



# **CPLD CUSTOMER SERVICE LECTURE 5**

## **DEALING WITH DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS**

## LECTURE 5 OUTCOMES

- **Why are some customers challenging?**
- **Characteristics of challenging customers**
- **Unjustified requests by customers**
- **What to do when you are wrong?**
- **The 5 steps to problem solving**

## A. WHO ARE CHALLENGING CUSTOMERS?

- A reality of life is that some customers are easier and more enjoyable to be around than others.
  - **Challenging customers are those customers with problems, questions, fears and personalities that require us to work to achieve true communication.**
  - Individuals are unique and therefore, may require different approaches to their issues.
  - Regardless of how we find our customers to be, it is still our responsibility to serve them.

## **B. WHY ARE CUSTOMERS CHALLENGING**

- They do not speak your language.
  - They do not have expertise or an understanding of the specific product or situation.
  - They may be openly hostile.
  - They are visibly upset about something (and it may not have anything to do with you or your company).
  - They are very quiet and non-communicative which can sometimes even be more of an issue
  - They show an attitude of superiority.
  - They are impatient.

## **B. WHY ARE CUSTOMERS CHALLENGING**

- They imply that they are doing you and your company a big favour for doing business with you.
  - They appear to embody the type of person that you have a personal bias against.
  - They are so nice that you hate to give them bad news.
  - They are extremely angry.
  - They have difficulty making decisions.

REMEMBER: Everyone is someone's challenging Customer.

**EXERCISE: DESCRIBE YOUR NIGHTMARE CUSTOMER**

## **C. TIPS TO KEEP FROM CREATING CHALLENGING CUSTOMERS**

NB: Some customers are challenging no matter what we do or do not do for them.

The reality is that we may create many of the customer problems that we experience.

## **D. CHARACTERISTICS OF CHALLENGING CUSTOMERS**

### **1. Language and/or Cultural Barriers**

- Speak slowly and clearly.
  - Avoid using slang terms.
  - Try illustrating with hand motions.
  - Don't pretend that you understand if you don't.
  - Ask questions and repeat what you said.
  - Write your message out.
  - Keep appropriate language dictionaries handy.
  - If all else fails, suggest that the customer come back with an English speaking friend.
  - Identify the languages that you encounter most often.

## **D. CHARACTERISTICS OF CHALLENGING CUSTOMERS**

### **2. An Impatient Customer**

- Always remember that a customer's impatience is probably due to some outside circumstance.
  - When calling customers on the phone, ask if you are calling at an appropriate time.
  - Stress that your goal is to work as efficiently as possible.
  - Stay on the task and complete the business quickly and accurately.
  - Strive to show that your company is worth the investment of their time.

## D. CHARACTERISTICS OF CHALLENGING CUSTOMERS

### 3. Angry - (Unfortunately anger is a common emotion in customer service)

- If not dealt with, anger between internal customers can create a war between departments.
  - Try to calm the customer.
  - Avoid responding with anger.
  - Ask customers to explain their situation.
  - Attempt to find effective solutions to the situation.
  - Always approach customer with respect even when they are behaving unprofessionally.
  - Attempt to gain control of the conversation.
  - **Remember that customer anger provides the opportunity for a new relationship and can have a positive result.**

## **D. CHARACTERISTICS OF CHALLENGING CUSTOMERS**

### **4. Analytical - (Analytical customers desire facts and the opportunity to interact with knowledgeable individuals)**

- These customers like consistency and proof.
  - Treat them with respect and give them what they want.
  - Explain in detail answers to their questions.
  - Ask for additional questions.

## **D. CHARACTERISTICS OF CHALLENGING CUSTOMERS**

### **5. Non-Committal - (These customers may have difficulty making decisions. They may be seeking information from a variety of sources before they make a decision)**

- Non-committal customers may have been too quick to commit in the past and then regretted their decisions.
  - They may have financial restraints.
  - They may have to consider the reactions of others.
  - To help non-committal customers, make a decision and detail the possible options.
  - Ask if there is anything that you have not explained.
  - Suggest a timetable for them to make a decision.

## **D. CHARACTERISTICS OF CHALLENGING CUSTOMERS**

### **6. Superior – (Some customers may convey the impression that they are in some way superior.)**

- Customer service providers must recognise their own self worth.
  - Don't become competitive with the customer.
  - Praise the customer's accomplishments and importance.
  - Suggest that a speedy resolution will enhance their position.
  - They might in fact be very insecure people with low self esteem and bring other people down to feel good about themselves

## **D. CHARACTERISTICS OF CHALLENGING CUSTOMERS**

### **7. Immature – (Immature customers are extremely common in customer service)**

- Listen to their explanation of the situation.
  - Be frank about the consequences of their actions.
  - Answer their questions completely.
  - Stress that their actions affect others.
  - Be firm.

## **D. CHARACTERISTICS OF CHALLENGING CUSTOMERS**

### **8. Talkative**

- Approach a talkative customer in a positive and open manner.
  - Allow them to share questions or concerns.
  - Help them stay on the subject by asking specific questions.
  - Show appreciation for their knowledge and abilities.
  - Use humour to keep them focused.
  - Conclude by reminding them that you know they are on a time schedule.

## E. UNJUSTIFIED REQUESTS BY CUSTOMERS

### Responsibility Check

- Since businesses must be managed with profitability in mind, customer service providers must be able to recognise unjustified requests.
  - A Responsibility check is assessing a situation and determining who should have responsibility and who really does have the responsibility.
  - Accountabilities must be created and enforced.
  - The goal in performing a responsibility check is to clarify what went wrong in a situation and to shift the responsibility to the responsible party.

## **F. WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU ARE WRONG?**

**When you believe that you have treated a customer inappropriately, try the following:**

- **Review the situation.**
  - **Observe the customer's reaction.**
  - **Admit the mistake.**
  - **Apologise for your actions or error.**
  - **Find a solution and implement it.**

## **G. THE PAYOFFS OF COPING WITH CHALLENGING CUSTOMERS WHICH LEAD TO LONG TERM PROFITABILITY**

- Customers must be thought of as long-term assets.
  - It is much easier to retain established customers than it is to recruit new customers.
  - We learn to deal with conflict by confronting it.

## **H. PROBLEM SOLVING**

### **Step 1a: Identify the Customer's Problem**

- Before you can decide on a course of action, you must first know the nature and scope of the problem you are facing.
  - Often, a customer may not know how to explain his or her problem well.
  - Begin your journey into problem solving by apologising for any inconvenience.
  - The customer probably wants someone to be responsible.

## **H. PROBLEM SOLVING**

### **Step 1a: Identify the Customer's Problem**

- I'm sorry you were inconvenienced.
- How may I assist you?
- Take responsibility for the problem, even if you didn't actually cause it.
- Remember that, in the customer's eyes, you represent the organisation.
- Let the customer know that you are sincerely regretful that the problem has occurred.
- Collect any documentation or other background information available.

## H. PROBLEM SOLVING

### Step 1b: Ask Questions

- Open-Ended.
  - Closed-Ended.
  - Ask some specific questions about the problem.
    - *What do you believe is wrong with the meter?*
    - *Did you check the manual first to see that you are operating it correctly?*

## H. PROBLEM SOLVING

### Step 2: Compile and Analyse the Data

- You need as much information as possible.
  - To get that information requires active listening and a little investigative work.
  - You should also do a quick assessment of how serious the problem is.
  - Once you have collected information through questioning and from other sources, spend some time reviewing what you have found.
  - **Ultimately, what you are trying to do is determine the choices available to you that will help satisfy the customer and solve the problems.**

# I. PROBLEM SOLVING

## Step 3: Identify Alternatives

- Let customers know that you are willing to work with them to find an acceptable solution to the problem.
  - Have an objective perspective.
  - Use this perspective as a basis on which to offer suggestions or viewpoints that the customer may not see or has overlooked.
  - Make sure that you consider various possibilities and alternatives.
  - Perhaps you will come up with ideas other than the ones that you and your organisation typically use.
  - Don't sacrifice customer satisfaction for convenience.
  - If necessary, seek approval from higher authority to use creative solutions.

## H. PROBLEM SOLVING

### Step 4: Evaluate Alternatives

- Once you have collected all the facts, examine your alternatives or options. Be careful not to let cost be the deciding factor.
  - Little extra time and money spent to solve a problem could save a customer and prevent recurring problems.
  - ✓ *What is the most efficient way to solve this problem?*
  - ✓ *Which are the most effective options for solving this problem?*
  - ✓ *Which options are the most cost-effective?*
  - ✓ *Will the options being considered solve the problem and satisfy the customer?*

## **H. PROBLEM SOLVING**

### **Step 5: Make a Decision**

- Make a decision on what your course of action will be.
  - To do this ask the customer – “What option would you prefer”.
  - This simple question puts the customer into the decision-making position and makes the customer feel empowered.
  - If the request is reasonable and practical, proceed and solve the problem.
  - If not, negotiate a different alternative.

# I. PROBLEM SOLVING

## **Group Exercise:**

In groups, identify the problem that your customer faces and then go through a problem solving exercise ensuring that an adequate decision is made at the end to satisfy the customer.