



BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

**CENTER FOR
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

© 2013 Boise State University

Developed
by Jerri Mizrahi
for the Center for Professional Development
Boise State University

<http://cpd.boisestate.edu>
208-426-3861

Fall 2013

Introduction and Self-Assessment:

In this interactive workshop, you will be reviewing and practicing customer centered service skills to use in providing the highest level of service to court users.

Objectives:

- Identify the Court User – Understanding Our Customers
- Assess and Discuss Service Centered Standards
- Define and Discuss Institutional vs. Cultural Context
- Effective Communication Techniques
- Identify actions court staff can do to make a difference in the court experience

Activity - Understanding Our Customers

- Who are our customers?
- Customer’s attributes and demographics
- Customer’s perceptions and expectations
- What we offer
- How we meet our customer’s needs

Activity - In the Shoes of the customer:

People have elevated expectations around wait/call times, technology, and treatment in customer service.

What might our patrons expect?

- No assumptions
- Active listening
- Complex made easy
- Respect always
- Institutional context
- Personal consideration and empathy

Self-Assessment of Service Centered Skills

Instructions: Listed below are behaviors that describe customer service representatives. For each behavior, please describe how often you currently engage in each on a scale from **Never (1) to Always (5)**. Please think over each item carefully and respond according to how often you actually exhibit each rather than how often you would like to use.

Scale: Never (1) Rarely (2) Sometimes (3) Often (4) Always (5)

1.	Verify the customer's appropriate information	
2.	Identify the customer's concern, question, or issue	
3.	Refer appropriately to the necessary resource and follow-up to ensure service satisfaction	
4.	Accept responsibility for decisions in areas of influence and understand boundaries	
5.	Respond to requests in a timely manner	
6.	Present an approachable, positive and professional image	
7.	Acknowledge customer's presence	
8.	Demonstrate a positive attitude towards customers and co-workers by treating all fairly and equally	
9.	Honor and accept diverse opinions and recognize culture differences	
10.	Respect the privacy of others, not gossip or share information of a confidential nature	
11.	Identify frequently asked questions to provide consistent answers	
12.	Follow established protocols, policies, and procedures	
13.	Identify when you need to hang up, do research, and call later	
14.	Reduce return calls by ensuring accuracy, resolving issues completely and following up	
15.	Record and document accurate and comprehensive notes	
16.	Provide clear, concise, and consistent communication	
17.	Use language the customer will understand	
18.	Actively listen, gauge emotions, and understand body language	
19.	Gain a shared understanding of the concern, question, or issue	
20.	Check for clarity and understanding by summarizing	
21.	Use empathy to gain insight into the issue and acknowledge what the customer is going through	
22.	Remain calm, composed, and avoid arguing	
23.	Put emotions aside when dealing with a difficult customer to defuse situation	
24.	Apologize, as needed, for impact on customer	
25.	Partner in the process with the customer to solve concern, question, or issue	

Scoring the Service Centered Skills Assessment:

- Average the scores for items 1 through 5 to obtain a score for "Comprehensive Responsiveness."
- Average the scores for items 6 through 10 to obtain a score for "Respect and Inclusiveness."
- Average the scores for items 11 through 15 to obtain a score for "Efficiency."
- Average the scores for items 16 through 20 to obtain a score for "Listening and Clear Communication"

- Average the scores for items 21 through 25 to obtain a score for "Empathy and Conflict Management."

Activity - Service Centered Standards

Comprehensive Responsiveness

- Verifying the customer's appropriate information
- Identifying the customer's concern, question, or issue
- Referring appropriately to the necessary resource and following up to ensure service satisfaction
- Accepting responsibility for decisions in area of influence and understanding boundaries
- Responding to requests in a timely manner

Respect and Inclusiveness

- Presenting an approachable, positive and professional image
- Acknowledging customer's presence
- Demonstrating a positive attitude towards customers and co-workers by treating all fairly and equally
- Honoring and accepting diverse opinions and cultural differences
- Respecting the privacy of others, not gossiping or sharing information of a confidential nature

Efficiency

- Identifying frequently asked questions to provide consistent answers
- Following established protocols, policies, and procedures
- Identifying when you need to hang up, do research, and call later
- Reducing return calls by ensuring accuracy, resolving issues completely, and following up
- Recording and documenting accurate and comprehensive notes on the student's records

Listening and Clear Communication

- Providing clear, concise, and consistent communication
- Using language the customer will understand
- Actively listening, gauging emotions, and understanding body language
- Gaining a shared understanding of the concern, question, or issue
- Checking for clarity and understanding by summarizing

Empathy and Conflict Management

- Using empathy to gain insight into the issue and acknowledging what the customer is going through
- Remaining calm, composed, and avoid arguing
- Putting emotions aside when dealing with a difficult customer to defuse situation
- Apologizing for impact on customer
- Partnering in the process with the customer to solve concern, question, or issue

What other standards can you identify that are critical to your area?

Service Expectations in Cultural Context

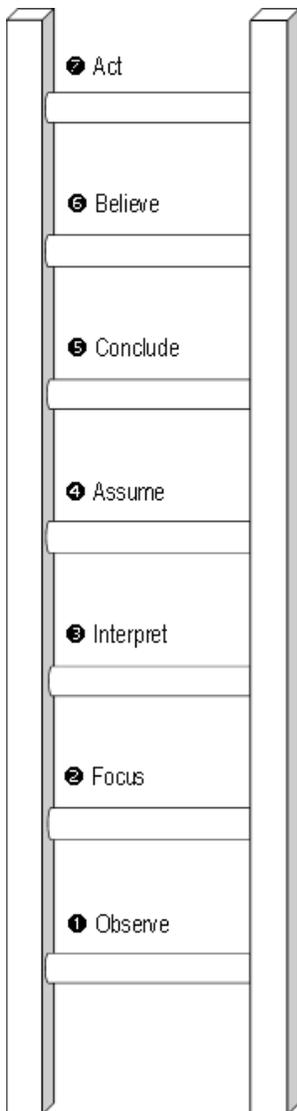
Institutional cultural context (Personality of the Institution)
 Customer Cultural context (Culture/Backgrounds of the Customer)
 Seek to identify and consciously acknowledge real group and individual differences

Ladder of Inference

What do your customer’s worry about?

Ladder of Inference – Implicit Bias

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>



You’ve formed an opinion of the situation by using the “Ladder of Inference.” This concept was developed by Harvard professor Chris Argyris. It describes the thought process we go through, often at an unconscious level, as we size up any situation.

Step 1: Observe — Something catches our eye and we gather observable data.

Step 2: Focus — We selectively decide what we want to focus on.

Step 3: Interpret — We add meanings to what we see and hear.

Step 4: Assume — We make assumptions about those involved.

Step 5: Conclude — From those assumptions, we draw conclusions.

Step 6: Believe — Based on our conclusions, we adopt beliefs about the world or topic in general.

Step 7: Act — We take actions or don’t take actions that reinforce our perception.

Activity - How can you use the Ladder of Inference to Improve Communications?

Potential Barriers to Communication

Bias - conscious and unconscious

- Power/status
- Language comprehension and proficiency
- Accent
- Culture/ethnicity
- Economic level/factors
- Gender and sexual orientation
- Education level
- Age
- Physical/mental ability or disability
- Appearance
- Other differences

Effective Communication

The following are a few tips for effective communication:

- Listen attentively
- Ask and invite questions
- Provide feedback to others to demonstrate respect
- Clarify your own ideas before communicating
- Communicate purposefully -- focus on your real message
- Contextualize their request
- Consider the timing, setting, and social climate
- Acknowledge the other person's perspective
- Be aware of your tone, expression, and receptiveness

You often may encounter obstacles to effective communication. Be mindful of these obstacles, and do your best to recognize and overcome them. The following are examples of obstacles to effective communication:

- Poor listening skills
- Lack of interest
- Stereotyping
- Power struggle
- Intimidation
- Inability to understand the other party or no desire to understand the other party

- Language barriers
- Low self-respect
- Defensiveness
- Inaccurate assumptions

Activity – Identify best practices to demonstrate the following:

- Respect
- Letting people know why you are asking for things
- Understand that people are frustrated
- No judgment

Overcoming barriers to communication

Court Staff Can and Do Make a Difference in the Court Experience

<http://www.mass.gov/courts/serving-self-rep-guide.pdf>

WE CAN:

- Explain and answer questions about how the court works.
- Give you information about court rules, practices, and procedures.
- Explain options available to court users.
- Provide you with court forms and general instructions about filling out court forms.
- Provide you with information from your case file, unless such information is restricted.
- Provide information about past rulings in your case.
- Answer questions about court deadlines.
- Provide information about court schedules and how to get a case scheduled.
- Provide you with contact information for lawyer referral services, legal aid programs, and other services where you may be able to obtain legal information and the services of a lawyer.

Providing basic assistance with court forms does NOT constitute giving legal advice or engaging in the unauthorized practice of law. The court does not depart from its impartial role by providing forms and directing court users as to their proper use.

Courts have obligations to explain court processes and procedures to customers.

The court is obligated to provide accurate information to all court users.

Court staff must remain neutral and impartial and never give information for the purpose of giving one court user an advantage over another.

A court should treat all of its court users equally; attorneys and defendants, self-represented litigants and lawyers, jurors, and member of the public.

Responsible for providing accurate information and access to the system to help all court users know how to use the system.

Cultural Context:

Most people who come to court are not familiar with court procedures or terminology. If someone does not ask a question in the right way, it is court staff's responsibility to take the time to clarify what is being asked. By providing effective customer service, court staff may reduce the number of times court users must come to court, and thus, reduce stress on the court system.

Court staff can act as a bridge of knowledge to self-represented litigants, but they cannot guide self-represented litigants completely. Although court staff cannot provide legal advice, that premise is an unacceptable excuse not to provide service. There is usually some information or assistance that can

be provided, even if it is just explaining the reason court staff cannot give legal advice; you may always explain procedural options or make a referral.

WE CANNOT:

- Tell you whether or not you should bring your case to court.
- Advise you on what words to use in your court papers or whether they are correct.
- Tell you what to say in court.
- Give you an opinion about what will happen if you bring your case to court.
- Provide confidential case information that you are otherwise not authorized to obtain.
- Conduct legal research for you.
- Talk to the judge for you or let you talk to the judge outside of court.
- Alter court documents.
- Recommend a particular attorney to handle your case.

Tips:

- Be Patient. Coming to court may be stressful, confusing, and intimidating, so you should take the time to welcome and greet court users. You may have been asked for the same information many times before; however, this may be the first time that this particular court user has asked for it. Put yourself in the court user's position and think how much you would appreciate it if someone took the time to answer your questions and explain an unfamiliar process.
- Remain calm even when the court user is not. Your attitude is key. Some court users may need to vent. Take it professionally, not personally.
- Explain your answers and reasons. Be clear and concise when providing information.
- Provide reasons why you cannot give certain information. This helps to minimize a court user's frustration and increases his or her understanding of the court system. If you cannot answer a question or provide assistance, explain why by telling the court user how important it is that court staff remains neutral and impartial. If you cannot answer a question, give alternatives.
- Know the distinction between "legal advice" and "legal information." Never use the prohibition against giving legal advice as an excuse not to provide legal information. There is usually some information or assistance you can provide, even if it is just explaining the reason you cannot give legal advice, explaining procedural options, or making a referral.
- Offer options to court users. Be prepared to offer options for legal help, including referrals to other agencies and self-service centers. Ask court users if they know of an attorney they can turn to for assistance. If they do not have an attorney, provide information on how they can find an attorney. Do not suggest which attorney the court user should or should not contact because you must remain neutral and impartial at all times.