

# 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?



# Defining Customer Service

- 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:

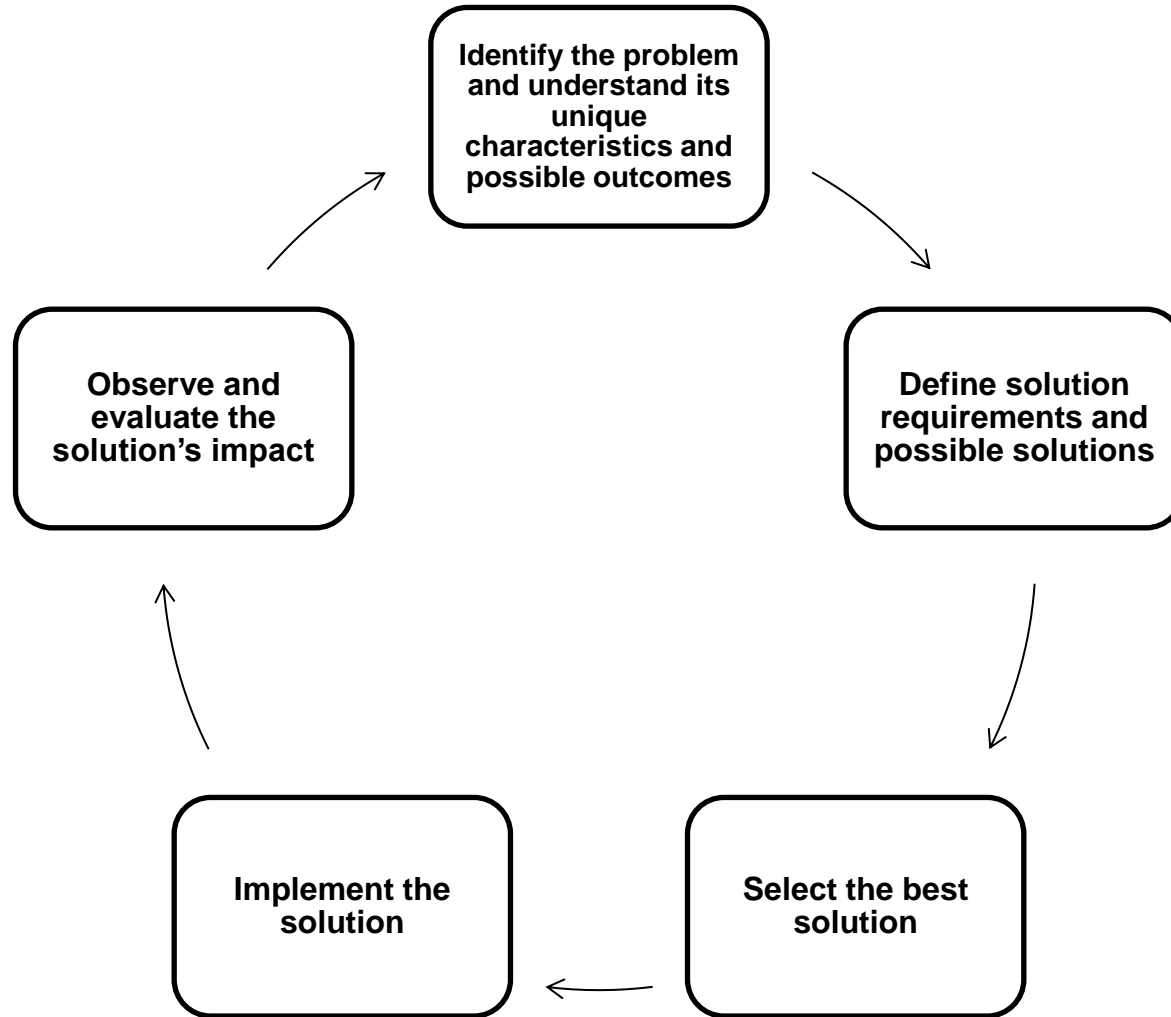
- Step 1: \_\_\_\_\_
- Step 2: \_\_\_\_\_
- Step 3: \_\_\_\_\_
- Step 4: \_\_\_\_\_
- Step 5: \_\_\_\_\_

# 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



# Problem Solving Scenario Exercise

- 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)

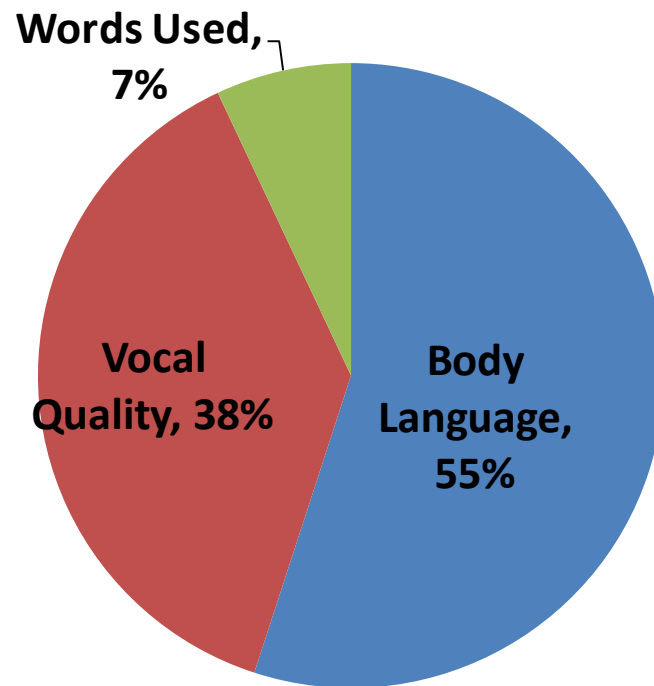
# Methods of Communications

- Listening
- Speaking
- Writing
- Reading
- Non-verbal expression



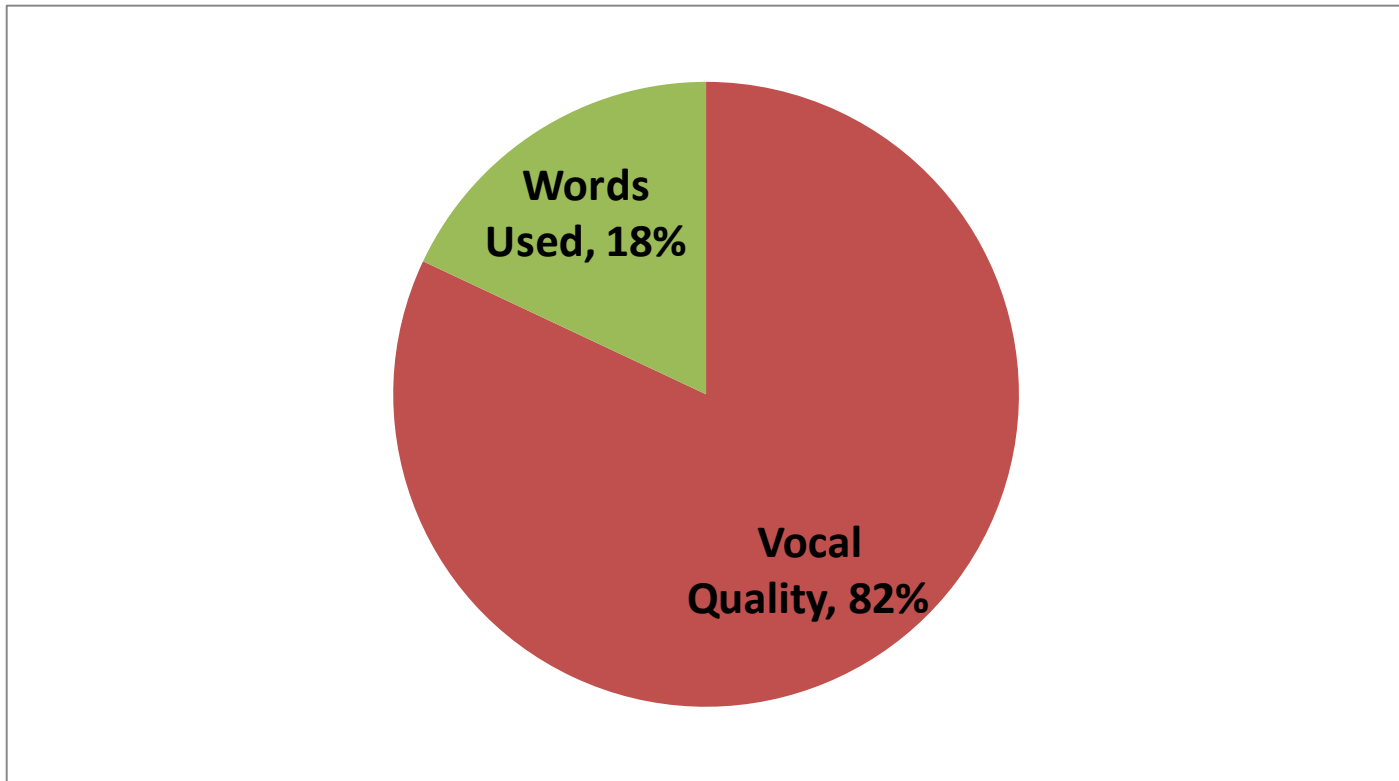


# Types of Communication: Face-to-Face



Source: The Big Book of  
Customer Service Training  
Games, 1999.

# Types of Communication: Telephone



Source: The Big Book of  
Customer Service Training  
Games, 1999.

# Types of Communication: E-mail



Source: The Big Book of  
Customer Service Training  
Games, 1999.

# Listening

- 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

## Words to use:

May I

How can I help

Would you like

Consider this

Opportunity

I'll be happy to

## Words to avoid:

You have to

Not our policy

Not my job

We'll try

I don't know

I have no idea

# 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

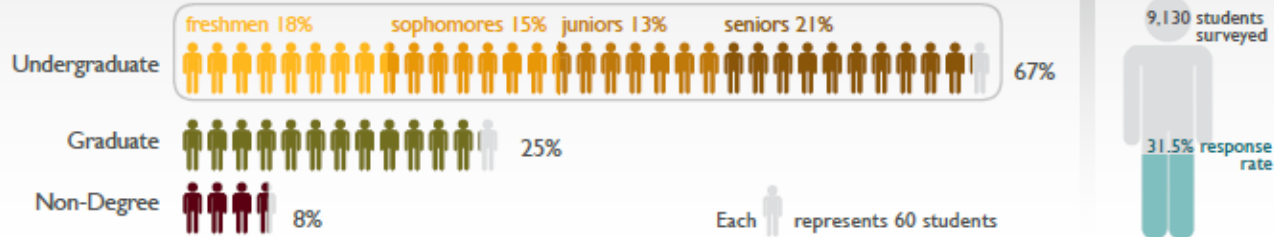
- When you last contacted XYZ University, what information were you inquiring about?
- Was your response time acceptable?
- Were your questions answered or your issue resolved to your satisfaction?
- Were you treated in a courteous and professional manner?
- Suggestions for improvement?

# Evaluating Student Satisfaction

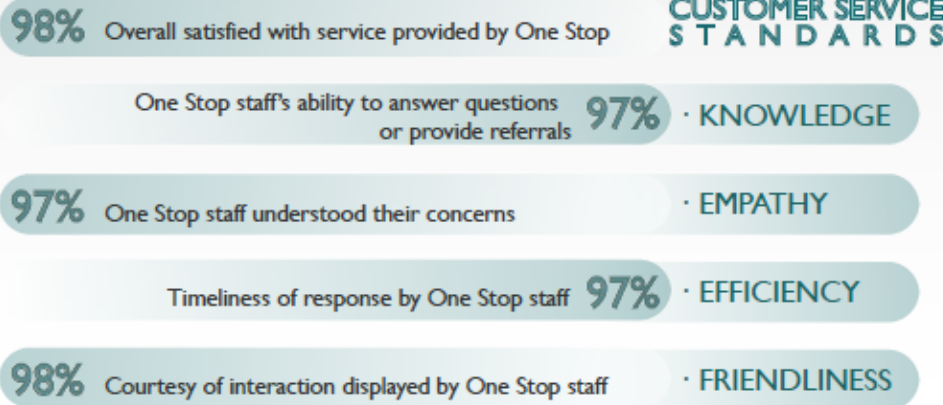
## ONE STOP Annual Student Survey 2012

ONE STOP Student Services  
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA  
**Driven to Discover™**

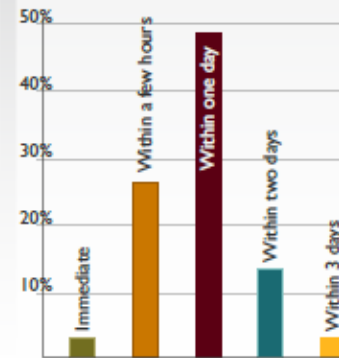
About the survey: A random sampling of students were contacted to respond to a service satisfaction survey of One Stop Student Services in November 2012. Overall, 98% of students who responded felt positive about the service they received.



### Overall satisfaction with One Stop



### Email response expectation



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
- <http://www.customermanagementiq.com/>
- <http://www.customerservicemanager.com/>

# Questions?

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