



# Customer Service



## Lesson One: The Principles of Quality Customer Service

Welcome to the module titled “Customer Service.” Customer service at career centers is a critical part of our daily jobs. We want to offer services in a manner that moves our customers forward in a positive way while holding them accountable for their efforts.

I am Kristin. I work at a career center greeting job seekers and employers. I listen to what our customers need and help point each customer in the right direction.

To do this, I have to remember customers are the most important part of our business. If no one was calling us or walking through our doors, we would not have a business. Knowing that customers are the focus of our business is the **first** principle of quality customer service. Using this information, we work to make customers feel satisfied and important. Our customers are not just numbers. They are unique like you and me.

### Quick Check Up!

1. Who is the focus of our business?
  - a. United Way.
  - b. Our customers are the focus of our business. This focus includes job seekers, employers and community service providers.
  - c. People who cannot pay their bills because they have no income.
  - d. None of the above.
2. Customers are the key to our business. If they were not coming in to use our resources, we would not have a business.
  - a. True
  - b. False
3. Megan engages each customer intently because she knows that the first principle of customer service is “customers are the focus of our business.”
  - a. True
  - b. False

4. Which of the following is **not** an element of principle one of quality customer service?
  - a. Customers are very important to our business.
  - b. Customers are not just a statistic, but people with unique needs like you and me.
  - c. Customers can interrupt our work, but we have to assist them as a part of what we do.
  - d. Customers are not dependent on us; rather, we depend on them.

**To direct our customers to the right place or the right person, we have to know who our customers are and how to identify what our customers need. This is the **second principle** of quality customer service. You may be asking, "How do I learn to point customers in the right direction?" First, I learned all about our workforce programs and partners. I also learned I have to listen to our customers and employ active listening skills. Sometimes our customers are happy. Other times they are not happy.**

**No matter what, I have to stay positive mentally. I am going to use active listening skills by paying attention to what they have to say. I also give verbal cues while they are talking so they know that I am really listening.**

**"What is a verbal cue?" Great question and I am glad you asked. When a person is talking, and you are paying attention, you may say things like, "Really" or "Uh-huh" or "Is that so?" These responses are verbal cues. They signal to the customer that you are listening.**

### **Quick Check Up!**

5. How is customer service defined?
  - a. The assistance that a company provides to individuals who buy or use its products or services.
  - b. The way in which a staff member engages both internal and external customers.
  - c. The assistance that a company provides to individuals who look to buy services from them or a competitor.
  - d. The way in which a staff member engages the company's competitors.
6. Some days I have to deal with one angry person after another. It is really hard and takes a toll on me mentally. To deal with the stress, I stay positive mentally, make sure to listen to each person intently and give verbal cues to let the customer know I am listening.
  - a. True
  - b. False

7. Verbal cues are blatant statements to the customer that tell the customer you are listening to them. For example, you may simply nod and say, "Uh-huh."
  - a. True
  - b. False

Let's talk about the different job seekers who come to visit us. What type of job seekers do you think come and visit our career centers? Part of the **second** principle is knowing our job seeker customer.

- We work with job seekers who are looking for work for the first time.
- We work with people who are working. They have a job; now they want a career.
- We help job seekers who are changing careers.
- We have job seekers who are looking to advance their careers.

Regardless of the reason the job seeker is coming in the door, more than likely they are coming in to see us because they need help accessing services. The question is, "Why is the job seeker coming in?" Because *the customer* is the focus of my job, I must listen to the customer.

8. The Customer Service module identifies four types of job seekers served within the career center. Which of the following is one of those types of job seeker? Job seekers who are
  - a. trying to break the cycle of unemployment.
  - b. having trouble interviewing.
  - c. having problems meeting employer needs.
  - d. trying to advance in their careers.
9. Principle two of quality customer service states that all customers will need help to conduct an effective
  - a. interview and understanding management styles.
  - b. job search and understanding Labor Market Information.
  - c. follow-up and completing a thank you letter.
  - d. meeting and completing an application.

10. Job seekers are our only customers. Is this statement TRUE or FALSE (Circle One).

I am also going to use the **third** principle of quality customer service. The third principle of quality customer service is appearing friendly and showing I care. After all, no one wants to deal with an attitude.

Do I ever get frustrated? Some days I meet with one angry customer after another. I get my feelings hurt, too. I remember that people are not frustrated with me; they are frustrated with their situation or with others. I still need to offer the individual good customer service.

*So, what is quality customer service?* Quality customer service occurs when we use our principles of quality customer service to serve each customer so that they leave satisfied. We want our customers to come back and use our services again. This includes job seekers, employers and mandatory program participants. We want to meet our customer's needs in a kind and courteous manner. We want to meet our customer's needs to the best of the company's abilities. We also want customer service to lead to a satisfied customer experience. Keep this definition in mind as we progress forward to Principle Four.

During this lesson, we stated that customers are the focus of our business. We also stated that we must identify who are customers are and their needs so we can direct them in the right way. We also stated that we, as workforce professionals, must appear friendly and show that we care. Afterall courtesy is key.

### Quick Check Up!

11. What is the best definition of quality customer service?
  - a. Engaging each customer in a manner that meets the organization's performance needs and ensuring the customer leaves happy.
  - b. Engaging each customer in a manner that meets the customer's needs to the best of the company's abilities and ensuring the customer leaves happy.
  - c. Engaging each customer in a manner that meets the business' needs and ensuring the customer leaves happy.
  - d. Engaging each customer in a timely manner and ensuring the customer leaves happy.

12. Customer service can be positive or negative.
  - a. True
  - b. False

13. What is quality customer service?

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14. Madison is a workforce staff member. She is having a bad day but remembers the third principle of quality customer service. She wants to appear friendly, so she serves each customer individually by...
- Giving each customer what they want.
  - Smiling and talking directly to each customer.
  - Smiling and referring each customer to a coworker.
  - Giving each customer useful information while they wait.
15. Which of the following is the first principle of “quality” customer service?
- The customer is the focus of the business.
  - The employer should be served timely.
  - The customer should leave satisfied.
  - The employer is the focus of our business.
16. According to Principle Two of quality customer service, all customers will need help
- Conducting an effective interview and understanding management styles.
  - Conducting an effective job search and understanding Labor Market Information.
  - Conducting an effective follow-up and completing a thank you letter.
  - Conducting an effective meeting and completing an application.

## Lesson Two: Principle Four of Quality Customer Service

Welcome to Lesson Two of the Customer Service module. Let's meet Angela. She works at the career center as a case manager. Angela has worked with very challenging customers and has an important principle to tell us about.

**“Not everyone you work with will want the services and connections you have to offer. This is the **fourth** principle of quality customer service.”**

This is Brad; and, he too works at the career center. He is a diligent staff member engaging customers based on the principles of quality customer service. Brad, what do you do when a customer does not want the help you have to offer?

- I try not to take it personally.
- I take a deep breath and engage one customer at a time.
- If I accept that some individuals do not want what I have to offer them, I will be able to move on and help others who may want my help.

That sounds like what I do. The key is to be courteous and respectful to all of our customers and do our best to offer our help to them. It is up to them to take the appropriate steps forward.

Now, I have to admit, I am going to do my best to sell my recommendations.

- I work hard to help the customer to move forward.
- I am not going to say one thing and dismiss them when they express a lack of interest.
- I am really going to try to get my customer to move forward successfully using multiple techniques.

Tell me a little more about what you mean. For example,

- I initiate a follow-up with the customer when they miss an appointment.
- I make sure to connect job seekers with employers if the employer has a job the customer would be interested in.
- The key is following the definition of quality customer service every day. The definition requires me to engage each customer in a manner that meets the customer's needs to the best of the company's abilities.
- I engage customers in a thoughtful and courteous manner in an attempt to have the customer leave happy and tell others of their experience, as well as have the customer return for additional services later on.
- I try to follow the principles of quality customer service. Ultimately, it is the customer's decision to work with us and participate in activities and services.

This sounds like the customer really *is* the focus of your business, which is the first principle of quality customer service.

### Quick Check Up!

17. Based on the principles of quality customer service, which of the following actions demonstrate courtesy?
  - a. Walk customers to their cars.
  - b. Do not answer your phone while talking with a customer.
  - c. Guarantee customers that you can get them jobs.
  - d. Tell customers they are very important and that you will give them whatever they need.

18. Principle four of quality customer service states that not everyone will want what you have to offer. If job seekers are not working and moving forward to reach their career goals and do not want the services offered through the workforce system,
- do not give up on the customers.
  - recommend another service to meet their needs.
  - do not take it personally.
  - recommend another provider to meet their needs.

### Lesson Three: Additional Principles of Quality Customer Service

Welcome to the Customer Service module, lesson three. Brad is graciously covering the front desk today and has agreed to help us go over additional principles of quality customer service, specifically focused on communication.

As I said earlier, being courteous is critical to quality customer service. It is not enough to appear friendly; you must **be respectful to customers**. This is principle **five** of quality customer service. What are some ways you can be courteous to customers?

#### Quick Check Up!

19. What are some ways you can be courteous to customers? Select all that apply below:
- Greet your customers with a smile!
  - Use the customer's name to connect to the customer.
  - Do not answer the phone while talking to another person face-to-face or on another phone.
  - Make sure to eat your basic meals so you keep your energy up and your brain ready to solve problems.
  - Listen and make sure you are responding to the customer's needs.

**All of those options are examples of ways you can be courteous to your customers. Principle **six** requires you to use good communication skills when working with a customer this includes when we are face-to-face or when we are on the phone. Greet the customer with a smile, face the customer when we talk to the customer and use plain language.**

20. Match the following:

A. Greet the customer with a smile.	Whether you are on the phone or face to face, be pleasant. Always answer the phone in an upbeat manner. Be kind and helpful.
B. Face the customer.	Make sure your headset is close to your mouth and do not mumble.
C. Use plain language.	Talk to the customer using customer-friendly language, not business jargon.

**The customer is not number one-hundred out of one-hundred and fifty that we will say today. The customer is a unique individual just like you or me. We must treat them with respect and courtesy. The customer needs us to clear our heads, face them directly and use customer-friendly language. We must listen to them and ask what the customer's needs are. What are ways that you can show you are listening and paying attention?**

#### Quick Check Up!

21. Active listening is the process of planning out what you are going to say before the other person gets done talking.
- True
  - False
22. What is **not** a way to show you are listening and paying attention to what the customer has to say?
- Concentrate on what you are going to say while the person is talking. Then, when the customer is done, offer information.
  - Use open and engaging body language.
  - Do not interrupt the customer while they talk. Instead, let the customer make their point.
  - Show you are engaged through reactions.
23. Use open body language to show you are paying attention. Do not cross your arms and make eye contact with your customers.
- True
  - False



24. Standing with your weight mostly on one leg and putting your hands on your hips is a great way to show open and friendly body language.
- True
  - False
25. As the customer talks, respond to what they say with verbal cues such as, "I hear you saying..." or "I understand" and other appropriate responses.
- True
  - False
26. Verbal cues and responses during the conversation are not used when helping customers over the phone.
- True
  - False
27. Stay free of distractions and try hard to hear what the customer is saying. Give time to process the information and then comment.
- True
  - False

**In today's business community, we communicate with partners and customers using a variety of media. We talk to our customers by email, phone, and text messages. We also leave our customers messages through media. When using such media, we must be careful about our techniques. Do not leave personal information on answering machines or phones that have answering systems, especially if you are working with programs that include information associated with public benefits. Do not text personal information over a phone or use Twitter. A good rule to live by is think, "What would happen if someone else read that message?"**

### **Quick Check Up!**

28. What information should **not** be left in a telephone message?
- Your name.
  - Your phone number.
  - Your extension.
  - Why did they miss the appointment? It made you mad.

**We want to keep our messages short, concise, clear and dated. We want to leave emotion out of them. Make sure to speak slowly, clearly and carefully. Do not rush when you leave your name and phone number so the customer can understand your message. In fact, you should repeat your phone number when leaving a message.**

**When texting keep it short, concise, clear and dated. Lucky for us, cell phones already provide a date and time stamp. Leave emotion out of the text message. Never post any information about an appointment on Facebook or Twitter no matter how emotional you are.**

### **Quick Check Up!**

29. What element should you leave out of your voicemail messages to customers?
- a. Emotions
  - b. Names
  - c. Dates
  - d. Locations

30. Select the message that is most appropriate.

A. I cannot believe you missed your appointment with me today. If you do not call me by 5 p.m., I am going to have to stop working with you and offering you services.

B. Sorry, I missed you today for our 1 p.m. appointment. This message is Professional (NAME). Please call me at (999) 999-9999 before 5 p.m. Thank you and have a good day.

**The second message on the previous slide was the professional message. Not only did it meet the requirements (short, concise, clear and dated), it was emotion free. Also, it did not include any information that was confidential.**

**Finally, the last element in the communication principle, or principle six, is to leave short, clear, concise and informative messages for our customers. You can leave professional voicemails for our customers by using a professional and upbeat tone and following the short, concise, clear and informative guidelines.**

**Short: ensure your voicemail offers basic information, such as your name and extension, so the caller knows whose office they have called. Make sure to ask the caller to leave you a message as well.**

**Concise: leave specific instructions for callers, so they know when to expect a return phone call. For example, your message may state, "I will return your call in 48 hours." If you will be away from your desk for a period of time, concise instructions are even more important. It is important to leave an alternative contact path as well.**

**Clear: speak clearly. Do not use the speaker phone to set up your voice mail. It is advised to use a headset or the handset so callers can hear you clearly. Make sure to speak slowly. Smile when you are setting your voicemail message so the recording has**

**an upbeat tone. It may sound silly, but the caller can tell if you are smiling or frustrated. It comes out in the tone of your voice.**

**Informative: Your voicemail recording is no place for an instruction manual for callers. Leave information important to callers about you, your extension and when you will call them back.**

### **Quick Check Up!**

31. Select the message that is most appropriate.

A. You have reached [NAME]. Please speak slowly and clearly so I can understand you when I check my messages. Leave your name, phone number and any important information so I can look up your case. I will call you back at my earliest convenience.

B. You have reached Professional at CareerSource Career Center. My extension is 9999, and I am sorry I missed your call. Please leave your first and last name and your phone number with area code, and I will be glad to call you back within 72 hours.

32. When texting customers, do not disclose any of the customer's personal information.

- a. True
- b. False

## **Lesson Four: Principles of Quality Customer Service**

**Welcome to lesson four. We are going to continue our discussion on quality customer service. Remember Kristin? She helped us learn some of the qualities of quality customer service. She has returned to help us learn more about these critical principles.**

**The reality is you will work with a variety of customers at the career center. Sometimes it will be really busy and sometimes it will not. When you are working with one person and another customer approaches, simply let the approaching person know that you will be right with them. This is principle seven of quality customer service. This lets the approaching customer know that you recognize their needs and are assisting someone else. It tells the approaching customer they are important to you, as well.**

**What if the individual you are helping needs a longer amount of time to be helped, and it will take a while to get to the approaching customer? Great question. Get help for those customers still waiting for you. You do not want to keep them waiting too long.**

What happens if you are assisting customers on the phone and managing multiple calls? Like most of our quality customer service principles, principle **seven** applies to our phone customers as well. Be welcoming to our customers on the phone. Welcome our customers on the phone with a smile. If you are busy, offer the individual the option to be placed on hold or to be called back.

If the caller chooses to wait, give frequent updates on where you are in relation to helping them. Do not just let them sit and linger on hold. This lets the caller know you have not forgotten them, and they are important to you. Remember, thank them for holding when you return to the call.

Whenever you are going to place a caller on hold, ask if you can do so. When you place a caller on hold, excuse yourself from the call, thanking them for agreeing to be placed on hold.

If you need to transfer the call to another team member, tell the customer why you are transferring the call. Tell the caller who you are transferring the call to, and offer their direct line in case they are disconnected.

Brad is here to tell us about the next principle. Brad, what is the **eighth** principle of good customer service? The eighth principle of quality customer service is “going the extra mile.” This is something my teammates at work do all the time. This may include something as simple as moving around the desk and sitting next to the person because they are upset. This can also include working with your job seeker to prepare for an interview or a job fair. As staff know, going the extra mile can make all the difference to our customers. This requires staff to pay attention to the needs of our customers.

Principle **nine** is to not make promises to our customers unless you can keep your promise. Reliability is a key component of a trusted relationship. Many of our customers are going through a hard time and need reliable relationships to move them forward in a positive way. You can do this by being on time for appointments and call when you say you are going to call. After all, we are building relationships.

Our **last** principle of quality customer service (**principle 10**) is we have to constantly look for ways to improve. We have to identify successes and apply those successes to customer engagement so that we can do our jobs even better than before.

You have to examine how you engage others and apply quality customer service principles with a hope of offering services successfully.

## Quick Check Up!

33. Why should customers be greeted with a smile over the phone?
- The customer will calm down if you are smiling.
  - Smiling helps you respond calmly.
  - The customer can tell that you are smiling.
  - Smiling helps you speak clearly.
34. If a customer is waiting on the phone, it is courteous to give them the option of waiting or getting called back. TRUE or FALSE (circle one)

## The principles of quality customer service

Let's recap what we learned in lessons one through four.

- Customers are the focus of our business. Customers are unique like you and me.
- We have to know who our customers are and what they need.
  - We work with job seekers who are looking for work for the first time.
  - We work with people who are working. They have a job, now they want a career.
  - We help job seekers who are changing careers.
  - We have job seekers who are looking to advance their careers.
- Appear friendly and show you care. Courtesy is key.
- Not everyone you work with will want what you have to offer.
- Be respectful and courteous to customers.
- Use positive communication skills both when we are on the phone and when we are meeting customers face-to-face.
- When you are working with one person and another one approaches you for assistance, let the approaching person know that you will be right with them. This acknowledgement applies to phone assistance, as well.
- Go the extra mile.
- Do not make promises or commitments unless you can keep them.
- We have to constantly look for ways to improve.

## Lesson Five: Dealing with Difficult Customers

Welcome to Customer Service lesson five. During this lesson, we are going to focus on dealing with difficult customers who could be aggressive or passive. We have all encountered difficult people. So, what are some key strategies for engaging those difficult customers?

That is a good question. There are a lot of strategies that can be used when dealing with difficult customers. In this lesson, we will focus on several effective strategies that you can employ when dealing with difficult customers; these strategies have been combined into a five-step process. We will review all five steps, which include identifying difficult customers, identifying different types of difficult customers, identifying reasons customers challenge us, and identifying techniques for managing challenging situations. While reviewing these strategies, it is important to note your safety and the safety of those around you should be your first priority. Each LWDB should have a safety plan. Please get to know your safety plan and when you should ask for help or remove yourself from a hostile situation.

In this session, we are making underlying assumptions that difficult customers are often expressing emotions such as anger or frustration. As we will discuss later in the session, customers are often not angry with the workforce professional, but the situations they find themselves in. Regardless, the expression of these emotions creates difficult situations that need to be defused and managed. There may be other underlying emotions as well, such as sadness or the feeling of defeat. The same steps apply to the expression of these emotions, as well.

The definition of the word “difficult” provides details that help us understand the challenge of managing situations involving “difficult customers.” The definition of difficult is “hard to understand or solve.” Does that sound familiar? When we are working with customers who are angry or challenging, it may seem like solving the problem or bringing customers back to a happy disposition is impossible. The other definition of the term “difficult” provide even more insight. Let’s read it like we are talking about a customer who is being difficult. This customer is “hard to deal with, hard to please or satisfy, or hard to persuade.” So, what do we do? Do we just give up? No. When we are dealing with difficult customers, we take it “one step at a time.”

**Step one** requires us to identify when customers are being difficult. Why is this important? Sometimes, we are so busy that we do not stop and say, “This customer is being difficult” or “This customer is angry, and I need to apply my strategies to manage this difficult situation.” Instead, we jump right in to a “fight.” To defuse a potentially difficult situation, we must first recognize that the person is angry, frustrated, sad, or just plain difficult.

We also have to recognize that anger, sadness and frustration are simply emotions. Our customers have a right to their emotions; unfortunately, these emotions impact how our customers interact with others. As professionals, we have to recognize that difficult customers are managing emotions that will influence how they interact with us. There are two types of difficult people: There are aggressive people and passive people. **Aggressive** people are expressive. You know that these individuals are angry, sad or frustrated because you can hear their verbal expressions, such as yelling. Sometimes, you can tell that they are angry, sad or frustrated through other behaviors. Often times, aggressive individuals use sarcasm to express their emotions.

While some individuals are **aggressively** expressive, others are **passive** in their expressions. Passive individuals do not express their emotions out loud. However, their body language and facial expressions give them away. When passive customers are angry or frustrated, they are closed off and often unresponsive. While such individuals may not be loud, their expression of emotions will impact how we engage them. Passively expressive customers can be just as “difficult” as an aggressively expressive person. Once you identify customers as angry or frustrated, you begin to understand the reason that they are expressing their emotions or being “difficult.” A person may become difficult by being aggressively expressive or passively resistant for a variety of reasons. Some of those reasons are the results of circumstances that occur in the career center. For example, a customer may have had to wait 30 minutes or longer to use a computer. This issue may not be in your control, but the customer may still come to you and express how they feel. Sometimes, the issue is unrelated to the career center. For example, there are customers who may have had to apply for benefits and go through a rigorous application process. As a result, they may take their frustrations out on you.

### Quick Check Up!

35. What is an example of open body language?
- Lean on one leg with your arms on your hips.
  - Sit with your arms crossed facing the customer.
  - Face the individual with your hands by your side or with hands clasped together.
  - Sit facing the computer to enter data while you talk.

You simply do not know when customers walk through your door what has happened to them in the past few minutes, hours or days that have now resulted in them being “difficult.” Think about your morning before you got to work. Did you wake up on time? Was there a traffic jam or accident that made driving terribly stressful? Did you fill your coffee cup all the way, only to spill some of it down your brand-new shirt?

Have you ever been difficult with someone? The answer is yes—we all do it. This is a primal response to a negative situation, whether conscious or unconscious. Robert Bacal states that hostile behavior is learned early on by all individuals because it is how we get what we want. We learn to verbally interact to express how we feel. We also give non-verbal cues to show how we feel and to get attention. Robert Bacal also states that once you have worked in the customer service area long enough, you begin to realize that anger comes at you in the same manner with different words. He calls it the “rules of the abuse game.” People use the same attacks and tactics to express their feelings and get what they want.

### Quick Check Up!

36. A job seeker customer enters the career center and begins screaming at the front desk staff. Why type of difficult customer is this? The customer is ...
- A difficult customer
  - A hostile customer
  - An emotional customer
  - An aggressive customer

Robert Bacal states in his book titled *Defusing Hostile Customers Workbook* that the goal of the difficult or angry customer is to control you or the situation. Why? The angry customer wants something, and the customer is not sure at that point how to get what he or she wants. Additionally, the customer is dealing with adrenaline and other behavior-impacting elements that are preventing him or her from reacting in a controlled manner. As long as the difficult customer can get you to react to the situation, the negative interaction will continue. Additionally, nothing will get resolved. You need to understand that the difficult customer will try to “bait” you to react using hostile or verbal attacks. The goal of baiting an attack is to get you to react in an emotional manner rather than in a controlled and logical manner. So, what do you do?

**Step Two:** you need to recognize your own emotions and accept that you are a human being who will want to react defensively. This is natural; there is nothing wrong with this. However, if you “react” instead of “interact,” the negative exchange will continue. If you take the bait, you are giving control to the other person. Remember, difficult customers are trying to get help, but they are simply not able to constructively request that help. Instead, they attack. The individual will bait you to trying to get you to respond emotionally. If you take the bait and react, the negative exchange will continue. If you take the bait and react emotionally, you give control to the individual.



37. A customer walks in to the career center demanding to speak to someone who can get him a job interview. What is the second step in dealing with this customer?
- Recognize your own feelings
  - Seek clarification
  - Remain calm
  - Identify the customer's frustrations

**Step three is to remain calm.** Dianne Berenbaum of Communico Limited says, "Step back before you respond." This requires us to stop and recognize that your instincts are to react. Instead, you must be the voice of reason. Do not take the customer's anger personally. Instead, depersonalize the emotions you are receiving so that you can take the next step. What is the next step?

**Step four requires you to find out why customers are angry, sad or frustrated.** Learning this information will tell you how to handle the issues or resolve the problems. It will require you to ask questions and listen. **Step four requires active listening.** Some individuals will not be able to express why they are frustrated in a calm way or without emotion. A great technique is to allow customers the opportunity to talk and vent their frustrations. While customers are talking, you will get a lot of great information about why they are feeling anger, sadness or frustration.

What is "active listening"? Active listening is the sincere effort to find out what is bothering the customer by hearing what the customer has to say and learning about what the customer is feeling. It is hearing to understand. Active listening takes focus, eye contact, concentration, and effective body language. It enhances how accurately you hear and understand your customers. Active listening is not a passive experience.

While you are actively listening to customers, you should be asking questions to clarify or understand what they are saying. Keep in mind, you may be listening to someone who will not give you the opportunity to talk. That is fine. When the customer stops talking, you can begin to ask questions, but make sure you are not planning what you are going to say *while* the customer is talking. Show you are listening by communicating verbally or with nonverbal cues. This may include saying, "I see" or "I understand." It may also require you to prompt the customer by asking questions or using phrases like, "Tell me a little more about that." You may also nod your head or lean forward. Do not look at other work or focus on distractions. If you want to show that you are listening, you must make eye contact and give your undivided attention. Finally, summarize or paraphrase the information you received. This requires you to restate what you heard in your own words. You can use statements like, "So what I heard is...." This shows that you are paying attention.

**Sometimes, it is hard not to react to what someone is saying. If you feel yourself reacting emotionally, try this technique: Act as though you are in the process of “learning.” Your customers are instructing you on how they feel, and you are collecting information by asking questions and probing informatively. Your goal is to focus on learning and not reacting. This means that your mind is open to what has been said because you are *learning*. You are also open to new ideas and opinions before formulating your own regarding the situation.**

38. Sally meets with her case manager and is frustrated. The case manager recognizes her frustration. As Sally explains why she is angry, the case manager displays active listening skills through which of the following behaviors?
- The staff member nods her head and encourages Sally to continue conveying her points through positive expressions.
  - The staff member repeatedly asks Sally to calm down as she is trying to explain her frustration.
  - The staff member listens intensely and thinks about what message she needs to convey while Sally is speaking.
  - The staff member stands facing Sally and crosses her arms to show she is focused as Sally explains her frustrations.
39. What of the following is **not** a way to show you are listening and paying attention to what the customer has to say?
- Concentrate on what you are going to say while the person is talking. Then, when the customer is done, offer information.
  - Use open and engaging body language.
  - Do not interrupt the customer while they talk. Let the customer make their point.
  - Show you are engaged through reactions.
40. Jason is frustrated after struggling to find a job for months. While speaking about the situation, you devote all of your attention to him by focusing, making eye contact and periodically asking him questions. Which of the following techniques was used in this scenario?
- Demonstrating self-control over your emotions.
  - Demonstrating active listening.
  - Avoiding hot words.
  - Avoiding confrontation with the customer.

While you are talking to customers, avoid using certain words or statements, also known as “hot words.” For example, it is recommended that you avoid using the word, “Whatever!” For some reason, this can exacerbate frustrations. It is also recommended that you avoid using the phrase, “I don’t care” or “That’s not my job.” These phrases only generate more anger in a person who is already frustrated. If it is not your job, perhaps you can find a staff member who can help. If the customer is on the phone, give the customer the name and number of the staff member he or she needs to speak with, and attempt to connect them to that staff member. Another phrase to avoid is, “That’s policy.” You may indeed be telling the truth, but telling why something is in place is better than simply saying, “That’s policy.” When customers hear “That’s policy,” they feel like they are being blown off. For other hot words or phrases, review the book *Conflict Prevention in the Workplace* by Robert Bacal.

### Quick Check Up!

41. Monica is a hard-working case manager. She has multiple tasks to complete before 5 p.m. While meeting with Samantha, Monica is making a mental list of what needs to be done before she can go home. What element of positive communication is being broken?
  - a. Use open body language
  - b. Stay free of distractions
  - c. Do not plan your response
  - d. Do not interrupt your customer
  
42. The terms “That’s policy” and “I don’t care” are
  - a. Hot words
  - b. Aggressive words
  - c. Passive words
  - d. Necessary at times
  
43. Sally visits the career center because her childcare money has been canceled. She impatiently waits at the end of a short line. She notices you, a case manager, walking away from your cubicle. Sally sees you and yells, “Hey, lady. I really need help.” According to Robert Bacal, the customer is attempting to get your attention by
  - a. overwhelming you.
  - b. frustrating you.
  - c. scaring you.
  - d. baiting you.

**Step five:** Once you have gained the customer's confidence, you are in a better position to resolve the issue. Many people think this means that you give the customer whatever he or she wants. However, this is not the case. This step simply means that you working with the customer to **create a solution**.

If a solution cannot be reached, provide the customer with his or her next steps. Sometimes our difficult customers are talkers. So, what is a strategy for customers who simply won't stop talking, especially since you do not want to interrupt? Remember that interrupting your customers can appear aggressive. A strategy you can use is to simply stop talking altogether. In fact, get as still and quiet as possible. Customers will want to know if you are listening, especially if you are on the phone. This is when you employ a technique of asking questions or paraphrasing what you heard. This strategy gives you the opportunity to move the conversation forward.

Have you ever walked out to the lobby and discovered a customer standing there with his hands on the hips and a scowl on his face? Of course, you have. This means you have an angry customer. First, I want to commend you on recognizing that the person is not happy; this is step one. Remember, it is very helpful to depersonalize the situation. Next, instead of launching immediately into the customer's negative emotion, try employing small talk. Try to get the customer focused on something that is good and brings other emotions to the surface.

What if the customer keeps getting louder and louder? There are two strategies that you can employ here. First, get quiet. When you respond, make sure that your response is very quiet, so the customer has to get quiet to hear you. Also, take a look at the customer's environment and mannerisms. If the individual is in a place where others can see and hear him, take him away from the audience. This makes sure that the individual is focused on talking to you and not performing for other people.

You may be asking, "What if I feel myself getting angry. What are some strategies that I can take to avoid reacting to the customer's behavior?" First, you are commended for recognizing your emotions: this is the second step to controlling the situation. It is natural, as a human being, to want to react. Take a deep breaths. Then, tell yourself "This customer is not mad at *me*." Now, you may be thinking, "But I just denied him benefits or I just terminated her from a program, and that impacts the family's income." The reality is the customer is not angry at you. The customer is mad at the situation and is simply not sure where to direct that anger. Also, tell yourself, "I am not going to get pulled into the customer's emotional trap." Remember, *you do not have to take the bait*. Listen to your customer and take it one step at a time.

**Another strategy you can try is to slow down your responses. When we are angry, we tend to react and talk fast. Take a deep breath before you speak and speak slowly. If you need to take a break, ask the customer if you can step away.**

**As a workforce professional, you play a critical role in putting the customer service puzzle together. You are going to be faced with challenges, which include dealing with difficult people. There are resources available to help you. For example, you can find more information about strategies for working with difficult people in the *Defusing Hostile Customers Workbook* by Robert Bacal.**

### **Quick Check Up!**

44. During a scheduled appointment, the customer becomes upset and begins to scream angrily at staff. Sam, the staff member, allows the customer to express their feelings then probes further and summarizes the information. Which of the following actions is Sam attempting to do?
- Resolve the issue
  - Seek clarification from the customer
  - Recognize the customer's feelings
  - Stay calm during the discussion
45. Christopher has been waiting for over an hour to speak with a case manager. Having been recently laid off from his job of 15 years, he is new to the job search process. When you are finally able to speak with him, he is visibly angry and frustrated. You have recognized the difficult customer. What is the next step?
- Recognize your own feeling and avoid taking the bait
  - Recognize the customer is angry with the situation and not you
  - Seek a resolution to the issue
  - Seek clarification
46. Based on the principles of quality customer service, which of the following displays courtesy?
- Walk customers to their cars after visits
  - Do not answer your phone while talking to customers
  - Think of what you want to say while the customer is talking.
  - Tell customers they are very important, and you will give them whatever they want

## Five Steps to Dealing with Challenging People

**Step One:** recognize when customers are being difficult.

**Step Two:** recognize your own emotions and accept that you are a human being who will want to react defensively.

**Step Three:** remain calm. Be the voice of reason. Remember, do not take the bait.

**Step Four:** requires you to find out why customers are angry, sad or frustrated. Step four requires active listening.

**Step Five:** once you have gained the customer's confidence, you are in a better position to resolve the issue. Work with the customer to create a solution.