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CUSTOMER SERVICE

In the previous lesson you have learnt about team building. In this lesson you will learn about importance of customer service, types of customers. Customer service is very critical for each industry. With the advent of numerous service providers for similar products, the need for enhancing the customer services experience has risen by many folds to stay upbeat and abreast with the rest of the competition. Companies these days are taking steps to consistently improve and enhance customer services these days as it is the only factor that differentiates you from the others.



OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain about customer service;
- list types of customers;
- handle customer's query efficiently.

7.1 IMPORTANCE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customer service is the process of ensuring customer satisfaction with a product or service. Often, customer service takes place while performing a transaction for the customer, such as issuing an certificate or updating credit card or debit card details. Customer service can take the form of an in-person interaction, a phone call, self-service systems, or by other means.

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If we go back 15 – 20 years, there was a time when most houses had the landline phones and people used to stand in long queues to pay the bill and still stick to it. The reason was lack of options, however today if you do not like a particular brand of mobile services, you can easily switch over to the other. Hence, it becomes extremely vital for the companies to give the best product and services.

We will now look at some **Customer Service Skills** that are vital for you to be able to work in the BPO industry. In a BPO industry, we feel that “being a people person” is of utmost importance. It is not untrue; however, we also need the skills to “WOW” the customers that we interact with on a daily basis.

The following are the important points:

Patience

Patience is not only important to the customers, who often reach out to support when they are confused and frustrated, but it’s also important to the services provider at large. If you deal with customers on a daily basis, be sure to stay patient when they come to you stumped and frustrated. Also be sure to take the time to truly figure out what they want.

Attentiveness

The ability to really listen to customers is very crucial for providing great service. Unless you pay attention you will never know what the real issue is. Not only is it important to pay attention to individual customer interactions, but it’s also important to be careful and attentive to the feedback that you receive at large.

Clear Communication Skills

Make sure you are getting to the problem at hand quickly. Customers neither need your life story nor they want to hear about how your day is going. More importantly, you need to be cautious about how some of your communication habits translate to customers. When it comes to important points that you need to convey clearly to customers, keep it simple and leave nothing to doubt.

Product Knowledge

You should know the product and its functionality in and out, just like a customer who uses it every day would. Without knowing your product from front-to-back, you will not know how to help customers when they run into problems.



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Ability to Use “Positive Language”

Language plays a very important role in influencing others, and people (especially customers) create perceptions about you and your company, based on the language that you use. It sounds superficial, but however, your conversational patterns can truly go a long way in creating happy customers.

Acting Skills

Sometimes you come across people that you will never be able to please. There will be times when you will deal with angry or frustrated customers who seem to want nothing else but to pull you down. Every great customer service representative will have those basic acting skills necessary to maintain their usual cheery persona in spite of dealing with people who may be just plain complaining.

Time Management Skills

You should spend more time with customers, but there is a limit. You need to be concerned with getting customers what they want in an efficient manner. When you realized that you cannot help a customers then get help from your organisation.

Ability to “Read” Customers

You won’t always be able to see customers face-to-face, and in many instances you won’t even hear a customer’s voice. That does not exempt you from understanding some basic principles of behavioural psychology and being able to “read” the customer’s current emotional state. This is an important part of the personalization process as well, because it takes knowing your customers to create a personal experience for them.

A Calming Presence

There are a lot of metaphors for this type of personality: “keeps their cool,” “staying cool under pressure,” etc., but it all represents the same thing: the ability that some people have to stay calm and even influence others when things get a little hectic.

You must know that you cannot let a heated customer force you to lose your cool. In fact, it is their job to try to be the “rock” for a customer who thinks the world is falling down due to their current problem.

Goal Oriented Focus

This may seem like a strange thing to list as a customer service skill, but it is vital.

That's because it leaves employees with goals and customer happiness can work hand-in-hand with great customer service.

Ability to Handle Surprises

Sometimes the customer support world is going to throw surprises. Maybe the problem you encounter is not specifically covered in the company's guidelines, or maybe the customer is not reacting how you thought they would. Whatever the case, it's best to be able to think on your feet... but it's even better to create guidelines for yourself in these situations.

Persuasion Skills

Often you will feel that the customer is curious about your company's product, rather than having problems with it. To truly take your customer service skills to the next level, you need to have some mastery over persuasion so that you can convince interested customers that your product is right for them (if it truly is). It's not about letting potential customers slip away because you could not create a compelling message that your company's product is worth.

Closing Ability

To be clear, this has nothing to do with "closing sales" or other related terms. If you are able to close with a customer means you are able to end the conversation with confirmed satisfaction (or as close to it as you can achieve) and with the customer feeling that everything has been taken care of (or will be).

Willingness to Learn

This is probably the most "general" skill on the list, but it's necessary. Those who do not seek to improve what they do, whether it's building products, marketing businesses, or helping customers, will get left behind by the people willing to invest in their skills.

If you keep the above mentioned points in mind, you will be able to give a "wonderful" experience to your customers on each occasion.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.1

- I. Fill in the blank with the correct option
1. If you deal with customers on a daily basis, be sure to stay _____.
 - a. energetic
 - b. calm
 - c. patient
 - d. cold



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2. The ability to really listen to customers is very _____ for providing great service.
 - a. comforting
 - b. helping
 - c. beneficial
 - d. crucial

3. The best customer service employee will have a _____ of how the product works.
 - a. overview
 - b. close
 - c. deep
 - d. clear

4. A great customer service person will have the ability to handle _____ thrown by the customer.
 - a. Surprises
 - b. Parties
 - c. Meetings
 - d. hurdles

7.2 MOMENT OF TRUTH

We will now look at an interesting yet integral aspect of customer service, which is the ‘Moment of Truth’, a phrase, used for perception versus the reality of customer services; we will explore this with a couple of examples –

Suppose, you have reached the market and are really tired and you see this untidy stall serving tea. When you look round you find that it is the only outlet available in that area. You are desperately in need of a cup of tea, however, looking at the shop you are unable to make up your mind, nonetheless you go on and ask for a cup of tea and to your amusement the vendor is extremely courteous and offers you a glass of water and a biscuit along with tea. You also feel that it is the best cup of tea you have ever had. In this case is the ‘Moment of truth’, the perception was to get a shabby service and bad tea however the reality was very different and this would compel you to come to this shop again in the future, what the vendor has given you is exceptional service along with a good product.



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The opposite is also true, so you go to this very posh looking restaurant and are welcomed by a disinterested and poorly dressed waiter. Upon calling him you see that he is taking the order very reluctantly, and what you get in turn is decent however slightly cold food and when you request the waiter to heat it up a bit, he is rude and unwilling. When you call the manager he also backs the waiter and is not willing to heat up the food. You go out from that restaurant with an awful experience and you will never visit or recommend it to anyone. So you see, despite being a fancy high-end restaurant the experience was bad and dissatisfying, again here the ‘Moment of truth’ was very different from the perception.

Good customer service creates a happy ‘Moment of truth’ for the customers and vice versa. What you must keep in mind is that it is these moments of truth that decide the longevity of the customer’s loyalty towards your organisation; hence, giving expected and sometimes beyond expected level of service is the key to success. Even one bad experience can leave the customer unhappy.

7.3 TYPES OF CUSTOMERS

You are already aware that customers play the most significant part in business. In fact, the customer is the actual boss and is responsible for the profit of the organization. Customer is the one who uses the products and services and judges the quality of those products and services. Hence it’s important for an organization to retain customers or make new customers and make business flourish.

Customers can be of the following types:

1. **Loyal Customers-** These types of customers are less in number but promote more sales and profit as compared to other customers as these are the ones who are completely satisfied. Loyal customers want individual attention and demand polite and respectful responses from you. Some appreciation of their business and long association with the organisation also keep them glued.
2. **Angry Customers –** These customers are hard to please because they are in some way or the other unhappy about either the product or the services they have got. They can sound harsh and rude and in most cases loud and angry. The key for you is to let them vent and then empathetically try to resolve their issue.
3. **Discount Customers-** Discount customers are also frequent visitors. They expect discounts on regular products and brands and tend to buy only low cost products. More the discount, the more they buy. They would also try to bargain a lot with you and would always look for what additional products and services they can get. They should be treated with patience along with assertiveness as sometimes they may go overboard.



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4. **Impulsive Customers-** These customers are difficult to convince as they are spontaneous. They do not have any specific item in their product list but urge to buy what they find good and productive at that point of time. Your effective selling skills and influencing skills can lead to actual sales.
5. **Need-based Customers-** These customers are product specific and tend to buy items for which they have a specific need. They are frequent customers but do not become a part of buying most of the times, so it is difficult to satisfy them. These customers should be handled positively by you by showing them ways and reasons to switch over to other similar products. These customers could possibly be lost if not tackled efficiently with positive interaction.
6. **Wandering Customers-** These are the least profitable customers as sometimes they themselves are not sure what to buy. These customers are normally new in industry and most of the times would call only to confirm or cross check. They investigate features of most prominent products in the market but do not buy any of those or show the least interest in buying. These customers should be properly informed by you about the various positive features of the products so that they develop a sense of interest in the product and buy.

As an employee, you must always focus on all customers equally; however the ways to handle each would differ. Strategies and handling techniques should be renovated and enhanced for giving satisfactory services to these customers.

7.4 HANDLING CUSTOMER QUERIES

It is said that “the customer is always right”. The below mentioned steps will give you an insight into the various ways to treat your customers and their queries effectively.

1. **Treat your customers well:** Give your customers excellent service, a smile, and ask if everything is to their liking. People enjoy being engaged in this way and it helps even the most flustered customer to remember that they had a good experience with you.
2. **Ask customers:** If they are looking for a particular item, or if you can do anything to help them to find the right product or service. Customers who appear confused, worried or helpless do need a hand. Even those who already know what they’re looking for may need a hand in choosing appropriately.



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3. **Listen:** This may seem straightforward but in sales and service, this is frequently not the case. More often than not, people selling or providing services think they already know what the customer is asking and switch off before the full explanation has been given. This can lead to wastage of time. A frustrated customer and poor communications that will impact the business.
4. **Be honest and straightforward:** Nothing irritates a customer more than being given vague answers and push-offs to queries about the products or services. If you do not know the answer, do not guess. Tell the customer that you do not know and you will immediately go and find out. They will respect you for that. If you cannot get the answer, request the contact details of the customer and offer to arrange a call back.
5. **Stop conversations with other employees during a transaction:** Once you devote your time to a customer, whether it is to discuss a sale or any other product or service, do not ignore the customer and make this a time to carry on a conversation with another staff member. This is annoying to customers who wonder if your mind is really on the job. Put aside all distractions and concentrate on the customer at hand. There will be enough slow moments for you to pick up conversations with fellow employees again.
6. **If you can't help, don't hinder:** It only makes matters worse if you try to force the customer to buy your product. When you see that they have made up their mind that your company does not have the item wanted or the price wished for, do not leave a bitter impression on the customer's mind by getting irritable, disinterested or unfriendly with them. Support the customer's decision to check elsewhere but make it a hard choice by suggesting how your product or service can make things better. You may lose the current sale but that is no reason to lose future association with the customer.
7. **Be willing to seek help:** If things are really heating up, or the customer really wants to talk to the manager, oblige. It will be very obvious to the manager that it is a difficult customer rather than your sales or serving technique that is in question.

Having said the above, a big question is whether the customer is always right? Not always. Do not tolerate verbal abuse. Remember you are there to serve the customer, but you are never the customer's servant. If handled correctly, you can turn a negative customer experience into a positive. With a good apology and a demonstration that your company listens, takes responsibility for problems, and acts on them, you can end up with a more loyal customer.

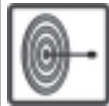


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INTEXT QUESTIONS 7.2

- I. Choose the correct option.
 1. These customers are product specific and tend to buy items for which they have a specific need. Identify the type of customers.
 - a. Loyal customers
 - b. Need-based customers
 - c. Impulsive customers
 2. If you are unable to help the customer then what will you do:
 - a. You will hinder them
 - b. You will ask your seniors
 - c. You will stop speaking



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

In this lesson, you have learnt the meaning of customer service. You have also learnt to identify with the importance of customer service with respect to a BPO segment. Also, you have learnt the various skills that are required for a successful customer service representative, identify the moment of truth and its importance with respect to customer service.



TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Case Studies
 - a. You have recently joined XYZ Corporation. Today is your first day on calls. You are handling such calls for the first time and suddenly you get a customer who is extremely unhappy and irate, he is constantly yelling and is demanding to see the supervisor. What should you do, in this case?
 - b. Your customer wants you to waive the interest charges for the last month as she was out of town and therefore could not pay her bill. You know that this is not possible and due to the delay the interest charges have to be levied. How would you tell the customer that you can't help her? And/or if the customer is not happy with the solution given by you how would you deal with such situations?
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2. List the key customer services skills, elaborate any four.
3. What should you do if you are unable to help the customer?
4. Explain 'Moment of Truth'. Write one positive and one negative 'Moment of truth' that you have had as a customer.
5. List the different types of customers.
6. Elaborate the following –
 - a. Angry customers
 - b. Loyal customers
 - c. Impulsive customers



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ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

7.1

- I. 1. c
2. d
3. c
4. a
5. b

7.2

- I. 1. b
2. b