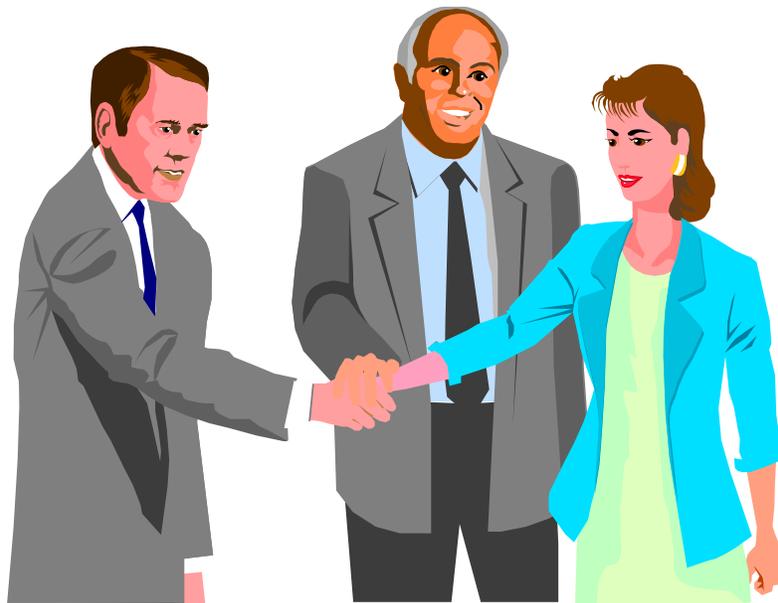


PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE PUBLIC CONTACT.



¹ Value Added Management – Specialists in marketing strategies and management system design, implementation, training and auditing.

1. UNDERSTAND THE OTHER PERSON'S POINT OF VIEW

Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes. Do this, so that you can appreciate the problem, it takes emotional maturity and communication skill. Find out what their interests are. Talk with them in terms of their experiences and what they expect, what brings this person to you.

2. LET THE CUSTOMERS TELL THEIR STORY

The best medicine for upset customers is to let them get it off their chests, **WITHOUT GETTING YOU UPSET!** Give them a chance to express their feelings. Draw them out with questions, or noncommittal remarks like "-m-m", "I know how you feel," "uh huh," etc. This will help them calm down. It will also reveal some points of agreement or settlement that are important in leading to a solution. (You may count on them not listening to you until they tell their story anyway. So plan for it).

3. LEARN TO LISTEN

It's not enough to sit passively while the customer talks. One has to listen with the mind, looking for the paths that lead to understanding and problem solving. It involves leading the speaker with apt and timely questions. It requires the ability to turn the speaker's questions back to them so that they will tell their story fully and not be given answers before they are ready. Listening is a skill!

4. SPEAK THEIR LANGUAGE

It won't help to use the words common to your profession, your company, your speciality when dealing with the public. You have to translate. You should never embarrass your customer, or put your customer on the defensive by making him/her ask 'What do you mean?' Find the words they will understand when talking about your product or service. Aim at communicating, not showing off your knowledge.

5. SAY IT WITH RESPECT

Courtesy, respect, consideration are all shown in little things: a friendly tone of voice, a manner that shows the customer that you consider him/her a person worthy of respect and courtesy, a controlled volume to your voice – not too loud, not in whispers; a choice of words that will be meaningful to your visitor.

6. MAKE THEM FEEL IMPORTANT

You may talk to fifty or one hundred people like these customers every day. But they see you only once. When you have other work, besides meeting people, set it aside when callers come to you. Try not to make them wait until you've finished. If you are pressed, tell them so; let them know that you would rather tend to them but must finish this one task and will return immediately. Learn the customers' name quickly and use it. A customer's name is important to them; they should feel it is important to you.

7. BE PREPARED

When you know a specific person is coming, review his/her file in advance. Should you not know, you can still prepare your interview by planning to draw out the person in a warm, interested, friendly way. When you are dealing with facts, prices, data, that you give to your customers, you must keep current. If it is necessary, plan to get to work fifteen minutes early and review the information you must have during the day.

8. BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF

Bluffing may be all right in poker, but it won't do in public contacts. When you don't have the information, don't "fake it". If you don't know the answers, refer the customers to the right place for them. Give accurate directions to the referral, even if it is your competitor. Your customer will remember!

9. BE PRESENTABLE

There are limits to grooming. But they should be set by necessity, not sloth. Many times public contact can be rendered ineffective because the person at the desk or counter is carelessly groomed; the desk is a paper jungle. Often people are offended by such matters. They suggest a lack of interest in oneself and therefore a lack of interest in others.

10. KNOWING HOW TO STOP AN INTERVIEW

Don't lose the effectiveness of your interview by letting it drag on. When you feel that the problem has been solved, you can courteously end the contact. This takes tact, but should be done firmly, pleasantly. Often simply rising from your seat, extending your hand, and saying "thank you for calling in Mrs Martin", is all that is needed. A good sense of closure – however you apply it – is essential.

HELPFULNESS IS A FEELING WE GIVE TO OTHERS

Sometimes they feel it because we provide exactly what they want; our service, an answer to their direct question, advice, a product, directions.

Sometimes they feel it because we have listened to a troubled, angry, hurt, frustrated, anxious person with patience and concern.

Sometimes they feel it – even when we can be of no direct help – because we referred them to the person or place where they could be helped.

HELPFULNESS IS NOT ACCIDENTAL

We have to plan carefully to be helpful to others. We must know the answers to information questions that our organisation expects us to give to the public. We must know the limits of our knowledge, skill, and authority. We should do all that we can correctly. We need to know our job roles and fill them effectively. We must therefore know when it is helpful to refer our customers to someone else who can help.

- ◆ It is not helpful to be wrongly referred to a place or person who cannot supply a service or an answer.
- ◆ It is not helpful to be given referrals that result from a vague, inadequate understanding of the customer's problem.
- ◆ It is not helpful to be sent on a wild goose chase because the sender just guessed at things.

HELPFULNESS IS A SKILL

It's knowing how to greet clients pleasantly, warmly, learning names quickly, and using them to make them feel important.

It's learning to judge a situation quickly: listening, gathering the facts, using good questions, making sure customers understand their own problems.

It's knowing how to decide what to do: by helping the customers see the alternatives, referring them properly when that's needed, saying "no" when you must – but doing it kindly.

It's learning to get the job done in language customers understand, efficiently, in terms of their point of view, for their interest.

It's knowing how to close an interview so that the customer feels appreciated, will want to return, and has been understood.

Imagine a customer who calls you and says – "You people can't seem to get the simplest booking right. My whole schedule is out of line because of you."

Your brief response might be: "I'm sorry you were inconvenienced, Mr Jackson. Let's see where we can go from here."

You apologise briefly and sincerely, to show your concern.

You focus on solving the problem by projecting towards a future course of action.

HANDLING THE CONFLICT – PHONE CALL

There are several points to be aware of in managing the difficult caller.

1. Present a supportive attitude

A major problem in conflict is defensiveness. Defensiveness is responding to most of the messages we hear in a given phone call as if they are personal attacks.

We may be conversing on a business matter when we hear a message that we think is aimed at us. Immediately we start working out why we are being attacked and how we can attack back. So we are no longer trying to find a solution to a problem – we're retaliating instead, and we become the problem.

This can become an increasing cycle of attack and response, unless we break it with a supportive attitude.

2. Know the six messages that cause you to become defensive

a) Evaluation

We're sensitive to criticism, especially if it's aimed at us and not the problem.

b) Control

We resent being "controlled" or dominated. So when we tell people what "you'll have to do" and offer no alternatives, we arouse their ire.

c) Strategy

When people feel they are being manipulated, they become defensive. A good common example is screening calls. "May I ask who's calling?" is often thought to be a strategy to "rate" the caller's importance.

d) Neutrality

If we give the feeling of being completely neutral towards a situation, the other person can feel alienated and defensive. Our neutrality can sound like indifference. There may be occasions where a business like objective and completely neutral approach is best – but they are rare. Hostility is the usual result.

e) Superiority

We resent people who sound “high and mighty”. This attitude is often communicated when people present their credentials – “I’m managing director of this company, and a director of several others, and I’m not used to this sort of treatment”.

f) Certainty

The know-it-all is dogmatic and tends to drive the other person into an opposing stance.

3. Supportive alternatives

We give out empathetic messages which **deflect** rather than **reflect** the attack.

We consciously choose to react in a positive way, despite provocation. This frees us from the need to bite back.

If the other person persists with an antagonistic approach you –

- listen

- respond with “yes, I understand. Now let’s see where we go from here. I suggest...”

Use transition phrases:

Well, I understand that ...

Yes, I can see that ...

Yes, I appreciate your ...

Yes, I know what you mean ...

Well, I respect that ...

Yes, I agree ...

Phrases like these create a supportive climate by showing empathy and concern.

4. Four types of messages to avoid giving out

- a) Name calling
- b) Ultimatums
- c) Either/or propositions
- d) Shaming statements

5. Avoid "Fight" Behaviour

- ◆ Moving too slowly
- ◆ Chatting with colleague while customer waits
- ◆ Acting bored
- ◆ Interrupting
- ◆ Using a gesture rather than words to direct a customer

6. Avoid "Fight" Words

Using them causes anger and defensiveness e.g. "you allege...", "you say...", "you maintain...", "you can't...", "it isn't possible...", "kindly refrain...".

7. General Rule

Avoid using statements beginning with "you". They are perceived as judgemental, authoritarian, condescending or ordering.

8. Avoid "I" Statements

"I" statements when they include a negative, are also perceived as controlling, defensive, restrictive.

9. Avoid too much silence

Silence – non-responsiveness can produce the same effect as "fight". Customers' expect a prompt response to a complaint, so don't arouse unnecessary anger by procrastinating.

10. Avoid denials, accusations, refusals

"Are you sure about this?"

"It's the computer's fault"

"That's not my department"

"That's our policy and there is nothing I can do about it"

JOB BREAKDOWN

CUSTOMER SERVICE

The American Association for Quality said, "Unless a customer is completely satisfied to the point of being positively delighted and willing to brag about the product or service received, there exists a great potential for market damage and future trouble for the provider of those products and services."

The American Association for Quality conducted a large survey of customers throughout the country and came up with the following reasons why customers are lost.

Die	1%
Moved away	3%
Influenced by friends	5%
Lured away by the competition	9%
Dissatisfied with the product	14%
Turned away by an attitude of indifference on the part of the person serving them	68%

The problem we have is that only 4% of dissatisfied customers complain. The other 96% just quietly go away and never return. That represents a serious financial loss for the organisations whose people do not know how to treat customers, and a tremendous gain to those that do.

A typical dissatisfied customer will tell eight to ten people about the problem. One in five will tell twenty. It takes twelve positive service incidents to make up for one negative incident.

Seven out of ten complaining customers will do business with you again if you resolve the complaint in their favour. If you resolve it on the spot, 95% will do business with you again. On average, a satisfied complainer will tell five people about the problem and how it was satisfactorily resolved.

The average business spends six times more to attract new customers than it does to keep existing ones. Yet customer loyalty is in most cases worth ten times the price of a single purchase.

JOB BREAKDOWN

IMPORTANT STEPS	KEY POINTS
Listen completely and carefully	Don't interrupt Don't leap to the defence of the company Remember the complaint is the perception of the customer
Get the facts	Do not apportion blame to computer, colleagues or company
Apologise	Say, "I'm sorry" You take responsibility for personally fixing the problem
Assure the customer that you will take positive action	Tell the customer WHAT you are going to do and WHEN you are going to do it. Don't tell the customer what you can't do
If you can't fix the problem on the spot give a definite time when you will phone them back.	If you don't phone them back at the agreed time, all your good work so far is down the drain and your reputation has followed it.
When you get back to the customer tell them the actions which will be taken to prevent it happening again.	Ensure that the problem has been solved and the customer is satisfied with your actions
Follow up	Phone the customer the next week or month to find out how things are going and that there have not been any further problems
Use every single complaint as an opportunity	Complaints give direction Complaints give a great opportunity to develop better relationships with customers

THE CONCEPT OF AN EMOTIONAL BANK ACCOUNT

(How to build sound relationships)

Everyone knows how a conventional bank account works. You put money in and you take money out. If you withdraw more money than you deposit, the account becomes overdrawn.

If you deposit more than you withdraw, the account has a healthy balance and can earn interest.

In relationships, the same concept applies. Everyone has an emotional bank account and we have the ability to make deposits and withdrawals from the emotional bank accounts of the people with whom we interact every day.

If people keep on making withdrawals from our emotional bank account they become overdrawn with us. We ignore them and try to avoid their company. They make their withdrawals by not listening, treating us with disrespect, shouting at us, acting in an autocratic manner, not being trustworthy and many other ways.

You know the people who are overdrawn in their relationship with you. In the same way if we behave in this manner to others, we, in turn, make constant withdrawals until we are overdrawn from their bank account. Eventually the relationship is bankrupt.

On the other hand, people make deposits in our emotional bank account. They do this by treating us with respect, listening to us, giving us credit for extra effort or a good performance, asking our opinions, trusting us and being trustworthy towards us.

Because we are in total control of our own behaviour, we have the choice of making deposits or withdrawals from other people's emotional bank accounts. If we choose to make withdrawals our relationships will be poor. If we choose to make deposits our relationships will be better.

A very good test of our ability, is to coach somebody to do their job a different way in such a manner as to make a deposit in their emotional bank account.

If we are determined to make deposits in people's emotional bank accounts and practice at every opportunity, a strange thing happens. Those same people will make deposits in our emotional bank account. People will mirror our behaviour.