Exceptional Front-Line Customer Service in Higher Education

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Presentation Overview

- Defining customer service
- Customer service philosophy
- Forming customer service standards
- Basic principles
- Methods of customer service/communication
- Dealing with challenging customers
- Evaluating customer service
Sample Chat Question

What aspect of customer service are you trying to improve?
We need to understand who our customers are.

We need to understand our customers’ attributes and demographics.

We need to understand our customers’ perceptions and expectations.

We need to understand our product, service, resources.

Do we have the capacity to meet and exceed our customers’ expectations? If not, how can we get to where we need to be?
Customer Service Philosophy

- How do we develop a customer service philosophy?
- What does our organization or department stand for?
- Is the customer always right?
- What are elements of good service?
Forming Your Own Customer Service Standards

- Identify words or phrases that define your service expectations
- Further define what these standards look like
- Prioritize the standards
- Communicate within the organization
Forming Your Own Customer Service Standards

- Think about the needs of the customer and the ability of the organization to fulfill these needs.
- Are they aligned with the organization’s mission?
- Are they specific, measureable, reasonable?
- Think about the delivery systems:
  - People
  - Environment
  - Processes
Customer Service Standards
U of M One Stop Student Services

• Knowledgeable
  ▪ Understand and accurately explain procedures/policies.
  ▪ Verify student’s name/ID and look at student’s record even if their questions appear simple.

• Efficient
  ▪ Be comprehensive by looking at all aspects of the student’s record
  ▪ Verify all issues have been resolved
Customer Service Standards
U of M One Stop Student Services

• Empathetic
  ▪ Actively listen and be patient with customers
  ▪ Be realistic, but positive

• Friendly
  ▪ Introduce yourself during phone calls and welcome students to the counter
  ▪ Use a calm, reassuring tone and make eye contact
Creating Service Standards for Customer Encounters

• **Step 1:** Review your services and sub-divide into specific customer encounters. Make sure to use the customer’s perspective.

• **Step 2:** Document the basic steps that make up each customer encounter.

• **Step 3:** Determine what will enhance the service experience.

• **Step 4:** Create standards after re-defining your enhanced service experience and re-write the customer encounter to reflect your standards.

• **Step 5:** Periodically review and update your standards.
Creating Service Standards for Customer Encounters

Let’s create our own example:

- Step 1: ___________________
- Step 2: ___________________
- Step 3: ___________________
- Step 4: ___________________
- Step 5: ___________________
Basic Principles

• Understand the customer and their expectations
• Providing accurate information and being consistent and timely
• Being professional and courteous
• Deliver what you promise
• Being a good communicator
• Being a problem-solver
Problem Solving Model

1. Identify the problem and understand its unique characteristics and possible outcomes
2. Define solution requirements and possible solutions
3. Select the best solution
4. Implement the solution
5. Observe and evaluate the solution's impact
Think of a current problem in your organization.
What are the problem’s unique characteristics?
What are some possible solutions?
What are the pros and cons of each solution?
What are the possible outcomes?
How might you evaluate the solution’s impact?
Another Problem Solving Approach

- Empathize (acknowledge the problem)
- Clarify (identify the true need)
- Take Action (partner for a solution)
- Follow Up (Provide goodwill)
Methods of Communications

- Listening
- Speaking
- Writing
- Reading
- Non-verbal expression
Types of Communication: Face-to-Face

- Body Language: 55%
- Vocal Quality: 38%
- Words Used: 7%

Types of Communication: Telephone

- Vocal Quality, 82%
- Words Used, 18%

Types of Communication: E-mail

Words Used, 100%

A good listener...

- conveys sincerity
- focuses on the speaker and what they are saying
- does not interrupt
- listens with their eyes and their mind
Listening

• Things to avoid…
  ▪ Formulating what you want to say while the customer is still talking
  ▪ Thinking about other things while the customer is talking
  ▪ Jumping to conclusions
Vocal Quality

- Tone or Pitch
- Inflection
- Rate
- Volume
# The Power of Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words to use:</th>
<th>Words to avoid:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May I</td>
<td>You have to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can I help</td>
<td>Not our policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you like</td>
<td>Not my job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider this</td>
<td>We’ll try</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity</td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ll be happy to</td>
<td>I have no idea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Effective communication

- Closed-ended questions
  - If you need a “yes” or “no” or other one-word answer
  - Useful when you want specific information, to limit talking, or to control direction of conversation
  - Common lead-ins: who, when, did, which, would, are, can, have, do, is, will, and may
Effective communication

• Open-ended questions
  ▪ If you need more than a “yes” or “no” or one-word response
  ▪ Useful when you want general information
  ▪ Common lead-ins are: what, how, and why
Body Language

- Posture
- Feet and Arms
- Hands
- Handshake
- Head and Eyes
Telephone Customer Service

• Smile!
• Answer with a professional greeting.
• Give answers and assistance as efficiently as possible.
• Thank the caller.
• Conclude the call in a positive way.
Telephone Etiquette

- Make sure you are familiar with the features of your phone.
- Answer in as few rings as possible.
- Be sure to avoid side conversations and try to reduce background noise.
- Never eat or drink while on the telephone.
- Ask permission before placing someone on hold.
- Thank customer for holding once s/he is off hold.
Using Voice Mail Effectively

- Identify yourself
- Speak slowly, clearly, and directly
- Keep it short
- Keep it to one topic at a time
- Identify the type of response you need
- Avoid phone tag
E-mail Customer Service

- Type e-mail like you would a formal letter
- Proofread before sending
- Respond/answer promptly
- Never type in all uppercase
- Avoid industry jargon and acronyms
E-mail Customer Service

- Be careful with sensitive information
- Respond quickly - if you can’t, consider an auto reply system
- Be clear and concise
- Understand that e-mail can be permanent and forwarded to anyone
In-person Customer Service

- Smile
- Professional greeting
- Lean forward toward the customer
- Make eye contact
- Be aware of body language
- Give contact information for future questions
- Thank them for coming in with their inquiry
Leveraging Technology to Improve Customer Service Operations

- Moving students from “in-line” to “online” through self-services
- Providing information/messaging through student portals
- Knowledge-base and webchat software
- Mobile device initiatives
- Social networking
- Automatic Call Distribution (ACD)
- Interactive Voice Response (IVR)
- Customer Relationship Management (CRM)
- Walk-in traffic queuing software
Why are Customers Challenging?

- They may not have an understanding or expertise of the situation
- They may not speak “our language”
- They may have difficulty in making decisions
- They may be impatient, hostile, non-communicative, immature, etc.
Ways to Work with Challenging Customers

- Listen and don’t interrupt
- Ask questions
- Show empathy
- Solve the problem
- Follow up
- End on a positive note
Then There Are The Very Difficult Customers

- Listen to their concerns. Speak clearly and slowly.
- Set limits. Be clear that abusive or offensive language/behavior will not be tolerated.
- Involve a supervisor or colleague for assistance or a new perspective.
- On phone calls, ask for their number and call them back later. This allows for a “cooling down” period.
Then There Are The Very Difficult Customers

- For in-person situations, get them out of the mainstream customer area, but don’t get yourself stuck in an area alone.
- Reassure customer that you will follow up.
- Don’t make promises you can’t keep.
- Document the incident.
- Understand what campus resources are available for further assistance.
How to share bad news

- Acknowledge customer’s feelings
- Share the responsibility of the problem
- Convey sincerity
- Ask for the opportunity to correct the problem
- Request the opportunity to continue doing business in the future
When You Can’t Say “Yes”

- Show empathy
- Explain the reason
- Offer what you can do
- Suggest what they can do
What To Do When You Are Wrong

- Admit the mistake
- Apologize for the error
- Find a solution
- Document the error
- Incorporate ways to lessen the likelihood for future error
Barriers to providing exceptional customer service

- Poor communication skills
- Staff not empowered to make decisions
- Lack of adequate training
- Staff on “auto pilot”
- Difficult to understand processes
- Policies that don’t make common sense
- Poor leadership/unmotivated staff
Evaluating Customer Service Staff

- Evaluating your staff
  - Shadowing in-person contacts
  - Secret “shopper”
  - Phone monitoring
  - Evaluating e-mail responses
  - Knowledge assessment

- Improving customer service
  - Coaching, counseling, mentoring
  - Leading by example
Assessing Student Satisfaction Levels

- Evaluating your customers
  - Surveys
  - In-person survey cards
  - Online comment cards
  - Interviews
  - Focus groups
  - Customer advisory groups
Evaluation Process

1) Establish the goal
2) Identify resources needed and a timeline
3) Research any existing information on the subject matter
4) Determine sample size and sampling technique
Evaluation Process

5) Assess data gathering techniques
6) Draft the evaluation questions
7) Pretest the questions
8) Conduct the evaluation
9) Follow-up on non-responses
10) Analyze data and write final report
Survey Question Examples

- When you last contacted XYZ University, what information were you inquiring about?
- Was your response time acceptable?
- Were your questions answered or your issue resolved to your satisfaction?
- Were you treated in a courteous and professional manner?
- Suggestions for improvement?
Evaluating Student Satisfaction

ONE STOP Annual Student Survey 2012
About the survey: A random sampling of students were contacted to respond to a service satisfaction survey of One Stop Student Services in November 2012. Overall, 98% of students who responded felt positive about the service they received.

Undergraduate: freshmen 10%, sophomores 15%, juniors 13%, seniors 21% (67%)
Graduate: 25%
Non-Degree: 8%

Overall satisfaction with One Stop
- 98% Overall satisfied with service provided by One Stop
- One Stop staff's ability to answer questions or provide referrals 97% • KNOWLEDGE
- 97% One Stop staff understood their concerns • EMPATHY
- Timeliness of response by One Stop staff 97% • EFFICIENCY
- 98% Courtesy of interaction displayed by One Stop staff • FRIENDLINESS

Customer Service Standards

Email response expectation
- Within a few hours: Immediate 10%, Within one day: 30%
- Within two days: 20%
- Within 3 days: 10%

Students who preferred contact by means other than email represent 7% of respondents.
Benchmarking

- Self-improvement tool
- Compare your organization with others
- Identify comparative strengths and weaknesses and learn how to improve
- A way of finding and adopting best practices
Benefits of Exceptional Customer Service

- Satisfied customers/students, increased retention, improved graduation rates
- Positive reputation and respect of students, their families, your institutional peers
- Work is more personally fulfilling for staff
- Problems are creatively solved
Resources and Publications

- *Raving Fans* by Ken Blanchard & Sheldon Bowles
- *Customer Mania! It's Never Too Late to Build a Customer-Focused Company* by Ken Blanchard
Questions?

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THANK YOU