



Module 10 : Customer Care

- The importance of customer care
- Your role as a PA when dealing with customers
- Things you should avoid when dealing with customer care
- How to represent your company in a professional manner

'Quality is not what you put into a service or product; it's what a customer gets out of it' **Peter Drucker**

Customers fund a company and your livelihood, so it is very important that you keep them happy. As a PA, you will be the first line of contact for most customers, so the company reputation can depend on your ability to create a good impression. You should always try and surpass a customer's expectations.

In this module you will learn:

- The importance of customer care
- Your role as a PA when dealing with customers
- Things you should avoid when dealing with customer care
- How to represent your company in a professional manner

10.1 Why is Customer Satisfaction Important?



To begin with, customer care isn't just important, it's absolutely vital.

A happy customer, who has been dealt with politely and efficiently, is more likely to return for a repeat purchase. If you prioritise customer service, it helps build a positive relationship between the company and the customer.

Try to put yourself in the customer's shoes. In such a competitive marketplace, your customers will have plenty of choice and if you don't satisfy them, somebody else will be glad to!

The competition will maximise every opportunity to wean away clients. Thus, you have to provide a high level of service that helps create a long-standing relationship between you and the client. Excellent customer care is always at the heart of any successful business.

Good customer care is one of the best marketing strategies for your business. A satisfied customer is likely to spread the good word about their happy experiences with you. This will increase publicity for your business and the customer is more likely to return for repeat business with your company.

Top quality customer service helps differentiate your business from the rest of the pack. In addition, customer-centric policies help reduce turnover and foster real, long-lasting relationships that help your business grow and prosper.

FACT



78% of customers have backed out of a purchase due to a poor customer experience.

Source: *glance*

A Closer Look at Customer Care Skills

Empathy

Empathy refers to the ability to understand people who may be different from you. In the context of customer service, this means putting yourself in the customer's shoes and viewing the situation from their perspective.

Positive Communication

Using positive words to communicate with customers (both verbally and in writing) will help redirect negative implications. For example, consider minimising the use of words like 'but' and 'actually'. Incorporating simple (but potent) changes to your phrases can help set the tone for customer relationships.

Your company may record your calls for training purposes and this is a good idea. Use positivity to convey your message without sounding unprofessional. If you sound negative, then they may not even bother contacting the company again. Indeed, why should they return to a company that doesn't care when there are many alternatives available to them? Here are some examples to illustrate the power of positive communication:

Examples Positive reply - *Our item is going to be back in stock next month and we can put you at*

the top of our waiting list as a priority!

Negative reply - This item is currently unavailable until next month and there is nothing I can do for you at this time. Please call back soon.

A slight change in your words can alter the perception of your words and produce a very different effect.

Patience

This is not always an easy quality to develop. You will often face situations where you have to talk to an angry customer or explain things slowly to a customer who takes time to grasp details. Showing signs of impatience is the worst possible thing that you could ever do under the circumstances. If you are tempted to lose your cool, remind yourself that customers are the heart of your business and they're the reason that you're there. Control your internal chatter and transform your thoughts to empowering, positive ones. When we leave ourselves vulnerable to anger, irritation and frustration, we tend to experience more of the same emotion. Patience is a challenging habit to learn, but it is well worth the effort.

Clarity in Communication

Clarity in communication helps reduce the number of communications with customers. On the other hand, when your communication is fuzzy or vague, you will have to waste time following up with more communication. If you have to explain something to a client (this could involve anything from a technical topic to refund clauses), speak slowly and distinctly. Check periodically to see that the customer is on the same page as you.

Don't be averse to repeating your explanation (if required). Clear communications prevent wastage of time, effort and help in moving customer relationships forward.

Communication is particularly important when you are dealing with a customer from a different cultural background. They may not be fluent with the English language; you may have to speak more slowly in order to make them understand. Similarly, elderly customers may suffer from hearing impairment or they may not be technically savvy. You have to communicate at their level instead of expecting them to communicate at yours.

Are you really listening?

Many customer feedback systems are flawed because they record data on an impersonal level. As we will go into detail later in the module, customer feedback is your chance to innovate your working style to become better as a PA.

Be mindful of the response that you give them; keep in mind that they have invested in trying to contact you. Customers may not be familiar with how to phrase a technical problem, for example. As a customer service representative, it becomes your job to help them communicate their problem in a friendly and empathetic manner.

Transparency

Customers do not like hidden costs, charges or surprises so always keep them informed. Describe

clearly what exactly will be happening before, after and during the transaction. Failure to communicate any errors or issues could lead to your company losing a business lead or new customer, so tread carefully.

It's better to communicate any possible negative issues to a client instead of making hollow promises. For example, if a product has a warranty of 6 months, do not claim a warranty of 1 year. Keep your communications open, transparent and honest.

How well do you know your product?

There is not much to be said for handling customer care if you possess inadequate knowledge of your company's products and services. You need to be completely well-versed in product knowledge. This will help you field a range of questions from customers. A PA is the first contact point for external individuals so be wise and invest some time into learning what your company is all about. Good customer care empowers clients and helps foster good relationships.

Learn to treat your customers with genuine respect and attention. Each phone call needs to have a goal, just like business meetings do. You should ideally aim to have specific objectives with every customer meeting.

Your company could use a framework like Net Promoter Score, which can help your company come up with guidelines that give flexibility and freedom for different scenarios. You can create a reference list for common problems that may arise and this may be integrated with a consistent complaints handling procedure. Uniform company guidelines will help establish a uniform code of customer service at every level.

10.2 How should you practise customer care?

All your clients will react to you in different ways and some customers will always be more difficult than others.

The nature and behaviour of customers may be something out of our control. However, it's in your hands to control your reaction to a difficult situation with a customer.

Remember when you wanted to impress your boss at the job interview? You should cultivate that same level of energy and enthusiasm for servicing your customers.

Customers stop trusting companies after they undergo negative experiences. A company that does not pay attention to customer service signs its own death warrant.

Attend and respond to each meeting or phone call with initiative and interest.

Treat each and every customer with the attention that they deserve.

Customers need to know from the get-go of exactly how committed you are, the level of competence offered and your ability to deliver. Use your skills to help them understand why they should use your company instead of going elsewhere.

Don't treat customers as a target

Treat every individual as a specific experience and not a demographic. They perceive themselves as

individuals. Your customer service tactics should be diverse, swift and dynamic.

Don't be afraid to ask!

Some customers can be shy and will expect you to prompt them at time; some of them may not know how to approach you about their queries or problems.

Always ask them how you can help and find out if they are happy with the information you have given them. Do they need any further assistance?

It is your job as a PA to ask all of these important questions. It is also a good idea to use customer surveys. Surveys allow customers to provide honest feedback without feeling pressured. You can then use the surveys to identify areas of improvement and points that require reinforcement.

In addition to customer surveys, follow-up calls are another option. You can always opt for a follow-up call to ask if the client was satisfied with the services that he/she received. Always allow a few days to elapse after the purchase in order to contact them for feedback questions.

Activity 1 - Practising Customer Care Skills in Your Life

Estimated time: 10-15 minutes

This module discusses the importance of customer satisfaction and how a happy customer will maximise the success of your organisation. It also covers a variety of customer care skills.

Take a few moments to practise these skills in your life. Begin with your patience, since this is not an easy quality to develop and everyone can use some practice. What can you do if you feel tempted to lose your temper in any situation in your life? Next, work on listening to the people who are speaking to you. How can you be mindful of the responses you are providing?

10.3 Strive to educate and empower your clients



Nobody likes being neglected, especially when they are paying good money for a service.

As a PA, you should make it a point to keep in touch with clients throughout the duration of services, not just at the commencement and completion. Some people will not have much of an idea about what is involved in the working operations of your company, so feel free to tell them and put their mind at ease.

When they are aware of what to expect, they will be more inclined to trust your company - just make sure your company can deliver exactly what you promise them.

10.4 What should you avoid with customer care?

- **Never go off the radar.** If there is an issue or a job that is expected to take longer than expected - your client should know at the earliest possible opportunity. Ensure that you have their phone and email contact so you can deliver the message in the quickest and most reliable manner.
- **Minimise the use of automated systems.** At some point, each one of us has had the experience of being shunted over to a voice machine or robot. This takes away the personal touch from customer communications. Talking to a machine can never replace human interaction and response. Automated response machines should only be used after office hours or during holidays. Otherwise, please take the trouble to attend to customer service calls personally. Your customers deserve your time.
- **Complaints handling procedure.** The company you work for should have an easy-access complaints procedure that is responsive and easy to use. A company that is able to handle customer complaints efficiently can expect huge rewards in the form of reinforced customer loyalty. Most businesses are very customer-friendly when it comes to selling a product or service. But many fall by the wayside when it comes to handling complaints and grievances. Create and implement a solid, consistent complaints handling procedure.

You can be persuasive

When your experience grows, so will your skills of persuasion. Some people will contact you to enquire about products and services as well as communicate grievances. This is an important reason why your contact details should be easy to find.

Aim for a combination of politeness blended with persuasion. You should try to convince each person that your product or brand is the right choice for them. Explain the features and advantages and describe how the customer can benefit from the product.

We cannot stress how important it is to be consistent in your work ethic. You must be willing to do whatever it takes and not resort to shortcuts just to make your job easier.

Customer service testimonials are more likely to be forthcoming when people have enjoyed a good experience. Great customer experiences have a solid impact on your business and your bottom line. Research indicates that a totally satisfied customer contributes 14 times more revenue compared to an unsatisfied customer.

Activity 2 - Reviewing What You Learned

Estimated time: 10-15 minutes

After practising your customer care skills in the earlier activity, you probably learned some valuable lessons about your own patience and how you can be more mindful in your career. Hopefully, this activity taught you how important it is to listen to others.

To ensure that you have a firm grasp on what you have learned in both the module and the activity, take a few moments to reflect. After reviewing the module and reflecting on your practice, describe in your own words why customer satisfaction is so important.

10.5 Five Effective Customer Strategies for Great Customer Service

1. It is the customers who pay the salaries and not the business owners. Look at the issue this way: If customers were to begin rejecting your products, the company's profits would begin to nosedive. During moments of stress, it is worthwhile remembering that without customers, the business would cease to exist.
2. Make a point of listening intently to every customer. Pay attention to their words, tone of voice and body language. Do not allow your mind to wander, or extraneous preoccupations to distract you. Ask incisive and relevant questions if you need to. Most of all, avoid making assumptions and do not adopt preconceived notions regarding client requirements.
3. A friendly and understanding attitude is as important as a worthy product to sell. It's not enough to be devastatingly efficient, without any human touch in your communication. Customers are extremely sensitive and can immediately sense apathy or indifference.

Offer courteous assistance with a smile and a friendly word. This will go a long way in establishing long-standing customer relationships based on mutual respect. Do not allow automation and technology to overshadow the human element in your organisation.

1. Always try and accommodate your customers. Look for ways to help them and satisfy their requests. At the same time, do try to avoid making hollow promises and false guarantees.
2. Implement a system whereby you can get regular feedback and constructive criticism. The best way to improve customer service and help your business prosper is by asking the opinion of the people who matter the most: Your customers.

Take a Quick Recap Test

[viralQuiz id=75]

Assignment

Customer Care

Time: 30+ minutes

Hopefully, you took in as much of the information in this tenth module as possible. To find out how well you have done, complete the following worksheet.

Download the worksheet below print out and complete.

[Download Worksheet \(PDF\)](#)

[Download Worksheet \(Word\)](#)

Module summary

Companies that enjoy unprecedented success are those that understand the importance of customer service. Those that fell by the wayside were those businesses that forgot their most critical asset - their customers. As a PA or secretary, you may often have opportunities to communicate with clients and speak to them on different issues.

Although companies may have designated staff members to handle customer service, it's actually the responsibility of each and every one to see that customers are looked after. Clear communication, acute listening skills and a friendly attitude go a long way in making customers feel comfortable.

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