you will try to solve problem.
- ▶ Give a time frame as to when will it be fixed.
- ▶ Once you have fixed things, follow-up afterwards.
- ▶ Don't complicate the situation.
- ▶ Be diplomatic and tactful.
- ▶ Never place blame.
- ▶ When you can't solve the problem, get help from someone who can.

Conclusion

And the reward is...

- ▶ You get to meet new people in a customer service job setting.
- ▶ The positive response you get from customers will give you confidence
- ▶ It's something to be proud of It's fun to care about doing your best It will make your workplace a positive place to be at
- ▶ You give the customer value for his money
- ▶ Some positions receive tips from customers (extra money to take home with you at the end of the day)
- ▶ You impress your boss and show that you are an asset to the company
- ▶ Sometimes you can make an impression that will affect you in the future such as new opportunities and/or career advancement
- ▶ You set an example for your co-workers, and are admired for your efforts.
- ▶ You help create high standards for the company
- ▶ you contribute to an overall memorable experience for the customer
- ▶ You help give the company, the community and the territory a good reputation for customer service.

Your success is built on how well you deliver!