

# The Art of Customer Relations

## 1.1 WHO ARE OUR CUSTOMERS?

Our customers come from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures. They vary in age, tastes, looks and perceptions.

Our customers may be Japanese, American or English. They may require special teas to drink if they are English or they may wish to have salad and a glass of water on arrival if they are American.

Some establishments according to locality or style may attract a particular clientele such as students, pensioners or business people.

### Different types of customers

**Regular customers:**

- \* they live locally
- \* enjoy the atmosphere
- \* they look forward to recognition, i.e. being called by name

**A Chance customer:**

- \* comes with a friend or a 'Walk-in'
- \* is staying near-by
- \* is trying a new place

**Visitors:**

- \* come with a group/or as individuals
- \* recommended by a tour operator or guide
- \* business people staying longer than 24hrs in a place are called 'tourists'.
- \* people travelling for pleasure are also called 'tourists'.



## 1.2 CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

**Customers** in our hotels/motels, restaurants or bars may have a wide variety of expectations. Our role is to fulfil these expectations on an individual basis, as no two customers needs are the same.

It is these individual needs that makes your job such a challenge.

You will provide a high level of service to your customers by fulfilling their *individual needs*.

**Examples of customer expectations:**

**A 'business person' may be looking for:**

- \* a warm smile and friendly greeting
- \* service at the level they have been used to providing their own customers
- \* a quiet spot for a business meeting
- \* some information on the night life, tours and local sights

**A 'courting couple' may be looking for:**

- \* a quiet table for two
- \* intimate surroundings
- \* discreet service

**A 'group' may be looking for:**

- \* a private area where it is 'OK' to make some noise
- \* fast, friendly service
- \* additional attention — such as a table setting in their club colours.
- \* group touring arrangements and guidance/ideas.



### 1.3 EXERCISES

Study carefully the following stories and determine what your customer's expectations are in each case.

- \* List the expectations.
- \* Determine if expectations were met.
- \* If not, how could they have been met?

Write your response on the next page of the workbook.

### STORIES

1. A customer, Mr. Barge, checks into his hotel and goes to his room — No. 107. He tries the light switch — nothing happens, he tries a few more switches — still nothing happens. Eventually he rings the switchboard:

Mr. Barge     'I have a problem with the lighting in my room'

Operator     'I'm sorry sir you will have to ring maintenance'  
(Nobody answers at maintenance, so he rings reception.)

Reception    'Good evening, Reception'

Mr. Barge    'Hello, I have a problem with the lighting in my room'

Reception    'You'll need to ring maintenance'

Mr. Barge    'They are not answering'

Reception    'Well what's the problem?'

Mr. Barge    'None of the lights work'

Reception    'Did you turn the main on?'

Mr. Barge    'What main?'

Reception    Sarcastically — 'Well of course they won't work if you don't turn the main on — it's by the door'.

2. A couple are seated in a restaurant for dinner. The headwaiter arrives to take the order. The gentleman asks:

Customer     'Could you tell me about the chicken and avocado dish?'

Maitre'd     'Well, its chicken and avocado — and its cooked!'

YOUR NOTES:

## 2. HANDLING COMPLAINTS

The road to providing a consistently high standard of service is never entirely smooth. Occasionally there will be complaints about the service or product provided.

Although a complaint usually causes an awkward situation it should be remembered that in the majority of cases our establishment is likely to be at fault and we shouldn't need to look too far for solutions. There are very few difficult customers, but many difficult situations.

A professional will welcome a complaint. It is a far better situation to be given the opportunity to satisfy a dissatisfied customer than to lose a customer.

The hardest thing to get back is a lost customer. If a customer leaves your establishment dissatisfied, there is a good chance they will relay their experience to their friends. You have not only lost a customer but potential customers as well.

### Points to remember when handling complaints:

- A customer may be a little embarrassed about relaying a complaint to you and may even appear defensive, rather than aggressive
- Get on side with your customers situation — put yourself in their position . . . that is called “empathy” . . . or understanding and caring enough to fix the problem right away
- Always keep the situation in perspective
- We are all only human.



YOUR NOTES:

## **2.1 FIVE STEPS FOR HANDLING COMPLAINTS**

## 2.2 CASE STUDY:

The group will be divided into two, and each sub-group is to go through this case study, discuss it and agree on one way to handle the situation.

A regular customer and their party are half way through the main course, when you are called to the table. You can see by the look on the customer's face that there is a problem.

'This fish is off. It has a smell to it — and my friend's salad has a grub in it. I'm a regular customer and I've never struck anything like this — you have embarrassed me in front of my friends and spoilt our whole evening'.

'What are you going to do about it?'

YOUR NOTES:

### 3. TELEPHONE TECHNIQUE

The incoming telephone call may be a customers first introduction to your establishment. That's why it is very important that you give a good impression each time you answer the telephone.

Answer the telephone courteously and promptly.

Communication is both visual and verbal. As telephone communication is only verbal particular attention is needed to determine the callers requirements.

You must listen very carefully to what is being said and to the callers tone of voice. Likewise, you must speak clearly and adopt a pleasant manner.

Listening is a skill. It involves the accurate transfer of a thought from one person to another. Good listening skills involve not assuming you know what is going to be said, not interrupting, displaying interest and continuing to listen even when you think you recognise the ideas.

It is easy to develop bad telephone habits, and every now and then it is useful to remind *yourself* of the things that annoy *you* when *you* call a business number. This way you are more likely to avoid developing bad habits in the future.

YOUR NOTES:



### 3.1 RECEIVING A CALL

- \* answer the telephone promptly — within 3 or 4 rings
- \* extend to the caller the courtesies you would like yourself
- \* greet the caller, accurately identify your organisation and offer assistance.

“Good evening, Jo Jo’s Motel. May I help you?”

- \* use clear, cheerful and pleasant tones
- \* avoid interference from background noise
- \* smile as you answer the telephone and put that smile into your voice.



#### Points to remember when receiving a call:

- Excuse yourself from another call (or a customer at the desk) and deal with callers quickly.
- Remember, people don’t object to your providing good service to others.
- When you connect a caller to an extension which doesn’t answer immediately, keep the caller informed of what you are doing. Don’t leave them wondering what has happened. Let them know if the extension is busy, if you are trying another extension or if you are paging someone.
- If the switch board is busy, don’t be a fountain of knowledge to one caller while others wait. Connect the call to someone who can provide them with the information they require, leaving you free to deal with other calls.
- If a caller has a complaint, be sympathetic and connect them to a person who can help.
- Be warm, helpful and friendly to all callers — and they will feel that the staff at your establishment really care about their customers.

## 3.2 TAKING A MESSAGE

Messages are important and it is essential that you take care in receiving and passing them on.

The key points to receiving a message;

- Take down messages exactly as you receive them.
- Record details: name of caller, date and time you took the message, name of person to be informed, nature of the call/message details.
- Repeat essential details so that:
  - you have received them correctly
  - you have time to record all the details.
- Inform the other party what action you will be taking.

YOUR NOTES:

## 4. SUGGESTIVE SELLING



Suggestive selling is the process of selling a suggestion to another person.

Selling, in these terms is persuading someone to purchase a product or service that they may otherwise not have bought. The benefits of suggestive selling are many:

- ★ your customer feels pampered that you have taken care to explain the value of certain products.
- ★ the revenue per 'cover' or per 'head' is increased as a result of the extra sale.
- ★ it is a challenge for you, the professional to satisfy the hidden needs of your customer.

### 4.1 DO I NEED TO BE A SALES PERSON?

Yes — I do! But luckily we are already salespeople. A salesperson sells either themselves, a product or an idea.

**Situations in which we use our selling skills:**

- ★ When was the last time you persuaded someone to try a new brand?
- ★ Did you ever talk someone into watching a movie they hadn't heard about?
- ★ When was the last time you got to decide what program to watch on TV?

When you convince or persuade someone to do something, go somewhere or eat something ... you have "made a sale" ... you have sold someone an idea or a product.

By looking at how you sold these ideas and things to other people you can determine how to sell "suggestively".

**For example in the above selling situations we;**

- \* described the good saleable pointers with confidence : 'this item is produced locally'.
- \* listed any benefits to the customer — 'these socks are designed to work well with those shoes'.
- \* persuaded the purchaser through picture building — 'this bread is baked fresh and topped with the chef's special butters'.

Each of the previous examples can be applied to suggestive selling in your establishment.

**Example:**

'A customer is holding a trendy jumper that she has already tried on, but she hasn't gone near the jewellery display yet. The sales clerk suggests:

"We have a special on jewellery this week only, two pieces for \$10.00".

"There are a selection of necklaces that look particularly nice with that top".

"And there is a bracelet that matches exactly"

## 4.2 WHAT CAN BE SOLD USING SUGGESTIVE SELLING?

### EXAMPLES:

- \* specialty sports items
- \* shoe laces, socks, shoe polish
- \* matching clothing items
- \* additional games and accessories for the customer's particular game console.
- \* matching furniture items

YOUR NOTES. What other items lend themselves to suggestive selling in your establishment?

### 4.3 OPEN AND CLOSED QUESTIONS

A **CLOSED QUESTION** is a question to which the only answer is 'Yes' or 'No'.

An **OPEN QUESTION** usually encourages an informative answer. Open questions begin with what, how, when, where, why and who.

An important point to remember is that the use of open ended questions will always encourage a positive response from your customer.

Using the 'berry selection' example the next step would be to take the order.

'How many serves will that be Sir/Madam?'

People like to make an individual decision, so rather than say:

'Are you having dessert?'

This is a yes/no question and often the host feels pressured to answer on behalf of the table — better to direct your question to the others at the table individually. Such as:

'And will you have the berries too, sir?'

#### **Other examples:**

'What colour will you like that jacket in?'  
rather than,  
'Would you like this jacket?'

or,

'What sized memory card would you like with that new game console',  
rather than,  
'Did you know that doesn't come with a memory card?'

'**Which would you prefer?**' is a great sales tool — remember these words well!

**SUGGESTIVE SELLING** is one way of increasing both the professionalism of your job and the fun you have in looking after your customers.

It also assists your customers by providing them with a choice of product as well as a description of the product.

Through awareness of your customers needs and the use of open ended questions it becomes very easy to sell additional products to them, most frequently those products which they wanted in any case.

## 4.4 EXERCISE

### OPEN AND CLOSED QUESTIONS

Determine which of the following are open or closed questions —

- (1) What are you having for dinner?
- (2) How often would you need to use the conference room?
- (3) Did you enjoy your meal?
- (4) Can you tell me your name?
- (5) Can I get you a drink?
- (6) Do you like playing squash?
- (7) When did you last visit our restaurant?
- (8) What is your name?
- (9) What would you like to drink?
- (10) Have you been here before?