

Customer Service in Catering



Course introduction - using the materials

This course is designed so that you can do much of the studying on your own. To gain the most from this, you should plan your study carefully.

Feedback from your tutor can be a very useful learning tool and can help you to improve your work, but you will need to read it carefully and understand what your tutor says.

The following tips might help:

- Find somewhere to work where you have everything you need and there are no **distractions**.
- Decide **how long your study session** is going to be.
- Decide what it is **you want to achieve** in each study session (for example, decide how much of the material you want to cover).
- Evaluate the session - consider whether you achieved what you were aiming to achieve. If not, consider the reasons, for example, were you distracted or were there points in the material that you found particularly difficult and which slowed you down?
- Action plan - decide what you need to do next and what you need to do to make sure you achieve it.

Some tips on using feedback:

- Read every point carefully and make sure that you understand why your tutor thought aspects of your work were good
- and why your tutor thought aspects of your work could be improved.
- Look for comments that give you advice on how to improve.
- If you don't understand a comment, or feel it is unfair, be prepared to discuss it with your tutor.
- From the feedback list areas that you need to improve. Make an action plan to improve these before you submit your next piece of work to your tutor.
- Note good points and make sure that you continue to do these things in the future.
- When you are preparing your next piece of work, use the feedback to make sure that you don't make the same mistakes again.

Introduction

This unit is for people working in a customer-facing role in the catering industry. This will usually involve serving food and/or drink to customers.

The unit has three sections: **Section 1: The legal and regulatory framework** **Section 2: Working in the organisation** **Section 3: Dealing with your customers**

What will I learn?

When you have completed this unit you should know:

- The legislation and regulations that you need to consider when working with customers.
- The procedures and guidelines that your organisation sets down in relation to customer service.
- Organisational targets that you need to work towards.
- The limits of your job role.
- How to communicate effectively with customers.
- How to recognise when a customer is angry or annoyed.

Assessment

There are assessment questions you should attempt when you have worked through the unit and the learning activities. When you have completed the assessment, submit it to your assessor/tutor who will mark it and give you feedback on your progress. Your assessor/tutor will tell you if there are other practical assessments relevant to this unit.

Section 1

The legal and regulatory framework

Section introduction

In this section you will look at the legal and regulatory framework that affects the way you deal with customers in your job role. There are various pieces of legislation that protect customers and give them rights in relation to the goods and services they buy.

You will look at two main areas:

- **Customer rights**
- **Legislation and regulations**

Learning required

In this section you will learn about:

- The rights that customers have.
- How you can work taking account of these rights.
- The main legislation and regulations affecting your dealing with customers.
- Industry, organisational and professional codes of practice that affect the way you work.
- Any contractual agreements with customers.

The legal and regulatory framework

Customer rights

Section 1

Your organisation should put procedures in place to ensure that they meet all these laws, but you ought to be aware of the issues that might affect you in your job role.

The unit on food safety covers the legislation specifically relating to food, but there is other consumer legislation which covers food, drink and food and drink service, as well as other non-food goods and services.

Some of the areas in which legislation might affect how you work with customers include the following.

Sale of goods and services

Under legislation, goods supplied must be as described, of satisfactory quality and fit for purpose. In relation to food and drink this means that they must be **suitable for consumption and not damaging to health**. Your organisation should ensure that this is generally the case, but you should know what to do if someone **returns, or complains about, an item**.

Services need to be completed within the terms of the contract with the customer, within the required timescale where one is set, and the amounts charged need to be reasonable. And a contract isn't just something that lawyers write! You make contracts with customers every day when you are serving them with food and drink products.

You need to make sure that you **don't promise customers things that cannot be met**. If a customer turns up on time for a booked table in a restaurant and there is no table available, or they have to wait an unreasonable length of time, they may be able to claim compensation. They may also be able to claim if food is not served in a reasonable length of time.

Descriptions of goods

There are various pieces of legislation relating to descriptions of **goods and services and labelling**. (You may have heard of the Trade Descriptions Act). There is legislation covering the description of goods and services and how they are labelled.

To comply with general rules, you should ensure that you don't give customers false descriptions of goods and services, and don't supply goods and services which have false descriptions attached to them.

This includes the posters and other information, such as menus, that you have in the sales area. Make sure the information is **accurate** and if you are not sure, check with someone who will know. There are also specific rules about the **labelling of foods**.

Section 1

The legal and regulatory framework

Activity 1

List the information that your organisation provides about the food and drink products and services it sells.

Pricing of goods and services

There is a code of practice on pricing that guides organisations on how they should **advertise the prices** of goods and services.

Your advertising of the price should not be misleading. It should, for example, include everything that is required - if there is an additional charge for a product or service, this should be indicated, for example, a service charge.

Where goods or services are designed to customer requirements, an indicative price can be advertised, but it should be made clear that this is what it is and the price must be in the region of what most customers are likely to pay. Most pre-packaged goods should have the price on each unit.

If you have special offers which recommend meals at a discount price (i.e. where you say the meals were available at a higher price previously) they **must have been previously offered** at this higher price. Or if something is offered at a special introductory price, the price should go up after the introductory offer period finishes.

Legal and regulatory framework

Section 1

Weights and measures

If you are required to weigh or measure goods, you must ensure that your **weighing/measuring equipment is accurate** and that you weigh and measure things accurately. You must not give customers less than the amount or quantity requested.

Consumer safety

Your employer is responsible for ensuring that goods and services sold **do not pose any risk to customers**, but you should not sell anything that you believe could cause a risk to people. Don't sell any foods, for example, that have been withdrawn or are out of date.

Trade marks

Many names and logos are protected under **trademark legislation** and you should not use these, except in promoting bona fide products from the companies concerned, for example, don't sell something as a 'Mars Bar' unless it is one!

Age

Some goods and services are restricted as to age of the customer. For example, tobacco products cannot be sold to children and alcohol cannot be sold to anyone under 18. You need to **know any age restrictions that apply to the goods and services you supply** and make sure that you ask for **proof of age** if you are uncertain about the age of any customer.

Activity 2

List any goods you sell that have an age restriction and explain how you ensure that you don't sell goods to individuals who are underage.

The legal and regulatory framework

Returns and refunds

Customers are **entitled to return products** if there is something wrong with them or they are not fit for purpose or have been mis-described. The goods have to be returned within a **reasonable time** and this will partly depend on the type of goods. In restaurants, customers should complain about the food, drink or service at the time of the meal, unless the problem doesn't arise until afterwards, for example, if they suffer food poisoning.

Legislation and regulations

Legislation and regulations has already been briefly mentioned. They are external rules that your organisation has to follow. They might be regulations set by the overseeing body in your industry, or regulations or legislation set by the government.

It is important for organisations to make sure that all their staff carry out work activities **within the regulations and legislation**. If staff act outside these rules, there can be severe penalties for the organisation, its managers and the staff member concerned. So you should make sure that you are aware of the main regulations and legislation that applies to you and your work activities and follow them.

There are some regulations and legislation that apply to all work activities and you need to know about these.

They relate to the following areas:

- **equal opportunities**
- **disability discrimination**
- **data protection**
- **health, safety and security**
- **employment responsibility and rights**
- **consumer protection.**

There may also be some specific regulations that relate to your job or your industry. For example, in food handling jobs, you need to be specially trained in food safety and there are rules around how you store, prepare, handle and cook food.

The legal and regulatory framework

Section 1

Equal opportunities

There are various pieces of equal opportunities legislation. These try to ensure that people are not discriminated against on the grounds of ethnic origin and gender. You may be aware of equal opportunities legislation and how it applies to employment - that employers should **not discriminate against individuals on the ground of their ethnic group or gender** - but do you know how it applies to customers?

The **Sex Discrimination Act** requires that goods, facilities and services offered to the general public - whether they are paid for or not - should be provided on the same basis for both sexes.

The Act talks about two types of discrimination:

1. **Direct discrimination** - would be where one gender was treated less favourably than another. For example, a shop gives discounts to men shoppers but not to women.
2. **Indirect discrimination** is where a condition or requirement exists that applies to both sexes, but when it is actually applied, fewer members of one sex can comply with it so it effectively discriminates against them. For example, a nightclub sells half-price drinks to all people wearing skirts.

There are **exceptions** where it would be unreasonable for both sexes to be offered the same services, for example, tailoring and hairdressing, which might be different for men and women. And some roles, for example, care roles or places where individuals are required to be in a state of undress, such as saunas, can be single gender.

Voluntary organisations and private members clubs are also allowed to be single sex. Your organisation needs to ensure that any advertising it does complies with the Act.

Activity 3

- a) Briefly describe the goods and services your organisation provides. Are they equally available to men and women?

b) If not, are there legitimate reasons why they should only be offered to one gender?

Similarly, the **Race Relations Act** provides that anyone providing goods, facilities or services to the public must give the same standard of service to all customers, regardless of ethnic background. It would be unlawful, for example, to refuse to rent a vehicle to an Asian person when a white person in the same circumstances is rented a vehicle.

Again there are some exceptions for charities, clubs and societies, which cater specifically for one ethnic group.

Activity 4

Are there any ethnic issues that might affect your delivery of goods and services to different ethnic groups?

The legal and regulatory framework

Section 1

Note that the definition of goods, facilities and services used in the above Acts, includes anything provided by organisations, such as, shops, hotels, banks, insurance companies, financial services, cinemas, theatres, bars, restaurants, pubs, places of entertainment or refreshment, transport and travel services, and services provided by any local or public authority and by any profession or trade.

If you work for a public authority, or an organisation supplying public or community services, there was a new duty imposed on your organisation in April 2007.

This is the **Gender Equality Duty** and it places a legal responsibility on public authorities to demonstrate that they treat men and women fairly.

It applies to:

- All public authorities, such as health providers, education, local government and the police.
- Charities, voluntary and private sector organisations that are providing a public service.
- Services provided by organisations under contract, such as community transport, which means that any business providing goods or services to the public sector, such as stationery, room hire or catering, could be required to look at their own employment practices and how they provide services to men and women.

The duty may, or may not, make a difference to the services provided but organisations will need to review all their services to ensure they are being fair to men and women.

Examples include:

- Medical services - statistics show that men see their GPs less often and, as a consequence, are often seen in later, less treatable stages of a disease. GPs would need to look at how they could provide a better more accessible service to men.
- Women fear violent crime, such as physical assault and rape, more than men do, but fewer resources are spent in solving and tackling these crimes. Police forces may need to consider redirecting resources.

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The legal and regulatory framework

Activity 5

- a) Has your organisation been affected by the Gender Equality Duty?

- b) If so, describe the impact this has on your service offer.

Equal opportunities also apply within your organisation - you should be careful not to discriminate against colleagues on the grounds of their ethnic group or gender.

Disability discrimination

The **Disability Discrimination Act** was introduced to ensure that people with disabilities are given equal access to facilities, goods and services provided to the general public. The Act says that it is unlawful for providers to treat disabled people less favourably than other people for a reason related to their disability.

How does this affect your job role? Some examples are that people with disabilities need to be able to access your premises easily - if that is where business is carried out - you need to be able to communicate with people who have disabilities, they need to be able to read signs and other information or be given access to it in another way.

People with disabilities might include those with physical disabilities that affect their movement, sight, hearing etc., or those with learning disabilities that affect their understanding of situations and information.

Your organisation should ensure that you receive some **disability awareness training directly related to the job you do**.

The legal and regulatory framework

Section 1

Activity 6

Think about the products and services you offer your customers. List anything that might not be accessible by someone with a disability and say what you can do in your job role to make it more accessible. Examples might be using an induction loop to talk to people who are hard of hearing, making information available in different formats for blind or partially sighted people, or making sure that floor areas are kept clear to make them more accessible to people with mobility problems.

You can help people with disabilities by **identifying and meeting their needs** within your job role. If you identify a problem that needs addressing by your organisation, for example, wheelchair ramps need fitting or replacing, or signs and entrances need to be made more visible, you should bring this to the attention of your manager or supervisor.

Data protection

Organisations, which hold personal data on file, need to meet certain requirements in respect of that data. Mainly they have to make sure that it is **secure**; that they don't release the information to unauthorised persons or for unauthorised purposes; that the information they keep is accurate and up to date; and that they only keep information that is required for the purposes of the business activities.

The legal and regulatory framework

Your organisation should have **procedures in place** to ensure that these responsibilities are met and you should be **trained** in the areas that affect your job role. As a customer services professional, you may be required to collect and record information about customers.

Here are some things you need to remember when collecting, recording and storing information:

- **Only record information** that the organisation normally requests or that you need to meet customer needs - think about what you are going to use the information for. For example, you might need an address to post information to a customer or deliver a product.
- Make sure that the person **knows you are recording the information and why**.
- If someone asks for information about one of your customers, think carefully about whether they are **authorised** to have that information and check with your supervisor if you are not sure.
- Record the information in the required format in your organisation's system and make sure that it is **secure**. For example, paper files should be kept in locked filing cabinets and electronic files should be pass worded.
- Make sure that the information is **accurate and up to date**. For example, you should only record facts about customers -not your own comments and opinions about them. Check with customers that the information you hold is correct.
- Destroy personal data, in line with **organisational procedures**, as soon as you are sure that you don't need it any longer.

Activity 7

List the information about customers that you are required to collect and record. In each case, say why you need this information.

The legal and regulatory framework

Section 1

Health, safety and security

Health and safety is an important issue for all organisations. Under health and safety legislation, all organisations are required to **assess and reduce risks to health and safety for their staff, visitors and customers.**

You should receive **health and safety training** from your employer that explains how you can carry out your job safely and protect yourself from harm in the workplace. (There is a unit on health and safety in this course which you should cover.)

All employees in an organisation have a duty to follow health and safety procedures laid down by their organisation, and not to do anything that might endanger the health and safety of anyone else on the business premises. Here you will look at the sort of **risks that your customers might face**. Remember though, that you have a responsibility towards your colleagues too, and many of these risks will also be risks to them.

Now look at some of the risks that might occur. Note that these mainly apply when customers visit your organisation's premises. You will not normally be responsible for health and safety on the customer's premises, unless you are providing a service or demonstrating a product on their premises. You may also need to consider the **security of your customer's property**.

The areas you need to consider include:

- **Slipping and tripping, or items falling on to customers** - you need to make sure that there are no trailing wires, uneven flooring, holes in the flooring, wet patches on the floor, shelves or displays that are unstable, or anything the customer could trip over or fall down.
- **Fire or other emergencies** - if there is a fire on the premises you need to know what the procedures are for evacuating the premises and that fire exits are clearly marked and free from obstacles. The fire alarm should be working and it should be obvious that it is an alarm. And you should also know where the fire equipment is located.
- **Electric shock** - any electrical equipment used by or with customers should have been checked, properly maintained and be safe.
- **Risks from chemicals or other dangerous substances** - these might be, for example, cleaning fluids that happen to be on the premises. You should make sure they are used safely and properly stored when not in use.

The legal and regulatory framework

Section 1

- **Risks related to food** - if you work with food, you should receive separate food safety training and you should be aware of the risks of food poisoning and foreign objects getting into food and drink.
- **Damage to hearing or eye strain** - noise and lighting levels should be acceptable and adequate for the type of products and services being offered.
- **Risks from intruders** - you need to be aware of who is on the premises. Intruders or unauthorised visitors could pose as staff or take or damage property that belongs to your customers. Be aware of who is on the premises at any time and why they are there.
- **Illness** - there is always a risk that a customer could be taken ill (through no fault of yours) whilst on your premises. You can't do anything to prevent this, but you should be aware of procedures you need to follow in such situations. These might include calling emergency services, contacting your organisation's first-aid person, or, if you have been trained to do so, applying first-aid techniques.

Activity 8

What risks might your customers face whilst you are providing customer service?

List them here.

The legal and regulatory framework

Section 1

Activity 9

Look at the following situations and write down what you would do to prevent the situation Or reduce the risk.

- a) The child of a customer drinks some cleaning fluid out of a bottle they find in the corner of the premises.

- b) A customer trips over a pile of boxes that have just been delivered and have been stacked in doorway.

- c) A fire breaks out in your premises.

- d) Someone comes to your premises pretending to be a maintenance man and then steals items of customers' property.

Check your answers on page 36

The legal and regulatory framework

Section 1

You should know your organisation's health, safety and security procedures and make sure that you work in such a way to protect the health, safety and security of your customers and colleagues.

Legislation and regulations specific to your job role, organisation or industry

There may be other legislation and regulations that apply specifically to you because of your job role, your organisation, or your industry sector. Everything can't be listed here because it will depend on the goods and services you provide, but here are the more common areas of regulation relating to food and drink, and other services that may be offered on food and drink premises:

- food handling
- sale of food
- food premises
- sale of tobacco products
- betting and gambling
- DVDs and videos
- hotel prices
- sale and supply of medicines
- sale and service of alcohol
- labelling of foods
- information about allergens (anything people could be allergic to).

You need to find out what regulations may affect you in your job role.

The legal and regulatory framework

Section 1

Activity 10

List any regulations or legislation that affect your customer service job role and say how each affects you and what you do. (You can ask your supervisor or manager for help here!)

Summary

In this section you have learned about:

- **The legal rights** that customers have.
- The legislation that guides the way you **deal with customers**.
- Legislation and regulations **specific to your job role and industry**.

Please spend a short time reviewing what you have covered for this section before moving on to Section 2. When you have completed all the sections and are happy that you fully understand what you have covered, go on to undertake the assessment.

Section 2

Working in the organisation

Section introduction

In this section you will look at your own job role within the organisation and the rules and targets that the organisation sets to guide the way you do your job.

You will look at two main areas:

- **Products and services**
- **Your job role**

Learning required

In this section you will learn about:

- The products and services that you are responsible for providing in your job role.
- The guidelines set by your organisation about what you can do in your job role.
- The limits of your authority.
- Organisational targets related to your job role.
- The implications of targets not being met.

Working in the organisation

Section 2

In order to provide effective customer service, you need to know about the products and services offered by your organisation.

Read the following scenario.

Kieran works in a restaurant and has the following conversation with a customer over the telephone.

Kieran: Hello, Mario's Steak House, can I help you?

Customer: Hello, I want to book a table for six on Friday night, please.

Kieran: OK. What time?

Customer: Can I just check if you serve any vegetarian meals - I have one vegetarian in the party.

Kieran: Yes. What time on Friday?

Customer: Pardon?

Kieran: What time on Friday?

Customer: Sorry. I meant about the vegetarian meals. What do you serve?

Kieran: Well I'm not sure. We have fish on the menu.

Customer: No. The person doesn't eat fish. I need a vegetarian choice.

Kieran: Right. Did you want to book a table?

Customer: I need to know about the vegetarian choices first.

Kieran: We do have some.

As the customer you would probably be getting very frustrated at this point. Kieran obviously doesn't really know what choice the menu offers for vegetarians and isn't being particularly helpful. The customer eventually gives up and books a table elsewhere.

In order to help customers you need to know about the products and services your organisation provides. You don't need to know everything, but you need to know the **main products and services** and where to go to find out detailed information if you need it. Many individuals who work in a customer service role, keep a file of information about products and services that they regularly update, so that they can help customers properly. If you offered catering for parties, for example, you might keep sample menus.

The products and services offered by your organisation will relate to food and drink.

Working in the organisation

Section 2

Activity 11

- a) What products and services does your organisation provide?

- b) How do you find out about new products and services and when they are available? This might be new menus, new arrangements for group bookings etc.

- c) How do you keep up to date with changes to existing products and services? This might include ingredient or allergen information in respect of individual dishes.

Your job role

Your organisation will set procedures, guidelines and targets for you to meet within your job role. These are designed to ensure that you carry out your job role in the way your organisation wants you to, in order to preserve their reputation and build their image.

Working in the organisation

Section 2

In relation to customer service procedures, guidelines and targets help to ensure that customer service meets the organisational goals, any legal requirements and helps to make customer service **consistent and reliable**.

The owners or senior managers in your organisation will have made decisions on the sort of **image** that they want to build for the organisation among its customers. Customer service helps to create this image, so it is important that procedures are put in place to make sure that the customer service delivered helps to build the image.

In addition, there may be legal requirements that the organisation needs to meet. For example, to do with how long food is held in heated cabinets etc. By setting procedures in line with legislation, the organisation is trying to ensure that all its staff meet the legal requirements.

Last, but not least, if all staff follow the same procedures, all customers should receive the same level of service and service should be relatively reliable. The **customer knows what to expect**.

Activity 12

From what you have already covered, you should be able to work out why it is important that you always follow organisational procedures. Write the reasons here.

Now check your answers on page 37.

The actual procedures that are in place relating to your job will depend on the job role you have and the type of organisation you work in.

Working in the organisation

Section 2

Activity 13

Where can you find the procedures that you need to follow for your job role?

Procedures might be in a procedures' manual, in your job description or on the noticeboard. You should make sure you understand procedures that affect your job role.

Service delivery targets

Within your job role, your organisation may have set **standards for service delivery** that you are required to meet.

What these are will depend on your job role, but they might include things like:

- **Greeting** every customer as they arrive on the premises.
- Asking if you can **help** customers.
- **Talking to customers** about specific goods or menu items, rather than just telling them what they are.
- Answering the telephone within **three rings**.
- **Asking customers** if everything is OK during their visit.
- Dealing with customer complaints within a **specific time limit**.

These standards are important because they help the organisation to make sure that service to customers is consistent and help to define what the customer expects. If the company says '90% of our meals are served within ten minutes', for example, then customers will expect 90% of the meals to be served within this time.

Working in the organisation

Section 2

Service standards are a sort of 'set of rules' for how you deal with customers. It is important that you follow the rules in order to help the company build up its reputation. You may have departmental or individual targets in your job role, based on the service that the organisation expects you to deliver.

Activity 14

- a) **What service standards does your organisation have for your job role? Summarise them here.**

- b) **What targets does your organisation set for your department or you, and how do you work towards them?**

The limits of your role

An important part of any job role is to **recognise the limits of your role** - this means to know what you are allowed and not allowed to do. Some of this will be guided by the procedures that you follow but you need to know which activities fall under your authority and when you need to pass things on to others to deal with.

It may be, for example, that only supervisors or managers can give refunds to customers or deal with complaints. Or there may be a complaints department to deal with all customer complaints. You must ensure that you are clear about where your role ends and when you need to refer to others.

Your **job description** will set out your role and responsibilities and if you are unsure about anything in relation to your job role, the law, regulations and procedures, you should refer it to your supervisor or manager.

Working in the organisation

Section 2

Activity 15

List any customer service activities that you are required refer to others and say - in each case - who you need to refer to.

As an employee, you have responsibilities and rights. You do have a responsibility to carry out tasks in the way your employer has asked you to do them. However, you should not put yourself or your customers at risk by doing so, and should not have to carry out activities that you do not feel comfortable with for moral, ethical or religious reasons.

You have the right to be safe and protected at work, so your employer should not ask you to do anything that contravenes the law or any regulations. If you are unhappy about any of the things you are asked to do, talk to your colleagues, supervisor or manager if you feel able to do this. If not, find advice outside the organisation from a union, professional, trade or industry body, or a solicitor or other advisor.

Summary

In this section you have learned about:

- The importance of **knowing about the products and services** your organisation provides.
- Organisational **procedures**.
- **Service delivery targets** set by your organisation,
- The limits of your job role.

Please spend a short time reviewing what you have covered for this section before moving on to Section 3. When you have completed all the sections and are happy that you fully understand what you have covered, go on to undertake the assessment.

Section 3

Dealing with your customers

Section introduction

In this section you will look at three main areas:

- **Standards for appearance and behaviour**
- **Customer needs**
- **Communication**

Learning required

In this section you will learn about:

- The standards for appearance and behaviour set by your organisation for your job role.
- How to recognise customer needs and expectations.
- How to respond to customer needs and expectations.
- Why effective communication is important.
- How to communicate effectively.
- What methods of communication to use.
- How to recognise when a customer is angry or annoyed.

Section 3

Dealing with your customers

Standards for appearance

In face-to-face situations, the first thing the customer will probably notice about you is your **appearance**. It is important that your appearance is **smart and professional**. This doesn't just mean your clothes. Your hair and nails, for example, need to be clean and tidy. And any make-up or jewellery you wear should be suitable. You should not drink or eat in front of customers, unless it is in a more social situation.

Your organisation may have rules about what you wear when you are dealing with customers. Some organisations have uniforms, others give staff guidelines on what is suitable dress.

Activity 16

What are your organisation's rules about appearance? Describe them here.

The next thing customers will notice is your initial behaviour towards them.

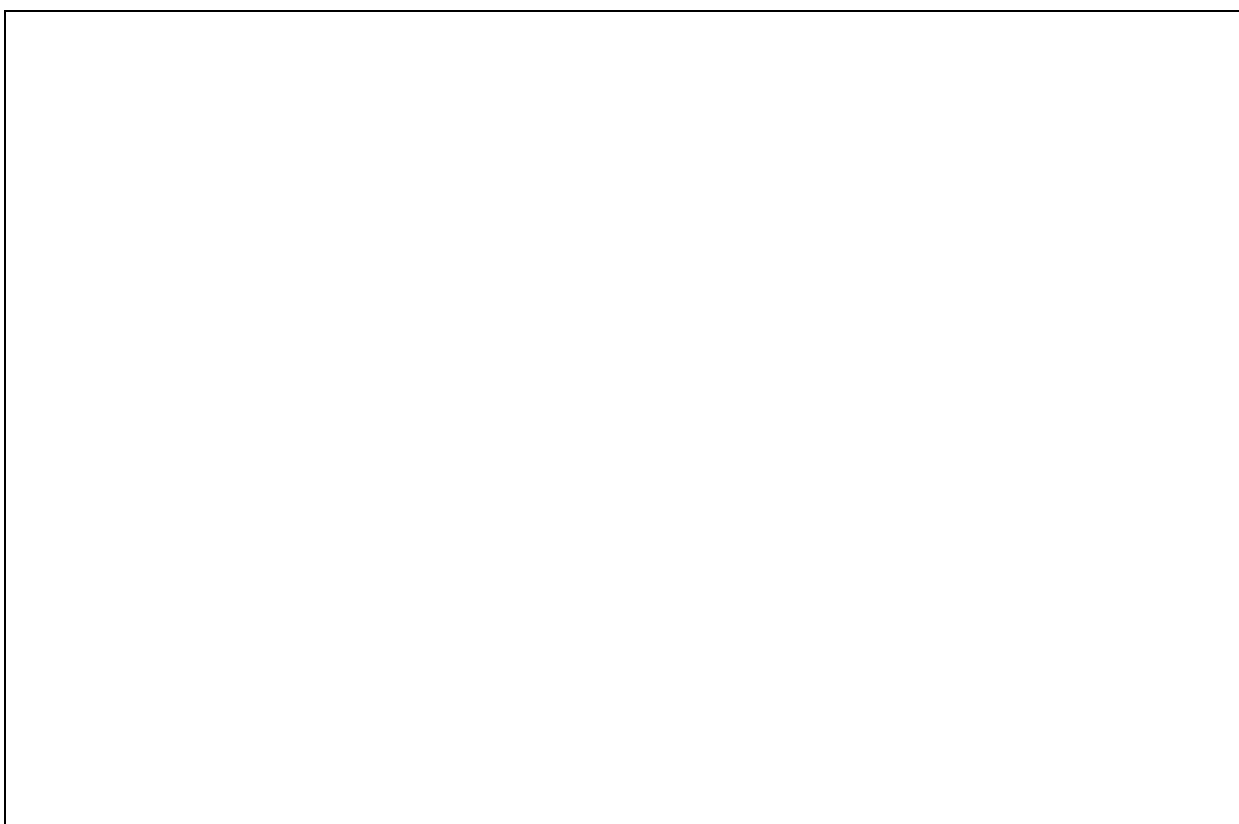
Section 3

Dealing with your customers

Activity 17

Note how you would feel if you were the customer in the following scenario. Say whether you would be happy with the service and, if not, why not.

You go into a sandwich shop. Behind the counter, there are three young assistants, talking and laughing and eating their lunch. None of them look up as you come in. You can't find the sandwich you want on the shelves, so you approach the counter. One of the assistants looks up and says (with a sandwich still in her hand and her mouth full) 'Whaddyawant?'



It is unlikely that this is the sort of service you would really want to receive from shop assistants, especially when they are handling food items. They give the impression they are not really interested in what you want. They are certainly not very polite. If this had happened to you, you would probably go and find a sandwich somewhere else.

Greeting customers is important. It all helps to give them a good impression of your organisation. Many restaurants, for example, have one member of staff at the door all the time saying hello to customers as they come in. You might not need to do this, but you should certainly greet customers when they approach you. Be respectful and friendly. Say hello and ask how you can help.

Your organisation may give you **guidelines** on how and when to greet or approach customers.

Section 3

Dealing with your customers

Activity 18

What guidelines are you given about greeting customers or asking if they need help? Describe them here.

Key point

The important thing to remember is that you should treat customers with respect and courtesy at all times.

Customer needs

One of the main skills of your job is **recognising what your customer wants and responding appropriately** to that. You will need to ask appropriate questions to the customer and respond to questions they may have about menu items, service etc. Pay particular attention when customers highlight a specific dietary need or allergy.

You should **summarise and confirm customer needs** to ensure that you have properly understood what the customer wants. For example, it's a good idea to repeat orders back to customers to confirm you have noted them down correctly.

Throughout any dealings with customers, it is important that you **keep them informed and reassured**. By doing this you can check that they are still happy and that what you are doing is still meeting their needs. For example, if a menu item isn't available, or it will take longer than expected to prepare, always explain to your customer. Tell them what is happening and why and ask if they want to change their order.

Your organisation may provide specific guidelines about how to recognise customer needs and how to deal with them.

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Dealing with your customers

Activity 19

What organisational guidelines are you given on recognising customer needs and dealing with them?

Describe them here.

You may be given certain questions to ask, for example, or procedures to follow if you identify a specific dietary need or allergy.

Communication

A large part of whether you are successful or not in customer service, is to do with how good you are at **communicating with your customers**. There are lots of different elements to communication and you need to make sure that you take account of all of them.

You need to think about:

- **What you say** - make sure the language you use is appropriate so that your customer understands it and is not offended.
- How **you say** it - make sure your tone is appropriate, don't be offhand or patronising.
- **Your body language** - you need to show your customer you are interested. This means making eye contact, facing towards them, looking relaxed and friendly.

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Always show that you **value and respect** customers in what you say and do. If you notice that your customer seems confused, or upset, or irritated try to adapt what you are saying and doing to resolve the situation.

Here are a few tips on communicating with customers:

- **Be polite** - this can go a long way to building customer relations.
- **Use the right tone of voice** - cheerful if appropriate, and enthusiastic. If you appear to be bored, the customer will see this and is more likely to be dissatisfied with the service received.
- **Be patient** - take time to explain things.
- **Be objective** - don't judge the customer on appearance or the way they speak or express themselves.
- **Be sensitive** - listen and look for signs of how the customer is feeling.
- **Be professional** - don't let your personal feelings get in the way of meeting customer needs.

One of the things you need to do is to **choose the best way to communicate** to your customer. This might be face to face, by telephone, or in writing, by letter, fax or e-mail.

Activity 20

Consider the following situations. In each case decide which would be the best method of communication to use and give your reasons.

1. You need to discuss and resolve as quickly as possible a number of problems related to customer service with a group of individuals within your organisation.

Method of communication:

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Reason:

--

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Activity 20 *continued*

2. You need to confirm the details of a customer booking.

Method of communication:

Reason:

3. You need to confirm a customer's full address for delivery

Method of communication:

Reason:

4. You need to send a message about availability of a product to a number of people within the organisation.

Method of communication:

Reason:

5. The building is on fire and you need to tell the fire and rescue service!

Method of communication:

Reason:

Section 3

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6. You need to discuss the contents of a document with a work colleague who is at another site

Method of communication:

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Reason:

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Check your answers on page 37.

Your organisation may give you guidelines about the sorts of communication you should use in different situations.

Activity 21

Describe the guidelines your organisation has given you about using different communication methods.

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Remember, you should always work within the guidelines given to you by your organisation.

Is my customer angry or confused?

Sometimes your customer may become angry or confused. You need to know how to recognise the signs so you can deal with this quickly before it becomes a problem. The things to look for are **changes in body language and in tone and level of voice.**

Section 3

Dealing with your customers

Activity 22

Over the next couple of days, practise watching people around you or on television. Look for the signs that show they are angry or confused and note them here:

Angry:

Confused:

These are some of the things you might have identified:

Anger - frowning, shaking the head, staring, tapping feet or hands irritably, looking aggressive or standing too close, which is intimidating, speaking loudly and changing the pace of their speech - either speaking more quickly or more slowly than before

You should try to establish if your customer is OK. The best way to do this is to ask them and try and find out what is wrong. Always be polite and respond appropriately, but if you think you are at risk from a customer ask a colleague for help.

Confusion - looking puzzled, folding arms and appearing defensive, or wringing hands and looking anxious, speaking more quietly, not saying very much and being hesitant when asked a question.

Again the best way to deal with this is by trying to find out what is wrong. You need to be **careful** here, though, not to make your customer feel stupid for not understanding. If you think they are confused about something, ask if they want you to explain anything further and never treat a question as if it is stupid. Always just answer it.

Try and identify information that is likely to confuse customers and find different ways of explaining it. You could practise this with a colleague.

Section 3

Dealing with your customers

Summary

In this section you have covered:

- Organisation standards for **appearance and behaviour**.
- Organisation guidelines on how to **recognise what your customer wants** and respond appropriately.
- Organisation rules and procedures regarding the **methods of communication** you use.
- How to recognise when a customer is **angry or confused**.

You have now completed this unit. Please spend a short time reviewing what you have covered for this section before attempting the assessment for the unit.

Answers to activities

Activity 9, page 15

Look at the following situations and write down what you would do to prevent the situation or reduce the risk.

a)

The child of a customer drinks some cleaning fluid out of a bottle they find in the corner of the premises.

The bottle should have been locked away so it was not accessible to the child. It's a good idea to have something to amuse children, too, if they are likely to be waiting around - this keeps them out of trouble!

b)

A customer trips over a pile of boxes that have just been delivered and have been stacked in the doorway.

You need to ensure all doorways and floor areas are clear for customers. You may need to have extra staff on duty when deliveries are received to ensure they are moved quickly and that customers are directed or assisted around any obstacles. It may even be necessary to close premises to take deliveries or when you are moving substantial amounts of stock around.

c)

A fire breaks out in your premises.

Raise the alarm and ensure all customers are evacuated from the premises as soon as possible. You need to know fire exits and meeting points, location of fire equipment and how to raise the alarm. Remember to be aware of anyone with mobility problems and assist them in leaving the premises.

d)

Someone comes to your premises pretending to be a maintenance man and then steals items of customers' property.

There should be security arrangements and procedures on your premises to ensure this cannot happen. In this situation, someone should have requested ID or checked that a maintenance man was expected and asked why he was there.

Also customer property should be kept somewhere that it cannot be easily accessed. If, for example, you take customers' coats, keep them somewhere they can easily be seen by yourself or another member of staff - a receptionist perhaps - or lock them away. In general, you should always challenge strangers on the premises to find out why they are there.

Answers to activities

Activity 12, page 21

From what you have already covered, you should be able to work out why it is important that you always follow organisational procedures.

It is important that you follow procedures to ensure that:

- The service you give to customers is in line with the expectations and vision of the organisation.
- The service you give complies with any legal or regulatory requirements.
- The service customers receive from you is the same service they would receive from anyone else in the organisation.

Activity 20, pages 31 to 33

Consider the following situations. In each case decide which would be the best method of communication to use and give your reasons.

1. You need to discuss and resolve as quickly as possible a number of problems related to customer service with a group of individuals within your organisation.

A meeting would allow you to talk to a number of people at once and generate discussion, which is useful for problem solving.

2. You need to confirm the details of a customer booking.

You could set out the details in a letter or contact the customer by telephone depending on when the booking was, i.e. whether post would be quick enough.

3. You need to confirm a customer's full address for delivery.

Telephone the customer as this is the quickest way of contacting them.

4. You need to send a message about availability of a product to a number of people within the organisation.

E-mailing or sending memos would allow you to distribute the information efficiently to a number of people.

5. The building is on fire and you need to tell the fire and rescue service!

Telephone (as quickly as possible!).

6. You need to discuss the contents of a document with a work colleague who is at another site.

E-mail or fax the document, so you both have it in front of you, then discuss by phone.

