



5

Customer service

Learning objectives in this unit

- Talking about customer service
- Dealing with customers
- Reassuring and sympathizing
- Using direct and indirect questions when dealing with customers

Case study

- Dealing with customer service problems

Starting point

- 1 Discuss a good and bad experience you have had of customer service when buying a product.
- 2 Was your impression of the product affected by the service?

Working with words | Customer service

- 1 18▶ Listen to a woman talking on a radio show about a customer service encounter and answer questions 1–4.

- 1 What was the woman's problem and was it resolved?
- 2 Does she have a positive or negative view of the shop's customer service?
- 3 Do you think she will use the shop again?
- 4 Did the shop assistants make the right decision? Why or why not?

- 2 Read some of the comments about the encounter posted on the show's website.

1 I suppose you could support the assistants' 'go by the rules' attitude. But, as a store owner myself, I think it's wrong to quibble about a couple of minutes; staff are there to be **courteous** and **responsive**, and I wouldn't be happy if that happened in my store. It's so much easier and more cost-effective to keep an **existing** customer than to find a new one. My personal rule of thumb is: a **satisfied** customer might tell a friend, a **dissatisfied** customer will complain to everyone they know.

2 Of course you want to meet the customer's needs and you don't want to lose **loyal** customers by appearing **uncaring**, but the customer must also understand that

- a) hours are posted for a reason
- b) employees have lives outside the shop, and
- c) for security reasons, once the tills are closed, no one is allowed in the shop.

3 I work in a bank where we've introduced an unpublicized rule which really helps to foster customer loyalty. The doors officially close at 5.00, but they let anyone in until 5.10. The feedback we get from the cashiers is very positive; by letting people in, we exceed the expectations of customers who arrive just a little late, and no one really expects to be let in if they arrive after 5.10.

4 This is actually a management failure, though everyone seems to be blaming the shop assistants. If I were the owner, I'd tell the staff that in a situation like this, they should try and find a solution. I'd point out the importance of customer satisfaction and I'd give them the power to make decisions – with examples of what they can and can't do. And I'd make sure they understood the effect of **attentive** and **efficient** service as well as **discourteous** and **sub-standard** service on potential customers – and their regular ones.

5 I agree with the last post. Management need to regularly measure customer satisfaction and make sure service quality is part of everyone's work experience. **High-quality** customer service is all about bringing customers back. And about sending them away satisfied so they give positive feedback about your business to others, who may then try the product or service you offer for themselves and in their turn become **repeat** customers.

3 Work with a partner and answer questions 1–3.

- 1 Say what the main points of each post are and whether you agree or disagree with it.
- 2 Which post do you agree with most?
- 3 Can you think of a better solution to the problem?

4 Match the adjectives in bold in the posts to these definitions.

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 1 not sympathetic: _____ | 7 happy with something: _____ |
| 2 polite / impolite: _____ / _____ | 8 of a very good standard: _____ |
| 3 helpful: _____ | 9 faithful and supportive: _____ |
| 4 not as good as normal: _____ | 10 returning: _____ |
| 5 well organized: _____ | 11 not happy with something: _____ |
| 6 reacting quickly and positively: _____ | 12 present: _____ |

5 Which of the adjectives in 4 describe

- 1 customer service?
- 2 customers?

6 Use some of the adjectives in 4 to write another post for the radio show website.

7 Complete the questionnaire by matching 1–7 to a–g.

Customer service questionnaire

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 What do you do to meet ... _____ | a feedback about service from your customers? |
| 2 What new procedure might help you to exceed ... _____ | b customer satisfaction and service quality? |
| 3 In what ways do you measure ... _____ | c existing customers or to win new ones? |
| 4 Have you introduced ... _____ | d your customers' expectations of the service you provide? |
| 5 Do you think it is easier to keep ... _____ | e customers to your competitors? |
| 6 How do you try and get ... _____ | f your customers' needs and keep them satisfied? |
| 7 How do you avoid losing ... _____ | g any unpublicized rules to improve customer service? |

8 Work with a partner. Ask and answer the questions in 7 about your own company or a company you know.

» For more exercises, go to **Practice file 5** on page 110.

9 Work in small groups. Decide on the five most important factors in good customer service.

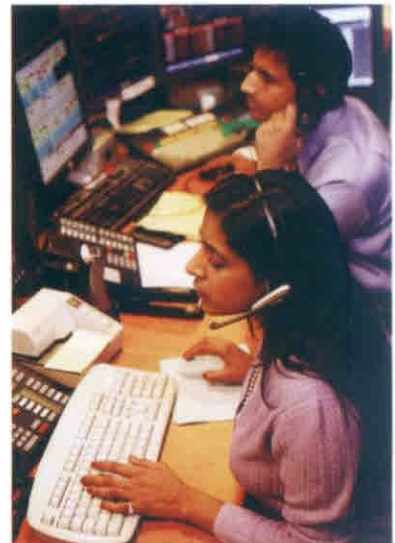
Example: Try to meet your customer's needs with efficient and attentive service.

10 Write a customer service feedback questionnaire. Think of six questions to find out how customers view your company and whether they are satisfied with the service that is provided.

Example: Tick the words that best describe your experience of this company.

- uncaring
- sub-standard
- courteous
- efficient

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4 Work with a partner. You are going to deal with a phone call from an internal customer. Student A, turn to File 36 on page 146. Student B, use the information below. Read your information and take turns to make and receive the call. Make sure you

- request information about the problem or situation and establish the facts
- clarify the information and check that it is correct
- promise action.

Student B

1 You work in the Sales Department and call the Communications Department.

Problem: the dates for your business trip have changed.

Further information: you need the original flight cancelling and a new one booking; this also applies to the hotel.


Deadline: by next week.

2 You work in the Travel and Logistics Department and receive a call from an internal customer.

Action to promise: email new details as soon as you have them.

5 Work with a partner. Decide what phrases the caller and receiver might use in these situations. Then take turns to make and receive a call.

- 1 A team leader from Operations calls Human Resources. The employment contracts for two new workers are needed by the end of the day – there's already been a delay of six weeks.
- 2 The Communications Officer from a company calls a printing company. The company magazine hasn't arrived and it is due to be sent out to employees tomorrow.

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Practically speaking | Reassuring and sympathizing

1 20▶ Listen to four short conversations at work. What has happened in each situation?

2 20▶ Listen again. How does the first speaker ask about the situation in each conversation?

3 Which is the best response to each situation, a or b? Why?

- 1 a Forget it. b I know it's hard at first, but you'll soon find your feet.
- 2 a I'm sure you did the best you could. b It sounds as if you don't care.
- 3 a You did the right thing. b How awful!
- 4 a You couldn't have done any more. b Oh no!

4 21▶ Listen and check your answers.

5 Work with a partner. Have similar short conversations using these situations (or ones of your own). Refer to the *Useful phrases* on page 134.

- a difficult interview
- an argument with a colleague
- a long negotiation about a new company policy
- a tough presentation to a new client
- a call to a customer to say a product has been discontinued

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Key expressions

Requesting information

What seems to be the problem?

How can I help (you)?

What can I do for you (today)?

Establishing the facts

Can / Could you tell me when ...?

Can / Could you explain exactly what the problem is?

Can / Could you give me ...?

Talk me through (it / what happened).

Clarifying / Checking facts

Let me get this straight ...

What you're saying is ...

You mean ...?

If I understand you correctly, ...

Could I just clarify what you're saying?

Promising action

I'll look into it straightaway.

What I'll do is ... and ...

I'm going to have to look into this.

I'll get back to you (shortly).

Once I've / As soon as I've ..., I'll call you back.

Referring to time / deadlines


by (Friday) at the latest

by tomorrow / lunchtime / the end of the week

in time for the deadline

as soon as

shortly

 » Interactive Workbook
» Phrasebank

Language at work | Direct and indirect questions

1 Match the indirect questions (a–e) from audio 19▶ to the equivalent direct questions (1–5).

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| a Can you tell me when you sent it to us? | 1 Why is it doing this? ____ |
| b Could you explain exactly what the problem is? | 2 How long will it take? ____ |
| c Do you know why it's doing this? | 3 Have you got an order number? ____ |
| d Can you tell me if you've got an order number? | 4 When did you send it to us? ____ |
| e Could you let me know how long it will take? | 5 What exactly is the problem? ____ |

2 When might you use an indirect question rather than a direct question? How do you change a direct question into an indirect question?

» For more information and exercises, go to **Practice file 5** on page 111.

3 Work with a partner. Think of two direct and two indirect questions to ask for each of these situations.

Example: You want to see the store manager to make a complaint, but he is out.

When will the manager be back? / Do you know when the manager will be back?

- 1 A customer is calling about an ongoing complaint. You need to know which of your colleagues the customer spoke to last time.
- 2 You are arranging a delivery for an important client. You want to know whether morning, afternoon or evening would be the most convenient time for delivery.
- 3 A customer is very agitated and upset. You can see that something is wrong, but it is difficult to understand what she is trying to say.
- 4 You are waiting at a station for a train that is over an hour late. You think it may have been cancelled and go to the information desk to find out.
- 5 A customer is calling about a faulty product. It may still be under guarantee, so you need to find out how long the customer has had it.

4 Work with a partner. Student A, turn to File 11 on page 139. Student B, use the information below. Think about what questions you need to ask to get the information you need. (Use a mix of direct and indirect questions as appropriate.)

Student B

- 1 You work in a travel agency in Amsterdam. Use this information to answer your partner's questions about flights to / from New York and hotel accommodation.

10.00	Depart Amsterdam (AMS)	Tue 20 Mar	Delta 81	€980 rtn
13.25	Arrive New York (JFK)	Duration: 8 hr	Direct flight	
17.40	Depart New York (JFK)	Fri 23 Mar	Delta 80	
06.45	Arrive Amsterdam (AMS)	Duration: 8 hr 5 min	Direct flight	

Park Central Hotel

Location: across from Carnegie Hall, one block from Broadway, two blocks from Fifth Avenue

Cost: €1,060 for three nights (accommodation only)

- 2 You are staying at a hotel in Prague. Ask at Reception for suggestions for things to do in the city. Find out about:
 - places of interest
 - opening hours
 - cost of entrance
 - how to get there

Tip | Using different types of question

Use indirect questions

- to open an enquiry or change to a new topic of enquiry
- to establish a level of politeness
- to ask for sensitive or complex information.

Use direct questions

- to ask follow-up questions
- to be more focused or direct
- to ask for simple factual information.

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Dealing with customer service problems

Background

Differing expectations of customer service?

CBE Brasilia supplies companies around the world with first-class coffee beans. One of its clients is Kool Kaffee, a chain of popular coffee shops, originating in Germany, but now doing business in most German-speaking countries as well as a few of its eastern European neighbours. Recently, Kool Kaffee has experienced a problem with one of its Internet orders with CBE Brasilia.

- 1 March – a bulk order of coffee beans was made.
- 2 April – delivery arrived but Premium Selection and Midnight Espresso beans were missing; there was no documentation from CBE concerning the order – only the documents on the package from the shipping company.
- Kool Kaffee called customer services immediately. They were polite and friendly but said there was no record of the order being placed. Further calls were made to customer services on 4, 10, 11 April. An email was sent 16 April.
- Kool Kaffee called again on 18 April and were told there was no record of the order or of their communication with the company since the incomplete delivery.
- CBE Accounts Department was contacted. They found a receipt and details of a delivery with the signature, 'dot.com'. However, this receipt was for the same goods but for Kool Kaffee CH – the Zurich office, which made a purchase on the same day.

Discussion

- 1 What's your opinion of the way that CBE Brasilia dealt with the situation? Could it have dealt with the problem more effectively? Could the problem be related to the different expectations each culture has of customer service?
- 2 **22▶** Listen to José Buenadir from CBE Brasilia describe the problem and how it was resolved.
 - 1 Was this a satisfactory resolution to the problem? Why or why not?
 - 2 What lessons should the company learn from this situation?
 - 3 What changes could it make to improve its customer service?

Task

- 1 Work with a partner. Student A, turn to File 13 on page 139. Student B, turn to File 33 on page 145. You are going to make two phone calls each: one to an internal customer and one to an external customer. Read each situation and then make and receive the calls.
- 2 Form two groups, Student As and Student Bs.
 - 1 Consider the two situations where you received the call. Which course of action did you promise your client? Turn to File 48 on page 149 and work out your score.
 - 2 Do you agree with the score and

The Expert View

Expectations of what constitutes good customer service are always influenced to a degree by cultural values. So a disagreement between two businesses over a customer service issue may be as much about different expectations and attitudes as about the business issue itself. If one party believes they are dealing with the problem in an acceptable way, it may be difficult for them to understand why the other party is not satisfied with their response. When dealing with a customer service enquiry in an international context, it's important always to consider what outcome the other person is looking for. What are they really concerned about, and what do they expect to happen?

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Case study