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E-GUIDE

CUSTOMER CARE

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*This e-guide has been prepared in conjunction with a classroom-based customer care training.*

## **The application of this guide:**

This guide outlines key considerations and principles for delivering good customer care in the work place. It provides information that may assist employees in customer facing role to learn new skills and techniques for dealing with the challenges of providing excellent customer service.

The guide has been designed alongside classroom-based customer care training. Although it is a very useful reference guide, it should not be relied upon on its own as a main training resource. It should be used in conjunction with other formal training methods. It is particularly aimed at Frontline staff and employees who interact with customers on a daily basis. However, the customer care issues discussed are relevant and applicable to other types of employees and roles in any organisation.

The words Customer care and Customer service are used interchangeably in this guide. Customer service is how a company or organisation deals with a customer before, during and after the purchasing or use of a service. Customer care is the provision of customer service.

There are two dimensions to customer care; the first is the procedural dimension which is to do with organisational systems, procedures and processes – the way things get done, the mechanisms that are in place in an organisation to ensure and maximise customer satisfaction. The other dimension is the personal dimension which relates to how an individual/employee within the organisation delivers customer care. It is about the human side, the interpersonal side and what behaviours, attitude and skill we use to deliver good customer care.

This guide is focused on the human dimension of customer care. How does one apply a combination of own behaviour, skills and knowledge supported by organisational systems, procedures and processes and all these factors together to deliver good customer care and ensure customer satisfaction.

## Introduction:

At some point in our lives, we have all been customers ourselves and as customers, most of us have come to recognise what we like and what we don't like about the products and services we purchase or obtain. Furthermore, we know what should have happened instead. With such theory, all customers care representatives should be equipped to give excellent customer service. But theory is not always reality and most of us experience customer service failures several times a week either whilst shopping for groceries, at a restaurant, at the gym, the cinema, petrol station etc.

Good customer care can benefit a company or organisation in various ways. Good customer care contributes to financial benefits such as increased sales or profit especially in the private sector where goods are sold for profit. Good customer care also helps your organisations' reputation and will help the customer like your organisation, keep coming back again and most importantly want to share their experiences with your organisation to others. This is good for your organisation's survival and very relevant in the non-profit sector like charities and voluntary organisation. If there are no customers to serve, such organisations cease to be relevant or may lose their funding.

Any employee who interacts with a customer either by phone, face-to-face, e-mail or any other communication channel is responsible for delivering good customer care. Public sector and non-profit organisations face significant challenges as they respond to the pressures of reducing spending, budget cuts and providing more customer-focused services. Putting systems, processes and procedures in place to maximise customer satisfaction is only part of the jigsaw. Frontline staff must develop the right skills, attitude and behaviour to enable them consistently provide quality services to customers.

### What will you learn from this guide?

- ❖ Customers are very important. They are the lifeblood of any business or organisation.
- ❖ Customer care: what does it mean to you, the organisation you work for, and your customers
- ❖ Customers have different needs which must be looked after by a company or organisation; How to identify these needs
- ❖ Key skills and behaviours you need to deliver good customer care
- ❖ Top tips to use when dealing with unhappy customers

Use this guide as a reminder of the core principles, values and approaches that should guide you as you take up the challenge of putting customers first and delivering good customer care daily.

Read the notes and complete the accompanying Activity. Remember! Skills come with practice; taking away some of the key ideas and techniques you have learnt from this guide and putting them into practice is extremely important to help you develop good customer care skills. You may even develop successful techniques of your own along the way. If you do, share it with others.

## Who are Customers?

Customers are the lifeblood of any business. Without them a business or organisation would not or could not exist. According to traditional definitions, a customer is a person, company or other entity that purchases goods and services from another person, company or entity. This may be the purchase of a bottle of water from a retail shop, a meal from a restaurant or office stationery from a wholesale company. This definition is particularly relevant in the private sector where goods or services are sold for profit and it is very easy to see the direct impact of less, or more customers on the existence of companies in this sector.

In today's world, we can widen this definition further to include customer interactions in which products or services are not necessarily exchanged for money. This is usually the case in public sector or non-profit organisations such as charities and voluntary organisations. Research results show that peoples' expectations are being shaped by their experiences of customer service in the private sector and factors such as quality, delivery, timeliness, information provision, professionalism and staff attitude are still important to customers.

Examples of these sorts of customers include:

- a person borrowing a book from a public library
- a person attending an appointment at a hospital
- a person seeking information from a voluntary service
- a person or company hiring a meeting room from its local community centre
- members of the public accessing services from a community support centre
- a person or company seeking expert advice from a voluntary service

*So what is the meaning of 'customer'?*

*A customer is anyone who interacts with us or the service we provide, is affected by the quality of the product or service, either indirectly or directly, whether they are internal to the organisation or not. A customer could be an individual, a company or an organisation.*

The above definition brings out the fact that a person, company or organisation can be a customer without spending money. Customers are people who need your assistance. They are not an interruption to your job, they are the reason you have a job.

We are all customers ourselves; in our everyday life we experience customer care. Think about it, places you enjoy visiting or doing business – stores, petrol stations, banks, library, gym, etc. Why, aside from the actual products or service do you like doing business with them? You probably find them courteous, timely, friendly, flexible, interested, and a series of other exemplary qualities.

## 😊 ACTIVITY 1 – Do you know who your Customers are?

With the above definition in mind, make a list of the different types of customers for your organisation.

- List as many as you can and use the table below to categorise them into ‘internal’ and ‘external’ customer groups.
- List individuals by their professions, list organisations or companies by the type of business or department they run.
- An EXTERNAL CUSTOMER is a person, company or entity outside your organisation. This simply means that they are not members or part of the organisation you work for.
- Staff who work within your organisation are INTERNAL CUSTOMERS of each other. You are all customers yourselves, even if situated in different locations.

INTERNAL CUSTOMERS	EXTERNAL CUSTOMERS

Supporting notes:

Internal customers should not be overlooked. Providing high quality internal customer service can improve the ability of your organisation to satisfy external customers. For instance, employees in administrative support departments such as Finance, Legal or HR may provide service to internal customers in Frontline roles such as Reception, Sales or Customer Enquiry Desk. Example, an IT support department may find that customer service representatives cannot get vital information to their customers because the computers never work.

TIPS!

In identifying and categorising your customers, think about the services or products your organisation provides. In some situations, it is very easy to identify who the customer is and in some cases it isn't. The types of customers you have to deal with differ according to the type of organisation you work for. There is no right or wrong answer.

## What is Customer care?

Providing a high level of customer care requires firstly identifying who your customers are, secondly to find out what they need or want and lastly provide products or services which address those needs and want in a way that the customer feels happy and satisfied. Customer care means;

- ✓ Providing a good quality service in a friendly, efficient and helpful way.
- ✓ Listening to the customer and finding out through polite questioning what he/she needs or wants
- ✓ Treating people with dignity, respect and courtesy
- ✓ Treating people equally and fairly, acknowledging their differing needs
- ✓ Acting professionally and being helpful to customers
- ✓ Offering choices where possible and clearly explaining when there are no choices

*Customer care is the customer's perception of how well you supply the goods and services you provide*

Customer care is feeling concern and interest for someone who has entered the business or organisation to buy a product or obtain a service. Customers want accessible, efficient, consistent and responsive services and information. All businesses including public service organisations want happy customers. To ensure its customers are happy, an organisation must strive to provide effective and good quality products and services which meet its customers' expectations, keep them satisfied and coming back again.

Customer care is all about treating our customers how we would like to be treated ourselves.

### BENEFITS OF GOOD CUSTOMER CARE

THE CUSTOMER	YOU	YOUR ORGANISATION
Keeps him/her happy	Higher self awareness	Fewer complaints
Recognition	Higher self control	Lower employee turnover
Personal satisfaction	Happier life at work	Better work environment
Safe and clean facility	Happier life outside work	Higher productivity
Fast & efficient service	More repeat business	Higher income
Quality products	More referred business	Higher sales and profits
Value for money	Higher morale	Better reputation
Less stress	Improved skills and knowledge	Skilled, knowledgeable and confident workforce

## What do Customers really need or want?

Customer expectations change over time (usually becoming more demanding) and are mostly influenced by their previous experiences of dealing with other organisations. Almost every customer is unique and has a different perception of what they expect, need, demand or want. These differences in need can be based on language, ethnicity, age, gender, disability, literacy, sexual orientation or religion. Customer expectations are a dynamic feature which ebbs and flows regularly in accordance with a wide range of factors.

Although it is important that we delight our customers, it is even more important that we meet their basic needs. After all, what customer is delighted if the basics are not taken care of? Despite the different and diverse needs, there are some common and basic expectations which we all as customers have on our list.

**ARRTE** – six basic needs customers have,

1. **Assurance** – we expect to be treated with courtesy. When we walk into an office, a store, an hospital, a library, we expect to be able talk to someone who can assist us when we need help. We also expect him/her to know about their organisations' products or services so they can give the right advice, recommend the best product or provide a solution to our problem.
2. **Reliability** – customers expect high quality product or service. If it is information, we expect this to be reliable and provided in a timely and accurate manner.
3. **Responsiveness** – prompt response is one of the most basic needs required in delivering good customer care. A response to an online enquiry, telephone call, letter or face-to-face enquiry should be given in a timely manner. Even if there is a delay, being kept informed about the reason for the delay is good enough.
4. **Respect** – friendliness and professionalism is important in any company or organisation. An impolite response, a negative attitude or behaviour drives customers away.
5. **Tangibles** – the physical environment we live in has an impact on us in terms of safety, security and comfort. The same applies to the work and the environment we put our customers in, for instance our office, reception area or a meeting room. A positive physical environment adds to the customer experience, while a negative one can make a customer uncomfortable. Attributes of physical environment include lighting, size, cleanliness and overall appearance of our workspace.
6. **Empathy** – empathy is the art of understanding and acknowledging a customer's feelings and needs, before finding a solution that meets them.

As customers ourselves, one would agree that these are basic things you would expect from an organisation when buying a product, accessing a service or requesting information.



## 😊 **ACTIVITY 2 – Your own Customer experience**

Think about your own customer service experiences; choose one that stands out in your memory. As consumers, all of us have been somebody’s customer so we all know what we mean when we talk about customer service experience. Describe your experience below. It could be a good or bad experience.

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### Questions

- How well (or not) did the service meet your needs?
- What key factors contributed to the good or bad experience?
- What were your feelings and reaction at the time?
- What are your feelings and reaction now when you think about that company or service provider?

Give your answers below referring to some of the principles and techniques of good customer care already discussed above to guide your answer.

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If you had a positive experience, your list will probably include the following:

- ✓ Knowledgeable and friendly staff
- ✓ Professional manner of staff
- ✓ Staff listened to me, they seemed to care
- ✓ They did what they said they would do
- ✓ They responded to me promptly
- ✓ They seemed genuinely concerned
- ✓ They smiled
- ✓ They treated me as a real human being; not a distraction
- ✓ They seemed proud of what they did and of the organisation
- ✓ Courteous, friendly and efficient service

If you had a negative experience, your list will probably include the following:

- ✓ Nobody seemed to have a clue what they were doing
- ✓ Nobody explained the process or what was going on
- ✓ I was kept waiting without an explanation
- ✓ They ignored me or fobbed me off
- ✓ They treated me as though it was my fault
- ✓ They never got back to me; I had to chase them
- ✓ They blamed it on the system, the managers, the computers, their suppliers,
- ✓ They were busy doing something else and I was an interruption and a distraction from their main work

Some statistics,

Why do businesses lose customers?

- 1% die
- 3% leave the area
- 4% have no loyalty to any business and naturally move from one business to another
- 5% change because a friend tells them about other businesses which they say are better
- 9% find products and services cheaper elsewhere
- 10% just like complaining and enjoy doing it
- 68% go elsewhere because they are unhappy with the service that they were given**

## How to identify Customer needs

We need to know our customers' needs inside out to enable us provide the right experience and quality service, but this is not easy. Customer needs change over time and it is an evolving process. For this reason, customer care representatives must continue to develop their customer service skills and organisations must have a continuous improvement process in place to ensure that customer service is improved over time. You and your organisation need to be able to anticipate the needs of customers in a variety of situations.

Once we identify what our customer need or expect, we can begin to provide the service that meet these needs and expectations. Here are three key techniques that work when trying to identify customer needs and expectations.

1. **Put yourself in their shoes:** When working with or serving others, we should put ourselves in the customer's shoes. Mentally or physically place yourself in the role of the customer and ask yourself what you expect and demand from a customer care representative. We all have opportunities to engage in real life experiences of what it is like to be a customer because we shop and access services every day.
2. **Ask them what they think:** As an organisation and individual staff member, we want to move beyond meeting the basic needs of our customers – don't we? Talking to customers and asking for verbal feedback is an extremely effective way to know more about your customers and understand them better. The service experience is fresh in the customer's mind and the feedback is instant. This type of interaction does not have to be intrusive. It provides an opportunity to build strong client relationships. You can also refer to information gathered from formal questionnaires, evaluation forms and customer surveys if your organisation has one of these processes.

**Try this!** The next time you meet a customer who is leaving your building after using a service, for example hired a meeting room, obtained advice or information, ask if his/her expectations of the space or service have been met. If not, find out why and what you can do to make your service better.

Remember! Whether you are asking a customer what they think or collecting verbal feedback, if you are not in a position to make changes happen personally, you can still pass on the information you have captured to the right person. Whenever you can address customer needs in a variety of situations and find acceptable solutions, you, the customer, and the organization win.

3. **Collect and analyse data:** Customer information is a valuable asset. Businesses and organisations collect customer data and information about their needs through many resources. The data can be sorted, analysed and then turned into useful information such as how often they contact your organisation, what types of services they obtain, and their feedback about the service etc. The

information can then be used to provide better service, introduce new products and better levels of customer service.

The method each organisation uses to gather customer information is different depending on its size, budget, time limitations and interest in gathering customer feedback. The good news is that there are several data collection options and they don't have to be expensive or hugely sophisticated like a bespoke Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. Some can be simple and free to do.

Good customer care goes beyond meeting customer expectation. We want to go the extra mile for our customers, impress them or surprise them by adding value to a service we are giving or going beyond what is expected. Through this, we can build stronger relationships personally and for our organisation as well as enhance our reputation. Going the extra mile starts to set your service apart from the rest. It starts to add value and exceed expectation.

Here are some everyday examples you may have come across,

1. A sales assistant in the clothing store fitting room who offers to bring the right size blouse when you discover that the one you have just tried on is a little too small
2. A taxi driver who opens the door for you and waits at night for you to safely get into your destination
3. The waiter who brings your coffee to your table because he/she realises you have your hands full
4. A front desk assistant/receptionist at the venue where you are attending an event who discovers you are not familiar with the area and helps you find information about nearby restaurants for lunch
5. A computer technician who repairs your computer and then calls back a week later to make sure your IT is functioning well
6. A shop assistant who not only tells you where to find an item in his/her store but leads you there and shows you where the item is stacked on the store shelf.

None of these customer care representatives had to make this extra effort or go to this trouble. These 'goodwill initiatives' are beyond the call of duty and exceed the customer's expectation. They also make the customer remember the transaction or occasion.



## Steps to delivering good Customer care

The ABC of good customer care consists of three key elements – A for Attitude, B for Behaviour and C for Communication and technical skills. The following sections discuss the types of attitude, behaviour and skills customer care representatives must have to enable them develop good customer care and provide the best possible service to customers.

### ATTITUDE

**Definition:** Manner, disposition, feeling towards something or someone. A way of feeling or thinking that affects one's behaviour.

Attitude is everything when talking about people's disposition to work and in customer service situations. It involves the mind's perception to certain ideas, values, people, systems and institutions. Stressing the need for positive attitude supersedes every other skills and knowledge development that is prescribed for customer care staff. Customers want to interact or do business with individuals they perceive as positive and able to overcome obstacles.

Negative attitude can stifle learning, progress and success. It certainly breeds uncooperative behaviour when handling customer situations or changes required to help deliver that much needed improvement in a customer service process. It is easier to provide exceptional customer service when you have a positive attitude.

What attitudes assist in providing good service?

### ATTITUDE CHECKLIST

- ✓ Enjoy helping people
- ✓ Handle people well
- ✓ Care for others
- ✓ Give fair and equal treatment to all your customers
- ✓ Be understanding of people with special needs

### Behaviours

The way we act or conduct ourselves can affect internal or external customer experience with us. Bad behaviour can harm your organisation. There are certain behaviours that turn off customers or make it difficult to work effectively. We must be careful not to demonstrate these behaviours. Examples include,

- |                                |                                 |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ✓ Using inappropriate language | ✓ Brush off                     |
| ✓ Deride a customer            | ✓ Having sideline conversations |
| ✓ Coldness                     | ✓ Aggressive                    |
| ✓ Apathy                       | ✓ Rude                          |

The table below shows the verbal and non-verbal behaviours we need to be aware of when dealing with customers.

Verbal Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tone of Voice</li> <li>• Vocal Clarity</li> <li>• Verbal Expressiveness</li> </ul>
Non Verbal Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Posture</li> <li>• Facial Expression</li> <li>• Eye Contact</li> <li>• Gesture</li> <li>• Appearance (dress and personal grooming)</li> </ul>

### Verbal – How do you use your voice?

Inappropriate (x)	Do you speak faster when you are nervous?
	Speak slowly when tired and bored?
	Become loud when angry or upset?
Appropriate (✓)	Speak in a formal manner, using professional language?
	Have a cheerful voice?
	Have a warm and understanding tone?

- A flat tone of voice says to the customer, “I don’t like my job and would rather be elsewhere.”
- Slow pitch and presentation say, “I am sad and lonely – do not bother me.”
- A high pitch, rapid voice says, “I am enthusiastic and excited!”
- A loud voice says, “I’m angry and aggressive.”

Your tone of voice should always convey friendliness and amicability. Do not raise your voice in frustration or anger no matter how difficult or tiresome a customer may behave. And, it is important you pay attention to your choice of words at any time and especially when speaking to a frustrated or angry customer. The table below gives useful alternatives to the negative phrases on the left.

Wrong approach	Polite and Friendly alternatives
“No.”	“What I can do is...”
“I don’t know.”	“I’ll find out.”
“That’s not my job./That’s not my department.”	“Let me find the right person who can help you with ....”
“You are right – that’s bad.”	“I understand your frustrations.”
“You need to talk to my Supervisor.”	“Let me find that out for you.”
“Calm down.”	“I’m sorry.”

“You want it by when?”	“I’ll try my best.”
“I’m busy right now.”	“I’ll be with you in just a moment.”

**Non Verbal – What about your body language?**

Our non verbal behaviour refers to our body language including posture, facial expression and appearance. Body language can be complicated. It is absolutely possible to be technically accurate but still leave a customer unsatisfied with the level of service provided because of the way our body language conveyed our message.

Good body language is conducive to good customer relations. Here are some more useful tips to guide you.

- Avoid negative pose or postures such as folding arms, rolling your eyes, frowning etc.
- Positive posture and body language include – a smile, making eye contact and open gestures.
- Posture – slumping in a chair or leaning against a wall while interacting with a customer are signs you are not interested in the customer. Your posture should express attention, friendliness, and openness.
- Facial expression – sets a positive tone before you even begin speaking. A relaxed or pleasant facial expression is the ideal most of the time. A frown or a yawn goes a long way towards ruining a customer service experience.
- Appearance – how you look, your personal grooming has a big impact on your customers. Dirty hands, messy hair and poor dress can mean the loss of an otherwise happy customer. When interacting with customers, dress neatly and in a professional manner so as to command respect and let customers know you take seriously your position.

On one level this seems unfair and superficial because what a person says and how they behave should be more important than if they are well groomed, smiling and dressed-up. Yet visual perception plays a vital role in human impressions and reactions. For reasons psychologists do not always understand, nature and learned behaviour have taught humans to perceive neat, smiling, well-presented individuals in a more commanding manner.

- Observation – notice how your customer behaves and what he/she reacts positively to while you are providing a service
- Personal space – this is the distance that feels comfortable between you and another person. If another person approaches you and invades your personal space, you automatically move back without thought. You are uncomfortable. Leave adequate distance between you and your customer. Adequate space is important to making customers feel secure and unthreatened.

Remember, the little, interpersonal actions noted above mean a great deal in the area of customer relations. They can change customer perceptions and ultimately affect the success of your customer care efforts.



## KNOWLEDGE

In addition to the above, customer care representatives should be technically sound and well versed on their organisation's products and services. A good working knowledge of the organisation's goals and objectives, and an in-depth knowledge of the individual products or services it provides will enable you to behave in a confident manner and successfully respond to frequently asked questions or customer query. If a customer care staff does not know how to address a customer concern, he/she should know where to go for information or find someone else who can assist the customer in a timely manner.

Many times, you may have to deal with a variety of internal and external customers, including those who are angry, indecisive, dissatisfied, demanding, talkative or rude. Being able to assist customers effectively requires a positive approach, preparation, and a sincere desire to help others. Notice the attributes listed do not include costs or money. Instead, they reflect certain behaviours, attitude and skills as qualities required of a customer care professional.

### 😊 **ACTIVITY 4 - Your behaviour**

Look at the example below. In this customer encounter, how do you think the shop assistant should have acted instead?

Example:

You are in the sandwich bar waiting to be served. There is just one person ahead of you. The shop assistant does not make eye contact with you until it is your turn to be served.

Think about how you might modify your own behaviour in different customer situations at your workplace. Describe an encounter and explain how you should act in that situation:

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## Communicating effectively with Customers

A critical part of providing quality customer care is the way in which we communicate with our internal and external customers. When resolving customer problems or addressing customer concerns, we must be creative and sometimes it requires thinking outside the box. Most importantly, we must ensure we clearly understand the customer's issue. Using good communication skills such as active listening, a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions to understand what a customer wants needs or expects is important.

Communication is a 2-way process and involves SENDING and RECEIVING a message. It involves listening to others (receiving), evaluating the message (processing) and asserting/expressing (sending). Two key skills are important in this process, our listening and questioning skills.

### How to listen to Customers

Good customer care starts with the ability to listen and to find out through polite questioning, what a customer needs or wants. It is good practice to stop what you are doing and look at the speaker (the customer). Listen and sit/stand quietly so you can give him/her your full attention. Nod or say yes to show you are listening and understand. Ask a question if you need to, for understanding and clarifying. Below is a useful acronym to help you practice your listening skills.

<b>L</b>	Look interested and get interested in what the customer is saying
<b>I</b>	Involve yourself by responding
<b>S</b>	Stay focused and give your full attention
<b>T</b>	Test your understanding by asking questions
<b>E</b>	Evaluate the message
<b>N</b>	Neutralise your feelings

## Blocks to listening

In everyday conversation we use a variety of shortcuts to understand people and are always trying to make ourselves heard as well. These short cuts can be inhibiting to someone to whom we are trying to give our full attention. We may need to find ways of avoiding their use when we are encouraging people to talk to us. The first step is just to become aware of which ones we have a tendency to use. Here are a few examples,

Action	Meaning
<b>Mind reading</b>	Trying to work out what the other person is thinking or feeling
<b>Rehearsing</b>	Paying more attention to what I will say next than to what the other person is telling me
<b>Comparing</b>	Thinking or talking about what I or a third person would do in the same circumstances
<b>Filtering</b>	Hearing some things and not others
<b>Judging</b>	Focusing on my opinion of what they are talking about, not on what they are thinking or feeling
<b>Dreaming</b>	Following a chain of your own thoughts that have been triggered by what someone has said
<b>Identifying</b>	Referring everything the person says to my own experience
<b>Advising</b>	Giving your ideas about what the other person might find helpful
<b>Sparring</b>	Arguing and debating. Agree or disagreeing with what you are being told
<b>Being right</b>	Avoiding acceptance that something you have done or said might be wrong
<b>Derailing</b>	Changing the subject
<b>Placating</b>	Trying to be nice, pleasant and supportive

**Review this list and reflect on your listening skills.**

## Questioning

The better you ask questions and listen to customers, the more likely you will be to getting to the heart of the customers' concerns. Questions need to be used with care. They should show the listener is interested and is staying with the other person, without being intrusive or too demanding. We may need to ask ourselves why and for whom we are asking particular questions.

OPEN QUESTIONS – we use this term for those questions that encourage people to talk more.

CLOSED QUESTIONS – this term refers to those questions which are likely to be answered with a single word or a few words.

Here are examples of open questions,

“What were your first thought when you saw Jamie’s new car?”

“How involved were you in his selection and final decision on choice of car?”

Here are examples of closed questions,

“When did you go skating with Jane?”

“Did you arrange for a car park space at the club?”

“Was anyone else with you both when you arrived at the club?”

When you ask questions it is helpful if you do the following;

- Ask one question at a time.
- Try not to answer your own questions.
- Ask mostly open questions.
- Try not to use ‘why’.
- Avoid asking for alternatives. (Was it xxx or xxx?)
- Give people time to answer.

Questions starting with ‘why’ can sound interrogative or even judgemental, and often direct people towards rational thinking rather than feeling. (The latter may occasionally be more helpful.) If you find that you are asking too much factual detail it may be that you are avoiding feelings about loss in yourself or your customers.

Clarifying – In most customer encounter, you would want to clarify your understanding of the customer’s situation or problem. This will also show the customer that you are following them and are concerned about understanding them correctly. You would be using phrases like “So do you mean that...”, “If I’ve understood correctly, you wish ....”

Some useful examples when using questions to identify customer needs,

- “How may I help you today?”
- “What will you use it for?”
- “When do you need it done?”
- “How many would you like?”

Remember, with regular practice you can improve your questioning techniques.

## Dealing with unhappy Customers

Dealing with a customer is not a simple task, let alone dealing with an unsatisfied or unhappy customer. If your customer is unsatisfied (for just or unjust reason), you will have to use some of the many techniques of the customer service professional to win their support and continued loyalty. Here are some tips and techniques you can apply when coming into contact with a customer, communicating with him/her about her dissatisfaction, or analysing problems.

When dealing with an unsatisfied customer, you have to take the **LEADD**,

1. **Listen:** It is of primary importance when dealing with an unsatisfied or complaining customer to listen attentively to his/her complaint, gripe, frustration or grievance. Be patient, attentive and friendly.
2. **Empathy:** show empathy – empathy is not sympathy, where you simply feel bad about someone's situation without doing anything about it. Empathy is not restricted to problem solving, since frustrated customer will want his/her feelings acknowledged before he is ready to accept your solution. Empathy is the art of understanding and acknowledging customers' feelings and needs, before finding a solution that meets them.
3. **Acknowledge the problem:** With a nod, eye contact or positive phrases “I understand”, “please carry on, I am listening” or write things down if you have to. You may need to refer to your notes if you have to clarify certain facts when it is your turn to speak or respond to the customer.
4. **Do not argue and do not interrupt:** This will only worsen the situation, especially if the customer is angry. Let him/her speak before you try to discuss with him/her what happened. You will have your time to speak or respond and suggest a solution or way forward.
5. **Do not lose your self-control:** If you stay relaxed, customers will calm down.

Once you have captured as much details as you can from the customer, he/she would have calmed down and you have started to fully understand the picture. It is time to provide a solution.

1. **Review the facts:** ask necessary questions to get more information and complete picture of the situation. Your questioning skills come into play. You may also need to review notes you took down earlier.
2. **Admit the problem:** Here, you can repeat the key points of what you have deduced the key problem is. Find out what the customer needs you to do for them.
3. **Suggest a solution:** Explain first what you can do, and then gently add what you cannot do. This is where your knowledge about your organisations' products and services can be tested. Do you know the resources available to you, is there a complaint policy and procedure in your organisation etc. Remember, if unsure you can at this point; refer to someone more experienced or senior. There is danger in overpromising or underpromising which puts you and the organisation at risk of causing more damage to the situation.

4. **Involve the customer in problem solving:** Suggest the customer alternative solutions, if they exist. Customers appreciate the opportunity to choose the ways of problem solving.
5. **Take Action:** Take responsibility and act immediately on what you have discussed and agreed with the customer. Keep him/her informed of progress. You want to make sure you do whatever you have promised in a timely manner.
6. **Check results:** Check the results of any action you have taken to make sure the customer is completely satisfied with the solution offered.
7. **Follow up:** Make sure you complete any follow up action for the customer. Make sure that all promises you make to the customer are fulfilled. If you do not fulfil what was promised and ignore the customer's problem or complaint, the problem will grow. You may lose the customer completely to another organisation or competitor.

Did you know that,

1. When customers receive good service, they tell on average 10 – 12 people
2. When customers receive poor service, they tell upwards of 20 people

The next time you attend to a customer; aim to provide a good service that will make him/her tell others and say positive things about you and your organisation.

## SOME KEY TERMS

Customer	All businesses or organisations are dependent on their customers for survival and success.
Customer care	Great customer care involves getting to know your customers so well that you can anticipate their needs and exceed their expectations
Customer satisfaction	Customer satisfaction refers to how satisfied customers are with products or services they receive from an organisation. The satisfaction is determined by the quality and type of customer experience and by their expectation
CRM	Customer relationship management ( <b>CRM</b> ) is a system for managing a company's interactions with current and future customers. It involves using technology to organize, automate and synchronize sales, marketing, customer service, and technical support
Need	Needs are things that a customer feels compelled to address or believes are necessary. Needs are an individual matter and arise from internal sources or motivations that vary from one customer to the next according to their situation and background.
Wants	Wants are desired objects or experiences that a customer would like to have. They are not necessary, yet often bring personal appreciation, value, or satisfaction

