

Public Library Customer Service:

What Makes It Different from Bookstore Customer Service?

1. You are a government employee, which means you offer fair and consistent service to everyone. This concept is called “Safety for the Stranger” and extends to everyone, even people you don’t know and don’t like. To offer special favors to individuals or groups violates constitutional rights. If you can say “yes” to the person who is articulate, why not to everyone?
2. You don’t get to pick and choose your customers. It means that you serve everyone in your community, particularly populations that need your services because they do not have the resources to pay (even the damaged people).
3. You work for a government agency, and often your interactions with people are about setting limits or enforcing laws or regulations, not just solving their information needs.

What To Do To Relieve the Stress

1. Establish a Home Base to *benchmark* your best behavior.
2. Ask a *buddy* to monitor your external Performance State.
3. Work for *Level Behavior*: relaxed, friendly, and courteous.
4. Improve the details of your *responses* to other people.
5. Learn to take *microbreaks*, at least once each hour.
6. Become *benignly* indifferent to damaged behavior.

Communication Skills for Front Line Staff

March 24, 2006

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What Are Behaviors of Great Customer Service?

1. Ask the library user his or her name by introducing yourself first and politely asking them theirs. This applies to people of all ages and status.
2. Call them by their name. Use a formal form of address (Sir, Miss) unless they ask you to use an informal form, such as their first name. Do not call them by the first name on their library card or identification card unless they invite you.
3. Offer your hand to shake when appropriate.
4. Offer them a place to sit, if appropriate, such as when you have to talk with them at length, or if you sense they may prefer sitting.
5. Offer to move away from other library users if it is a private matter.
6. Smile at them with a friendly, relaxed neutral smile.
7. Write notes about what they are saying, but otherwise focus on them and keep your body still. You can move your hands, of course, however, avoid fidgeting.
8. Ask questions about the situation they encountered.
9. Avoid using library jargon, such as interlibrary loan, unless you have evidence (they use the word) that the library user knows what the words mean.
10. Do not interrupt them. Allow for small pauses of silence.
11. Nod when they are talking so they have physical evidence you are listening.
12. Ask them how they want the situation resolved.
13. Tell them what the library plans to do to resolve the situation.
14. Find out how the library user wants to learn about the resolution: phone call, letter, postcard, fax, e-mail.
15. If you are working with a library user who is somehow different from you, take extra care that you are using the same polite behaviors you would use with anyone.
16. If the library user has a helper or companion, such as a family member who is translating or a caretaker who is helping them navigate, remember to talk to the library user as a human being and to treat all parties as equal.

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The Two Sets of *Contradictory* Communication Rules: Maintaining Positive Performance

If you are *sending* a message:

Behavior has **consequences**. You do your best to present information in such a way as to make it as easy as possible for the other person to say “yes”. The response is the measure of the success of your message. You take responsibility for the details of your behavior and the responses of others (within reason).

What is difficult about being responsible for the details of your own behavior and it impacts others?

If you are *receiving* a message:

You make **choices** as to how you interpret behavior and respond to another person. You can choose to give other people the benefit of the doubt and assume their intentions are positive or, at the very least, make sense to them as beneficial. You describe behavior with neutral words, because you know you cannot read another person’s mind. Describing behavior reduces your own emotionality and gives you greater influence over other people’s behavior.

What is difficult about choosing your response to other people’s behaviors and describing their behaviors’ neutrally?

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Where is Your Source of Control? Inside You or Outside You?

Internal Locus (Point of Control)

- I am responsible for my choices.
- I can learn to choose how I respond to life, including the behavior of other people.
- I can find out how to get what I want.
- Success is knowable and replicable.
- I can create and execute a plan.
- I set goals for the future, learn from the past and take action today.
- I can learn new behavior.

External Locus (Point of Control)

- I am not responsible for my life.
- Other people and situations create my life.
- I am not responsible for my behavior, including my responses to other people.
- I will never know how to get what I want.
- Success is a magical accident.
- I react instead of plan.
- I only know the present and the past, not the future.
- I don't believe I can learn new behavior.

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Negative (And Sometimes Addictive) Behaviors

1. Generalizations: always, never, all, every.
2. Repeating the same negative stories or information more than once in the same conversation.
3. Repeating the same old stories in response to new information.
4. Assuming the worst of the people you don't like.
5. Ignoring or not being able to see and hear positive change.
6. Your first response is to criticize or say something negative.
7. Feeling as if feeling good means you have lost the battle.
8. Equating telling the truth as telling other people off, instead of apologizing for your own mistakes first.
9. Saying negative things if someone says something good about someone you don't like.
10. Telling new people only the negative things about the workplace and other people.
11. Spending time thinking and talking about other people's past mistakes.
12. Spending encounters with other people watching for mistakes.
13. Rejecting offers of help with. "Yes, but."
14. Rejecting people who are positive and constructive.
15. Saying that your own mistakes in communication and behavior are justified, because other people did something to you first.
16. Exaggerating bad news and minimizing or discounting the good news.
17. Using punishment words. Sarcasm. Wounding others.
18. Trying to convince other people how bad things are.
19. Distorting meaning through negative filters.

*What is your score?
How would others score you?*

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Positive Influence

Power: Ability to impose meaningful and significant consequences. Based on legal and fiscal duties. People have power over us.

Authority: Rank, status, reputation, tenure, position, title, credentials, ability. Based on tribal model of hierarchy. We confer authority. (Legitimate, illegitimate, earned.)

Influence: Rapport; information; action. Based on peer-based, empathetic relationships, measurable and describable data and personal responsibility and action.

First step: Rapport - Understanding the Other Person's World
(Negotiate/design the contract–Listen and discuss.) (Excess: Placater)

1. Like or similar: part of the tribe, a peer, an equal.
2. One or more facets of each person connect with each other.
3. Pace (match) the other person's speed; use the same language.
4. Recognize the other person's story; see, hear, and understand the world from his or her point of view, whether or not you agree.
5. The other person feels visible and validated. *Empathy.*

Second step: Information - Understanding the Big Picture
(Write/decide the contract–Facts and evidence.) (Excess: Bureaucrat)

1. Explicit and precise.
2. No mind reading. Emotionally neutral. No judgment.
3. In the person's learning preference: visual, auditory, kinesthetic.
4. In a timely fashion. Information exchange is give and seek. In appropriately sized chunks.
5. Measurable and observable data. *Objectivity.*

Third step: Action - Understanding Your Choices
(Enact/enforce the contract–Change and act.) (Excess: Bully)

1. Take responsibility: Be accountable. Be a stand-up person.
2. Respect the behavioral impact of Cause and Effect.
3. Alternatives are created; choices are made.
4. Risks are evaluated and taken: the cost of doing business.
5. Actions can be positive or negative. Positive works best
6. Something changes. Something moves. *Consequences.*

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Twenty-four Ways to Influence Behavior:

Teach, Lead, Sell, Change

Did the person you are trying to influence have time:

1. To think about it silently.
2. To read about it silently.
3. To write it down, perhaps more than once.
4. To hear the information out loud from someone else.
5. To say the information out loud.
6. To observe how it is done.
7. To teach it to someone else.
8. To evaluate it and test it.
9. To practice it.
10. To change it to make it their own.
11. To have a hand in creating it.
12. To learn the details.
13. To learn the big picture.
14. To know why.
15. To know who.
16. To work in a small group.
17. To experience the consequences of doing it well or not.
18. To create a physical model.
19. To observe themselves doing it.
20. To be tested.
21. To have a second or third meeting.
22. To interact with it on a web site or read it online.
23. To organize it in a way that made sense to them.
24. To create a “learning outline” or structure first.

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Words That Work

Learn how to elegantly turn a NO, which slams the door shut, into a possibility, which provides information both for you and your customers, and moves customers closer to solving their own problems.

1. Replace, “Yes, but...” with “Yes, and...”
2. Replace, “I don’t know.” with “Let me find out.”
3. Replace, “I can’t.” with “What I can do is...”
4. Replace, “We can’t do that.” with “What I can do is...”
5. Replace, “We can’t do that.” with “Here is the address and phone number of the organization that has that service, book, web site, copier, computer service or information.”
6. Replace, “You make me feel.” with “I feel...”
7. Replace, “You must...” with “Would you please...”
8. Replace, “I will help you in a minute” with “I will be finished with this customer in ten minutes. Would you like to wait, come back, find help at another desk, or have me call you after a specific length of time?”
9. Replace, “I will try” with the smaller, specific thing you will actually do.
10. Replace, “You are wrong.” with, “This is the information I have, and here is the document I am using as my source of information. Please tell me more about what you know, so I can better understand your perspective on the situation and where you received your information.”
11. Use power words:
 - a. Next: Next time, please tell me first when the computer is down.
 - b. Instead: What journals do you want instead of the ones we ordered?
 - c. Despite: Despite the confusion about the hours, what are you going to do?
 - d. Satisfy: What will satisfy your concerns about the cataloging?
12. Focus on the customer:
 - a. Focus on the customer’s desired outcome (the future), not just your own resources (present) or the customer’s problem (the past).
 - b. Be specific; avoid generalities.
 - c. Say what can be done, instead of what can’t be done.
 - d. Your nonverbal communication - your smile, tone of voice, and posture - will build rapport and thus, better outcomes.
 - e. Bad news is the best information; learn from miscommunication.

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How To Identify and Practice Successful Nonverbal Communication

Watch and listen to actors on television and in the movies and identify the details of human behavior. What do successful people do? What do the details convey to the average person? Try discussing your communication with friends and family and use the feedback to practice in front of a mirror.

- The expression on your face, do you...
 - Smile with whole face or just the mouth
 - Have a smooth or furrowed brow
 - Have a face that is expressive (moving) or blank
 - Look positive: happy, confident or negative: frowning, squinting
 - Look the person in the face and maintain eye contact, if appropriate
 - Match the other person's expression
- Sitting posture, do you...
 - Lean slightly forward or totally erect or slouched backward
 - Turn towards or away from the other person
 - Sit mostly still or shift in the chair continually
 - Match the other person's sitting posture
- Standing posture, do you...
 - Lean slightly forward or totally erect or slouched
 - Turn towards or away from the other person
 - Stand mostly still or shift your weight
 - Match the other person's standing posture.
- Hand gestures, do you...
 - Use some hand gestures or never gesture or always gesture wildly
 - Match the other person's speed and rhythm of gesturing

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Identify and Practice Successful Communication

- Tone of voice

It is very difficult to only read instructions and then know how to listen to your voice and change how you sound. Practice out loud where you can be alone, like in the car or the shower. Try asking a friend for feedback. Below is a list of things you can control about your tone of voice.

- Try smiling, it affects the voice positively
- Moving your head up or down changes the pitch – high or low
- The speed and rhythm at which you speak
- The number of times you pause or take a breath
- The variety of pitches, speed and sounds you make
 - No vocal variety can sound flat and cold
 - Too much variety can distract from your message
 - Balance and variety sounds warm and interesting
- You convey emotions through your tone of voice. You can play with vocal variety by conveying each of these emotions with a partner. Are you a “warm” or “cold” communicator?
 - Friendly
 - Superior
 - Contemptuous
 - Sympathetic
 - Indifferent
 - Frustrated
 - Too busy to help
 - Eager to help
 - Comfortable
 - Nervous

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Three Steps to Resolving Conflicts

- I. What do you want have happen instead of what is happening?
 1. Is the outcome an internal or external outcome?
 2. Is the problem a personal or personnel problem?
 3. Are you being specific?
 4. Are you being emotionally neutral?
 5. What will this outcome do for you?
 6. What are five other ways to get this outcome?
 7. What else would you want to have happen instead of your first choice?

- II. What about the other person(s)?
 1. What is the cost of change for them? What is the benefit for them?
 2. How will this outcome affect the other person(s)?
 3. How will this outcome affect other people indirectly?
 4. How will this outcome affect other departments?
 5. How will this outcome affect the whole agency?
 6. How will this outcome affect other agencies and communities?

- III. What are you going to do instead of what you are doing, in order to change the outcome from what you have, to what you want?
 1. How will you build rapport back with the person?
 2. Do you need to stop talking about the person to others?
 3. Do you need to change your day-to-day behavior with them?
 4. What details of your behavior do you have to change?
 5. Have you received criticism about your own behavior that you need to consider?
 6. What are five behaviors that really annoy you in other people?
 7. How can you learn if these are behaviors that you do as well?
 8. How will you measure success?

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Giving Effective Criticism

1. Effective criticism is given in private and face-to-face with the other party, with enough time for the other party to respond in that meeting. A third party can be present as a witness, “referee”, facilitator, or mediator. Only if there exists excellent rapport, strong trust, and good communication skills can criticism occur in front of others. One way to deal with team criticism is to discuss the issue privately one-on-one and then share the results with the team.
2. Effective criticism is based on “I” statements and/or documented evidence, rather than accusatory “You” statements and third-hand reports.
3. Effective criticism is given with the intention of improving the situation.
4. Effective criticism sticks to the point, and, if planned well, has only one agenda. This is preferred to “Now that I have you here, here are 50 other things you messed up.” One exception might be a formal personnel review.
5. Effective criticism is given in the context of validating the person so that the person's behavior is criticized instead of the person.
6. Effective criticism invites information and ideas from the other person about their perceptions of the problem (which may be 180 degrees different from the first person's view) and how to address it.
7. Measurable criteria for success and consequences is stated, agreed upon and documented. If there is no measurement, there is no agreement.
8. The meeting ends with a positive statement.
9. A memo is sent to all parties involved stating the particulars of the agreement.

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Accepting Criticism

1. First, thank the person for giving you feedback. This does not mean you necessarily agree with what is being said; you reward the person for speaking up.
2. If the criticism is being given in a public place, ask for privacy. If the other person keeps talking, request a “change of venue”. This can be stated in the positive. “I want to hear what you have to say, and I need for us to have a private place to do it.” Request a third party to be there, if you wish. The same criteria can apply in team settings.
3. If the criticism is a personal attack, acknowledge it with a nod of the head or a brief, neutral comment, and then shrug it off. Everyone, including yourself, has bad days. Also, you can interrupt and request them to stop that behavior and to focus on the problem, stating your intention to leave the room if they continue to yell, etc. If they do continue, leave, and document what happened. Always separate the message, which is probably very valuable, from the way it is delivered.
4. After you hear the complaint, you can ask for information on what they want you to do instead. You can ask for help and clarification. If you are defensive, you can confuse the communication. In cases of misunderstandings, stay productive, “No, I did not take the report. Do you want my help in finding it?”
5. If you are being criticized for the actions of people you supervise, you can take the responsibility without apology, instead of blaming them for what happened. You probably were well intentioned, but good intentions are not enough.
6. Set measurable criteria, including deadlines, for the resolution of the problem. If necessary, ask for third party assistance in resolving the problem.

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Communication Cheat Sheet

1. Focus on external evidence, not on hearsay or interpretations of intentions. Use neutral language to describe behavior.
2. Take positive action despite what other people are doing.
3. Move towards your own better behavior—next and instead!
4. Communication is not give and take, it is give and seek!
5. Don't get angry; get interested.
6. Stay unconditionally constructive.
7. Ask for preferences from people with whom you are not communicating well.
8. Mistakes are information.
9. Seek feedback from everyone: What should you be doing differently?
10. Decide how to handle mistakes before they happen.
11. Use all three influence strategies: Rapport, information, action.
12. Renegotiate your social contracts, so you are not compensating emotionally in the workplace for chronic home problems.
13. Create your own compelling workplace future; keep looking for your next customer/adventure. Actively job-hunt!
14. Stay level: relaxed, alert, good-humored. No sarcasm.
15. Speak only for yourself; respond directly to other people.
16. Participate instead of lurking.
17. Discuss an event only with the person with whom it happened.
18. Assume you are part of the problem and part of the solution.
19. Stay in the present moment; work for the better future
20. If you don't know what to do, stay civil.
21. Find joy every day in your life.
22. Set other people up for success; start with small steps.
23. Find the good in others.

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Anné Linden. Mindworks. *Unlock the Promise Within : NLP Tools for Building a Better Life*. Andrews McMeel Publishing (1997), ISBN: 0836221680. \$6.99. Elegant book on the practical application of cognitive psychology.

Karen Pryor. *Don't Shoot the Dog: The New Art of Teaching and Training*. Bantam Books (1999), ISBN: 0553380397. \$14.95. Check out for her web site at <http://www.clickertraining.com/home/index.htm>. Introduction to positive reinforcement, influence and behavioral science in a fun format.

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Martin Seligman. *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*. Free Press (2002), ISBN: 0743222970. \$26.00. Audio version available. The leading author on optimism and learning to take charge of your life, based on decades of clinical research. These are his best-known books.

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Online Resources

Exploring NonVerbal Communication

<http://nonverbal.ucsc.edu/>

Exploring nonverbal communication. This web site gives you a chance to learn more about nonverbal communication. You can even test your own ability to "read" samples of real nonverbal communication.

LibrarySupportStaff.com

<http://www.librarysupportstaff.com/stafftrain.html>

Resources for on-the-job in libraries.

Policies from libraries around the country

<http://www.falmouthpubliclibrary.org/customerservice.htm>

<http://www.alliancelibrarysystem.com/safeharbor/index.cfm?SectionID=92>

<http://www.naplibrary.com/customer.html>

<http://www.babcocklibrary.com/customerservicepolicy.html>

http://www.newburyportpl.org/customer_service_policy.htm

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