

Public Relations and Customer Service in Corrections

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Trainer's Manual
December 2000

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Module Description

This program addresses the role of MDOC staff in providing customer service and improving public relations. Specific topics included in this program are the importance of customer service, common customer service skills, tips on how to handle customer complaints, telephone skills, and prisoner visitation.

Program Information

This program is designed to be presented in a **group** training setting. The lecture and discussions in this program depend on interaction among program participants; to be effective, a minimum of 10 participants in each class is recommended.

Date Developed

December 2000

Module Developer

Joe Lemke, Curriculum Specialist, Training Section

Time Frame

2 hours

Target Audience

Information desk officers; this program is also applicable to other staff who interact with members of the public.

Materials Needed

Participant Handout

References

Policy Directive 01.01.100, Statement of Purpose, (11/28/94)

Policy Directive 01.06.130, Media Relations, (04/06/00)

Policy Directive 05.03.140, Prisoner Visiting, (01/12/98)

You Are The Critical Link, AZ Department of Corrections Training Module, 6/98

Customers First for Government, The Dartnell Corp., 2000

Page Revised 12/15/00

Objectives

Hour 1

- 1.1 Define the term *Public Relations*.
- 1.2 Define what service each employee is to provide in carrying out their duties
- 1.3 Identify and examine the basis for good public relations.
- 1.4 Explain how attitude impacts customer service.

Hour 2

- 2.1 Identify communication techniques essential to good public relations.
- 2.2 Identify strategies to handle complaints from members of the public.
- 2.3 Identify telephone techniques that improve public relations.
- 2.4 Recognize the purpose and importance of prisoner visitation

Objectives

Hour 1

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- 1.3 Identify and examine the basis for good public relations.
- 1.4 Explain how attitude impacts customer service.

I. Introduction

TRAINER NOTE:

1. Many of the staff required to participate in this program work at the information desks and currently provide quality customer service and generate good public relations.
2. For those participants this program will provide an opportunity to review customer service skills. It will also provide an opportunity for them to share their knowledge and skills with other participants.
3. It is sometimes best to have experienced staff respond to questions and discussions last.

A. All staff are part and represent the Department. This requires that staff, regardless of job assignment actively participate in the correctional process and work to achieve the Department's goals.

B. Policy Directive 01.01.100, *Statement of Purpose*, defines the Department's goals, mission and guiding principles. One principle outlined in this policy directive provides guidance for employees in carrying out their assignments:

☞ Refer participants to the handout titled - **Service is Our Code**

Service is Our Code

Each employee will provide the highest quality of service to the public, other criminal justice agencies, other employees of the Department and the offenders under the Department's supervision.

When staff conduct their daily activities and interact with others, it shall be done in a professional way which reflects positively on the Department, the profession and its employees.

- [REDACTED]
- C. When the public thinks of the Michigan Department of Corrections, *customer service* may not be something that comes to mind, but it is an important function and an important responsibility of all staff.
1. Customer service is also something that most staff don't readily associate with working in corrections.
 2. Although working in corrections is not the same as working for Meijer or Wal-Mart, it is similar in the fact that we also provide services to people, and a large part of our work requires that we interact and communicate with all kinds of people.
 3. The same customer service philosophy used by retailers and other service providers is applicable to those to whom the Department provides services.
 4. Therefore, throughout the remainder of this program, the term customers is used to identify those groups (identified below) to whom we provide service.
- D. In support of our mission to provide quality customer service, the Department has initiated this training program to focus on and improve the quality of service provided.
- E. Participation in the correctional process requires staff to interact with and PROVIDE SERVICES to law enforcement agencies, prosecuting attorneys, defense attorneys, the courts, state and federal correctional agencies, legislators, and other governmental agencies (e.g. FIA).

1. We also provide services to volunteer groups, members of the clergy, vendors, and friends and family members of prisoners, who enter our facilities on a daily basis.
- F. The contact that we have with these different groups not only influences their perceptions of the MDOC and its staff, but also with state officials to whom they express their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the Department. This contact can make the difference between a positive or a negative experience with the Department of Corrections.
- G. Another important group that we interact with on a daily basis and that cannot be overlooked is other *MDOC staff*.
1. Providing quality customer service does not stop with members of the public but must also be extended to MDOC staff from different facilities and work sites.

☞ Ask participants for examples of internal interactions with other employees and ways that it is important to be as helpful and polite as possible. These can include examples within a facility and/or within the Department.

II. Customer Service, Public Relations and Public Service

- A. The perceptions of the service that we provide forms the basis for what is commonly known as **Public Relations**.
1. Public relations is the business of fostering public goodwill. It is

also the relations of an organization with the general public intended to create favorable public opinion.

2. In Corrections, public relations can be simply stated as how staff treat the different people and groups that we interact with and provide service to on a daily basis, **AND**

3. How these groups perceive this treatment.

B. The most frequent and common contact with the public is by the correctional facility information desk staff, gate officers, and visiting room staff. Therefore, this program is targeted primarily at staff working those assignments. However, providing quality customer service and generating good public relations **starts at the front desk, it does not stop there !**

1. Other staff, including but not limited to, administrators, secretaries, maintenance staff, perimeter security officers - any staff who have public contact, also share this responsibility.

C. As all correctional staff know, working in the field of corrections can be very difficult. Much of this difficulty is due to the nature (confining people against their will) of our business and the behavior of many of our clients - prisoner, parolees, and probationers.

1. These factors foster a negative environment and despite the professionalism of many MDOC staff, they can have a subliminal effect on staff's viewpoints, attitudes and behaviors.

D. Because of the pervasiveness of the negative atmosphere, it is

sometimes easy to lose the perspective that we are public servants - *people who serve the public.*

1. Unfortunately, it only takes one incident or for one staff member to apply the "you're a convict mentality" to a member of the public to discredit the Department and it's staff and negate many good and positive things done by others.
2. Therefore, all staff **MUST** remember to treat others courteously and act professionally in their daily interactions with vendors, others within the criminal justice system, members of the public, and other MDOC staff.

III. The Importance of Quality Customer Service

- A. Creating and maintaining good public relations and providing quality customer service is important both on a personal and on a professional level.

Refer participants to the handout titled - **Quality Service Questionnaire**

1. Ask participants to answer the questions either TRUE or FALSE.
2. Using the following answer key, discuss the participant's responses. Ask for examples of situations that they may have experienced.

Quality Service Questionnaire - ANSWER KEY

- T** 1. It is easier to work with happy customers!
- T** 2. A positive attitude about your job can be contagious!
- T** 3. Those you give good service, receive positive responses from customers!
- F** 4. Those who see helping an upset customer as an opportunity to improve customer service are fooling themselves!
- F** 5. Providing quality customer service is always easy!
- T** 6. Providing quality customer service is a continuous challenge!
- T** 7. Interaction with customers is an opportunity to improve interpersonal skills!

- F 8. The way I perform my job is more important than the attitude I have about my job!
- T 9. Providing quality customer service makes my job less stressful!
- T 10. Learning people skills at work will help us in all areas of our lives!

B. It is an observed fact that those who are effective in customer interactions are also effective with co-workers and are more successful in their careers.

1. It is also an observed fact that providing quality customer service is the easiest way to perform your job.

C. The quality customer service questionnaire demonstrates the importance of providing good service on a personal level. Providing quality customer service is also important on a professional level when working public contact assignments such as the information desk or as a gate officer for several important reasons:

1. Quality customer service is part of your job, rather than an addition to it! - We are here to provide a service.
2. It reflects on the public image of ALL Department staff - officers and noncustody alike.
3. It reflects on the image of the Department and how well we are providing services to the public. If the Department has a poor public relations image, this will directly relate to how the legislature views the Department. This can then affect funding for the Department, which affects staffing levels and staff safety.

D. Although protecting the public from harm is the major service that

everyone in corrections provides, the manner in which we provide this service is equally important!

- E. Our efforts at improving customer service do not go unnoticed as evidenced by a letter written by a visitor expressing her appreciation for the treatment she received by a front desk officer.

 Refer participants to the handout titled - **Letter of Appreciation**

I would like to take a moment of your time and tell you about my experiences while visiting your facility. During my very first visit to your facility, I was very nervous and apprehensive. I prepared myself to handle, bad attitudes and rudeness during my visit. Surprisingly, I was greeted by an officer with a friendly, smiling face who put visitors at ease. This officer made the horror stories I've heard concerning institutions and Corrections Officers, totally false.

During several visits, in which I brought my children and mother-in-law I have never experienced a troubling moment with this officer. She always has a smile on her face and nice things to say. She shows visitors respect and consideration.

After going through sign-up, dealing with this officer gives visitors a pleasant feeling which has a trickle down effect. She ensures the visitor is treated professionally and this creates good visits and behavior the visitation room.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to inform you of a positive person dealing with negative people in a negative atmosphere. I look forward to dealing with this officer while signing up for my visitation in the future.

- F. The *Visitor Services Questionnaire* is another way in which the Department can get feedback on the service provided to the public.
1. Of course, when staff have to taken action as a result of visitors' efforts to violate rules or introduce contraband into a facility, it is unlikely that the Department will receive comments like those above.
 2. Even with the best of efforts, negative encounters will happen. The axiom "you can't please everyone", is true and not every encounter with the public will generate positive feedback.
 3. Despite this fact, staff must continue to make every effort to provide quality customer service, even in the face of negative behavior by a member of the public.
 4. Keep in mind that every contact with the general public is an opportunity to demonstrate our professionalism.

- ☞ Refer participants to the **Visitor Services Questionnaire** in their handout.
1. Discuss each of the factors listed on this questionnaire.
 2. Ask participants if any of them have had any negative or positive experiences with the questionnaire.

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS		AUTHORITY: MCL 791.206	4835-0242
VISITOR SERVICES QUESTIONNAIRE		COMPLETION: Voluntary	CAJ-242 1/91
NAME - Please print (NOT REQUIRED)		Address or Phone No. (NOT REQUIRED)	
INSTITUTION	DATE OF VISIT	TIME	AM PM
We want to improve our service to visitors. Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire to help us do this. Drop it in any mailbox; the postage is free. Please CIRCLE the answer you think is right, or closest to right.			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The information desk staff were: A. HELPFUL AND POLITE B. TOO BUSY TO BE HELPFUL C. RUDE AND INCONSIDERATE D. NEITHER - JUST AVERAGE 2. How long did you wait at the information desk? A. NOT AT ALL B. 1 TO 10 MINUTES C. 10 TO 20 MINUTES D. MORE THAN 20 MINUTES 3. The employees inside the visiting room were: A. HELPFUL AND POLITE B. RUDE AND INCONSIDERATE C. NEITHER - JUST AVERAGE 4. How long did you wait for your visit to begin? A. ONE HALF HOUR OR LESS B. MORE LIKE AN HOUR C. WELL OVER AN HOUR D. CLOSER TO 2 HOURS E. WELL OVER 2 HOURS F. I DON'T KNOW 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Overall how was your treatment at this institution? A. EXCELLENT B. GOOD C. ADEQUATE D. POOR - NOBODY'S FAULT, JUST TOO CROWDED AND BUSY E. POOR - BECAUSE I WAS TREATED BADLY WITH NO REASON 6. If you were strip searched prior to your visit today, did you find the employees who performed the search: A. PROFESSIONAL B. RUDE AND INCONSIDERATE C. NEITHER ONE - JUST AVERAGE 7. Any additional comments: _____ _____ _____ 		

IV. The Dimensions of Customer Service

A. Providing quality customer service is two dimensional.

1. One dimension is technical or procedurally oriented. This relates to the knowledge and skills you bring to the job, and how you perform the job.

2. The other dimension is the personal or social aspect of doing your job. This relates to attitudes, behaviors and communication skills.

Refer participants to **Job Characteristics** in their handout packet

1. Ask participants to list *PROCEDURAL* characteristics of assignments that have frequent contact with the public.
2. Ask participants to list *PERSONAL* characteristics of assignments that have frequent contact with the public.
3. Discuss the characteristics that they identified. The following lists of characteristics are common for customer service positions and are provided to assist in the discussion.

Procedural Characteristics

Efficient

Timely

Consistent

Dependable

Knowledgeable

Personal Characteristics

Tactful

Empathetic

Sincere

Friendly

Attentive

V. Attitude

A. To provide quality customer service, one characteristic serves as the foundation upon which all other characteristics, skills, and abilities are based - *ATTITUDE*.

1. Poor attitudes negatively affect customer service!

B. We have probably all seen examples of how a poor attitude affects customer service not only in our everyday experiences (i.e. in the checkout line at a store, or ordering food at a fast food restaurant), but

also at work.

- C. As an example, put yourself in the place of Fred. Fred is a new employee and is fresh out of the Corrections Academy and has never been to the facility. In other words, Fred doesn't have a clue where to go or who to report to. If you were Fred, which of the following employees would you like to encounter the first time when you approach the front desk for help?
1. Mike has been working at the facility for a long time, is very experienced and knows a lot about the operations of the facility. Unfortunately, Mike has a poor attitude that has destroyed his good qualities. Mike acts like he didn't care whether or not you found out where or to whom you were to report.
 2. On the other hand, Joe is relatively new and is still learning about the facility and how it operates. Often, he has to ask questions from others in order to answer questions and/or direct people to the right places, but he has an attitude of "I care" and "I want to help".
- D. What Mike has failed to realize is that you get what you give. If we ignore someone, we should only expect them to ignore us. If we look down on others because they don't know where they are to go or who to see, we should expect an equally negative reaction.
- E. Often customers initially treat us poorly because they have a low expectation of the service they'll receive - probably caused by a previous bad experience.
- F. At one time or another, we have all been *the customer* or been in Fred's shoes and have felt the effect of someone with a poor attitude.

VI. Attitude is a Symptom

A. Poor customer service is the primary manifestation of a bad attitude. Attitude, however, is a symptom rather than the problem. The problem can be a number of things:

1. Poor self-image, poor people (communication) skills, lack of knowledge, frustration with poor supervision, or a low perception of their job.

B. Everyone can benefit from doing a self-check and evaluating the state of their attitude.

Refer participants to the handout - **Attitude Evaluation**

1. The Attitude Evaluation consists of 13 statements. Each statement is followed by a rating which best describes how they feel the statement applies to them.
2. For example - Statement #1
If they feel that their job IS important to the success of the Department, they should indicate Yes by circling #3. If they feel that their job is important only SOMETIMES, then they should circle #2. If they feel that their job is NOT important, then they should circle #1.
3. Each participant should complete all of the evaluation and then add their scores from each statement for a total rating.
4. A copy of the Attitude Evaluation is on the following page. The answer key is on the page immediately following the evaluation.

Attitude Evaluation

Evaluate your **attitude** by drawing a circle around the rating which best describes you for each of the following statements.

	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
1. My job is important to the operations of the facility.	relations	3	2
2. I see my job as a way to develop my people skills.	hips affect my job.	3	2
3. I enjoy personal compliments about how I do my job.		3	2
4. I do not let negative people affect my attitude.		3	2
5. I enjoy the people I work with even when they are difficult.		3	2
6. I see crisis and conflict as an opportunity.		3	2
7. Learning more about my job is important to me.		3	2
8. I can respond positively despite the attitude of customers and my co-workers.		3	2
9. I can respond effectively to upset people.		3	2
10. I don't let bad days affect me.		3	2
11. I would like to improve my effectiveness with others and I am willing to work at it.		3	2
12. I am committed to my job and want to contribute to the success of the Department.		3	2
13. I don't let problems in my personal life and social		3	2

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

1

TOTAL RATING _____

C. If your rating was:

1. 31 or above - you have a high attitude aptitude and have great

potential in the customer service area. You should work in assignments that have a high amount of public contact - i.e. the Information Desk, or Gate Officer.

2. Between 21 and 30 - not bad, but there are some specific areas of your attitude that you should reconsider before you spend time in public contact assignments.
3. Between 14 and 21 - You've got problems and should examine your career choice.
4. 13 and below - You've got real big problems and should definitely consider a job without human contact and relocation to a remote area.

D. Attitude is really an energy factor. Have you noticed when your attitude is positive:

1. You get more done,
2. You get more done effectively,
3. You get better responses from those you encounter, and
4. You feel better and enjoy what you are doing more.

E. The opposite is true when your attitude is negative or you are tired:

1. Everything takes more effort than normal,

2. You encounter more resistance,
 3. You don't seem to get as much done, and
 4. You seem to encounter more negative responses from those around you.
- F. One factor that affects our attitude and also affects the attitudes of the public is *previous experiences*. These experiences will affect our reactions to future experiences and future attitudes.

 Refer participants to the handout - **The Attitude Pattern**

1. Experiences develop attitudes,
 2. Attitudes affect behaviors,
 3. Behaviors affect reactions,
 4. Reactions cause experiences which then,
 5. Reinforces attitude.
- G. Think of a bad experience you had with someone. Does it affect your attitude about that person - resulting in a different behavior, which gets reactions that reinforce the experience, which then reinforces your attitude?
- H. This pattern of negative experiences, behaviors, reactions and the resulting attitude will continue to repeat until something is done to break the pattern.

Objectives

Hour 2

- 2.1 Identify communication techniques essential to good public relations.
- 2.2 Identify strategies to handle complaints from members of the public.
- 2.3 Identify telephone techniques that improve public relations.
- 2.4 Recognize the purpose and importance of prisoner visitation

I. Breaking the Pattern

- A. If you can change your behavior - actions and reactions - it will improve the experience.
1. This has a more immediate long term affect on your attitude and is a much more effective approach than trying to change your attitude in hopes it will change your behavior.
- B. The key to breaking the pattern is to be pro-active rather than reactive. Instead of waiting for a customer or a co-worker to act so that you can react, you anticipate and initiate actions. For example:
1. Simply smile at people before they smile at you,
 2. Go out of your way to help a co-worker.

 Refer participants to the handout - **Pro-Active or Re-Active**

1. Instruct participants to answer YES or NO to each of the questions.
2. A response key is on the following page.

Pro-Active or Re-Active

1. Do you often tell people that you don't know, it's not your job?
2. Do you wait for customers to greet you before you respond?
3. Do you criticize your co-workers for their poor attitudes?
4. Do you wait for a customer to ask for help?
5. Are you reluctant to use a customer's name?
6. Do you drive by people with car problems?
7. Do you wait for a co-worker to ask for your help?
8. Do you wait for your supervisor to tell you what to do when you are not busy?

- C. If you truthfully answered YES to four or more of these questions, it can be an indication that you have a tendency to be re-active rather than pro-active.
- D. Most people are not born with a pro-active style. It's something they develop either because of personal experience or they make a concerted effort to become more pro-active.
- E. Just as you have attitudes about others, they also have attitudes about you.

 Refer participants to the handout - **Evaluating Your Strengths**

1. Instruct participants to complete this evaluation by using the rating system as identified on the evaluation.
2. Each of the characteristics play an integral part in determining the response they get from others.
3. This is a self-evaluation from which participants can evaluate themselves from several perceptions: how they think supervisors, customers see you, and co-workers see them.
2. The trainer's copy is on the following page.

Evaluating Your Strengths

Each of the following characteristics play an integral part in determining the response you get from others. Evaluate yourself from several perceptions: how your supervisors see you, how you think your customers see you, and how you think your co-workers see you.

Rate yourself on a scale of 1 - 10, with 10 being the highest

	See Yourself	Supervisor	Fellow Worker	The Public
Enthusiastic				
Persistent				
Determined				
Positive Thinker				
Smile/Say Hello				
Helpful				
Go out of your way				
Sincere (care)				
Appearance				
Initiative				
Consistent				
Punctual				
Total Rating				

II. Customer Service Skills - Effective Questions

- A. Although a positive attitude is the major factor in quality customer relations and in generating good public relations, it is also important to have and to use good communications skills.
- B. Two of the most important communication skills in providing quality customer service are:
1. The ability *to ask effective questions*, and
 2. Effective *listening skills*.
- C. The ability to ask effective questions is a very simple skill that identifies the real needs and wants of the customer.
1. It's not the fact that we ask questions, but how we ask these questions that's important.
- D. As an example, think of the last time you were shopping and someone asked " May I help you".
1. What was your response ?
 2. More times than not, you probably responded with "No", even though you were looking for something - why?
- E. The answer is because it is a *closed ended* question that can only be answered with a - Yes, No, or I don't know. Closed ended questions dead-end conversations.

F. Would you respond differently if you were asked, " *HOW* may I help you" or "*WHAT* can I help you with?"

G. When you ask questions that begin with - Who, What, When, Where, How, or Why - it shows the customer that you are interested in providing service and not just going through the motions.

1. These are called *open ended* questions.

H. Consider how more effective these questions are when they begin with a Who, What, When, Where, How, or Why.

☞ Refer participants to the handout titled - **Effective Questions**

1. Discuss how more effective the close ended questions become when they are converted to open ended questions. The participant handout also contains the converted questions.

Close Ended

1. Can I help you?

2. Can you call back?

3. I don't know. Can I call back to you later?
with the

4. Do you need them right away?

5. Can anyone else answer your questions?

Open Ended

HOW can I help you?

WHEN can you call back?

WHEN can I get back to you
information

HOW soon do you need them?

Who else might be able to answer
your question?

III. Customer Service Skills - Listening Skills

A. The first step to effective listening skills is asking effective questions. Listening for and hearing the meaning in the response is the all important second step to listening skills.

B. Some principles that are the basics of listening are:

1. Effective listening is a learned skill that can be improved through practice.
2. It is not possible to listen effectively during a distraction. For example, few people can listen and read a paper at the same time.
3. Feelings and facial expressions often mean more than the words that are being said. Visual feedback often means more than words.

C. Effective listening requires you to:

1. Stop talking,
2. Concentrate on what the other person is saying, and
3. Maintain eye contact.

D. Sometimes understanding exactly what a customer is saying is very difficult, especially if the customer speaks very little or poor English.

1. These language barriers also include people who mumble, speak softly or just have a basic inability to communicate their needs.

Refer participants to the handout titled - **Focus to Overcome Language Barriers**

1. The participants can follow along as each point is discussed.

E. To overcome these barriers, you need to refocus your listening and speaking skills and remember to:

1. Ask the customer to speak slowly. Help them relax by speaking slowly to them and being patient. Don't raise your voice.
2. Paraphrase what is being said. Use the same words the customer is using while speaking.
3. Keep speech simple. Avoid using modifiers such as "scarcely", "barely", and "almost" which can lead to confusion especially with people who have a poor command of English. Also remember to avoid technical jargon, slang terms and long sentences, all which can confuse your customer.
4. Look for new ways to communicate. You may ask someone to spell a word or name for you if they are having trouble pronouncing it or if you are having trouble understanding. If your facility gets frequent visits from customers who speak Spanish, keep a phrase book nearby to look up words your customer uses.

F. During service encounters, there are also a number of unspoken needs beneath the surface that customers also want you to meet. A 1999 California study involving state agencies that provide services to the public, identified at least eight unspoken customer needs:



Refer participants to the handout titled - **Unspoken Customer Needs**

1. The participants can follow along as each point is discussed.

1. *Listen.* Customers want you to pay attention to them.
2. *Be reliable.* Customers want to know that they can count on the agency and its representatives for dependable service.
3. *Give accurate information.* Don't guess at the right answer. If you don't know - find out, don't misinform.
4. *Stop telephone transfers.* Connect them with the right person the first time. Don't make them wait or leave them on hold.
5. *Be consistent.* Always treat customers with respect, regardless of how you are feeling or how you are treated on a certain day.
6. *Offer courteous service.* Always be patient and helpful.
7. *Take action.* Be responsive and prompt.
8. *Communicate.* Keep customers informed.

G. One other important point concerning listening skills is the question of:

1. How well do you REALLY listen to your customers?



Refer participants to the handout titled - **Listen to Yourself**

1. This handout is for the participant's personal reference. Allow participants several minutes to review the statements in this handout before moving on to the next

section in the lesson plan.

IV. Complaints

A. One of the most challenging parts of customer service responsibility is the challenge of responding to a distraught, upset, frustrated or irate customer. No matter whether you have 10 or 500 contacts a week with the public, having to respond to upset people, on occasion, is part of the job.

Refer participants to the handout titled - Responding Effectively to Upset Customers

1. The participants can follow along as each point is discussed.

B. Although there are countless reasons why a customer may be upset, five of the most common reasons are:

1. They had a misunderstanding.
2. They don't know what they want.
3. They can't get help.
4. They had a bad experience.
5. They have been mishandled.

C. Experience proves that an unhappy customer will lodge more complaints than will a happy customer. However, what is even more important is the fact that we must prevent unhappy customers from

creating more problems and RESOLVE THE SITUATION !

1. Successfully handling difficult situations requires special skills. To succeed, you must be able to separate the feelings from the problem.

D. *A Customer's Loud Voice, Upset Gestures or Negative Curt Comments Are Not the Problem - They Are the Symptoms of the Problem !*

E. Before you can identify and respond effectively to the real problem, you must deal with the customer's vocal expression of their feelings.

1. If you fail to effectively respond to these expressions, it becomes more difficult, and at times, almost impossible to respond to the cause or problem.

F. There are eight simple rules that, if followed, can help you to respond more effectively to upset customers [*these rules are listed on the **Responding Effectively to Upset Customers** *handout**].

1. Don't take the customers comments personally !
2. Don't argue with the customer !
3. Don't interrupt the customer !
4. Speak slowly !
5. Don't be in a hurry !

6. Don't point a finger too quickly !
 7. Don't fight their emotions !
 8. Don't tell the customer that they should not get mad !
- G. The eight rules are very similar to those that you would use in any type of confrontational situation, even with prisoners.
1. However, effectively handling complaints from members of the public is **NOT THE SAME AS RESPONDING TO PRISONERS !**
 2. Effectively responding to complaints from the public requires different strategies.
- H. Use the eight rules with the following basic strategy steps when dealing with upset customers [*these steps are listed on the Responding Effectively to Upset Customers handout*]:
1. LISTEN - Show interest, maintain eye contact.
 2. APOLOGIZE - The word "sorry" is a great diffuser of anger. Apologize even if it wasn't your fault.
 3. RESPOND WITH A SOFTENING STATEMENT - Acknowledge the customer's feelings of anger, frustration and disappointment.
 4. VERIFY - Make sure that you understand the problem.

 **Refer participants to the handout titled - Choose the Right Words**

1. Instruct participants to complete this quiz and discuss their responses using the answer key immediately following the quiz.

Choose the Right Words - Answer key

Rate each statement as "E" Effective or "I" Ineffective.

- | | E | I |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. "We apologize for the mistake, Mr. Baker." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. "We'll do everything we can to change the situation for you." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. "I understand." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. "If you are unhappy with the facility's rules, write your
State Representative." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. "Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. "That would be against our policy." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. "I'd be mad too if this happened to me." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

ANSWER KEY

1. **Effective**, but only if you show that the facility is at fault.
2. **Effective** because it shows a willingness to find a solution without assigning blame.
3. **Effective** because it shows you are paying attention to what the customer is saying.
4. **Ineffective**. You should do all you can do to ensure customer satisfaction, not make sarcastic remarks.
5. **Effective**. This shows that you encourage customers to point out problems so you can bring them to management's attention.
6. **Ineffective**. This is not to say that we should not follow policy, but that a more thorough explanation is more effective than this type of statement.
7. **Effective**, because your expressing empathy.

SCORE: If any statements were rated incorrectly, be sure to understand the reason for the preferred response and use these strategies for future encounters.

V. Telephone Skills

- A. Another important area of customer service is telephone skills - effective customer service does not end when we pick up the telephone!
- B. Each facility may have established telephone procedures and the following suggestions are not meant to override those procedures. They are, generally speaking, the most effective and accepted principles of telephone customer service.

 **Refer participants to the handout titled - Telephone Techniques**

- C. Techniques to make the telephone a more enjoyable experience for everyone - you and the caller:
1. Speak slowly and clearly !
 2. Answer using your name - "Wings Correctional Facility, Officer Joe Fellows."
 3. Open with caring questions - "How may I help you."
 4. Get the caller's name - "Who may I say is calling ?"
 5. Verify the spelling of the name, even if it is a common name -
" How do you spell your name ?" or "Do you spell your name"
 6. Ask permission to put the caller on hold - "May I put you on hold"

or "May I put you on hold while I transfer your call ?"

7. Limit hold time - While you may be answering all phone calls into the facility, don't forget about those customers on hold. Do not leave a customer on hold for more than 30 seconds.
 8. Thank the caller for holding - "Thank you for holding."
 9. For transferred calls that go unanswered - "No one is answering at that number, may I direct your call to someone else ?"
 10. Thank the caller.
- D. Knowing where to direct telephone calls or what information can be given out over the telephone is just as important how to answer the telephone.
1. A facility telephone directory should be kept nearby at all times.
 2. Know the proper place within the facility to direct calls. If you are not sure, place the caller on hold and ask someone. Do not just send the call off to someone else.
 3. When answering telephone calls from representatives of the news media, refer the inquiry to the designated media spokesperson for your facility.
 4. During times of facility mobilizations, follow your facility's procedures for handling inbound telephone calls.

VI. Prisoner Visitation

- A. One of the most important areas in Corrections is prisoner visitation. Facility information desk staff, gate officers, and visiting room staff fulfill the most important role in visitation.
 - 1. Their job is critical to ensuring that the visitation experience be as positive as possible while, of course, maintaining security.
- B. Visitation is an important factor in prisoner management. It exists to alleviate some of the stress of incarceration which leads to confrontation and conflict within the facility.
- C. Prisoners are concerned about their families and their families are concerned about them. These concerns, if not eased, can result in feelings of frustration, anger, and even desperation.
- D. When these concerns are not met through the visitation process, the prisoner can express his/her frustrations by acting them out through confrontations with other prisoners or staff members.
- E. These incidents present a danger to everyone in a facility and can spread to other prisoners who also wish to act out their frustrations.
- F. A negative visitation experience can hurt the image of the Department. It can lead to additional work for the staff in responding to complaints and a reduction in support for the Department from the public and their representatives. A positive visitation experience can be a great asset in maintaining peace throughout the facility and making your fellow staff members jobs easier.

VII. Conclusion

- A. Providing quality customer service is essential when working public contact assignments such as the information desk, visitation or as a gate officer. Remember -
1. Quality customer service is part of your job, rather than an addition to it! - We are here to provide a service.
 2. It reflects on the public image of ALL Department staff - officers and noncustody employees alike.
 3. It reflects on the image of the Department and how well we are providing services to the public.
- B. Many of facility staff who work public contact assignments on a regular basis, provide quality customer service and generate good public relations.
1. *ARE YOU ONE OF THEM ?*

Refer participants to the handout titled - Are You Meeting Expectations ?

This exercise concludes the program and allows participants to evaluate their level of meeting customer service expectations. An exercise summary is included after the quiz for participants to score their responses.

A copy of the quiz is on the following page.

Are You Meeting Expectations ?

- | | Yes | No |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Do you keep callers on hold only very briefly ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Do you listen closely to clue in on customer's problems or concerns ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Do you go all out to meet any extra needs a customer may have ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Do you know where to find facility information that callers may need ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Are you patient and respectful with upset or difficult customers ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Do you apologize when you make mistakes that affect customers ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Even when a customer's questions implies something negative about the Department of Corrections, do you answer willingly, rather than defensively ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you scored at least seven YES answers, you're meeting several key customer expectations - KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK !

2001 P.A. 415

Public Relations

and

Customer Service in Corrections

Participant's Handout
December 2000

Service is Our Code

Each employee will provide the highest quality of service to the public, other criminal justice agencies, other employees of the Department and the offenders under the Department's supervision.

When staff conduct their daily activities and interact with others, it shall be done in a professional way which reflects positively on the Department, the profession and its employees.

Quality Service Questionnaire

- ___ 1. It is easier to work with happy customers!
 - ___ 2. A positive attitude about your job can be contagious!
 - ___ 3. Those you give good service, receive positive responses from customers!
 - ___ 4. Those who see helping an upset customer as an opportunity to improve customer service are fooling themselves!
 - ___ 5. Providing quality customer service is always easy!
 - ___ 6. Providing quality customer service is a continuous challenge!
 - ___ 7. Interaction with customers is an opportunity to improve interpersonal skills!
 - ___ 8. The way I perform my job is more important than the attitude I have about my job!
 - ___ 9. Providing quality customer service makes my job less stressful!
 - ___ 10. Learning people skills at work will help us in all areas of our lives!
-

Letter of Appreciation

I would like to take a moment of your time and tell you about my experiences while visiting your facility. During my very first visit to your facility, I was very nervous and apprehensive. I prepared myself to handle, bad attitudes and rudeness during my visit. Surprisingly, I was greeted by an officer with a friendly, smiling face who put visitors at ease. This officer made the horror stories I've heard concerning institutions and Corrections Officers, totally false.

During several visits, in which I brought my children and mother-in-law I have never experienced a troubling moment with this officer. She always has a smile on her face and nice things to say. She shows visitors respect and consideration.

After going through sign-up, dealing with this officer gives visitors a pleasant feeling which has a trickle down effect. She ensures the visitor is treated professionally and this creates good visits and behavior the visitation room.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to inform you of a positive person dealing with negative people in a negative atmosphere. I look forward to dealing with this officer while signing up for my visitation in the future.

**CHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS
VISITOR SERVICES QUESTIONNAIRE**

AUTHORITY: MCL 791.206
COMPLETION: Voluntary
PENALTY: None

4835-0242
CAJ-242 1/91

NAME - Please print (NOT REQUIRED)

Address or Phone No. (NOT REQUIRED)

INSTITUTION	DATE OF VISIT	TIME	AM PM
-------------	---------------	------	----------

We want to improve our service to visitors. Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire to help us do this. Drop it in any mailbox; the postage is free. Please CIRCLE the answer you think is right, or closest to right.

The information desk staff were:

- A. HELPFUL AND POLITE
- B. TOO BUSY TO BE HELPFUL
- C. RUDE AND INCONSIDERATE
- D. NEITHER - JUST AVERAGE

How long did you wait at the information desk?

- A. NOT AT ALL
- B. 1 TO 10 MINUTES
- C. 10 TO 20 MINUTES
- D. MORE THAN 20 MINUTES

The employees inside the visiting room were:

- A. HELPFUL AND POLITE
- B. RUDE AND INCONSIDERATE
- C. NEITHER - JUST AVERAGE

How long did you wait for your visit to begin?

- A. ONE HALF HOUR OR LESS
- B. MORE LIKE AN HOUR
- C. WELL OVER AN HOUR
- D. CLOSER TO 2 HOURS
- E. WELL OVER 2 HOURS
- F. I DON'T KNOW

5. Overall how was your treatment at this institution?

- A. EXCELLENT
- B. GOOD
- C. ADEQUATE
- D. POOR - NOBODY'S FAULT, JUST TOO CROWDED AND BUSY
- E. POOR - BECAUSE I WAS TREATED BADLY WITH NO REASON

6. If you were strip searched prior to your visit today, did you find the employees who performed the search:

- A. PROFESSIONAL
- B. RUDE AND INCONSIDERATE
- C. NEITHER ONE - JUST AVERAGE

7. Any additional comments:

Job Characteristics

Please list 5 *PROCEDURAL* characteristics of assignments that have frequent contact with the public.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Please list 5 *PERSONAL* characteristics of assignments that have frequent contact with the public.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Attitude Evaluation

Evaluate your **attitude** by drawing a circle around the rating which best describes you for each of the following statements.

	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
1. My job is important to the operations of the facility.	3	2	1
2. I see my job as a way to develop my people skills.	3	2	1
3. I enjoy personal compliments about how I do my job.	3	2	1
4. I do not let negative people affect my attitude.	3	2	1
5. I enjoy the people I work with even when they are difficult.	3	2	1
6. I see crisis and conflict as an opportunity.	3	2	1
7. Learning more about my job is important to me.	3	2	1
8. I can respond positively despite the attitude of customers and my co-workers.	3	2	1
9. I can respond effectively to upset people.	3	2	1
10. I don't let bad days affect me.	3	2	1
11. I would like to improve my effectiveness with others and I am willing to work at it.	3	2	1
12. I am committed to my job and want to contribute to the success of the Department.	3	2	1
13. I don't let problems in my personal life and social relationships affect my job.	3	2	1

TOTAL RATING _____

The Attitude Pattern

1. Experiences develop attitudes
- ↕
2. Attitudes affect behaviors
- ↕
3. Behaviors affect reactions
- ↕
4. Reactions cause experiences which then
- ↕
5. Reinforces attitude

Pro-Active or Re-Active

1. Do you often tell people that you don't know, it's not your job?
2. Do you wait for customers to greet you before you respond?
3. Do you criticize your co-workers for their poor attitudes?
4. Do you wait for a customer to ask for help?
5. Are you reluctant to use a customer's name?
6. Do you drive by people with car problems?
7. Do you wait for a co-worker to ask for your help?
8. Do you wait for your supervisor to tell you what to do when you are not busy?

Evaluating Your Strengths

Each of the following characteristics play an integral part in determining the response you get from others. Evaluate yourself from several perceptions: how your supervisors see you, how you think your customers see you, and how you think your co-workers see you.

Rate yourself on a scale of 1 - 10, with 10 being the highest

	See Yourself	Supervisor	Fellow Worker	The Public
Enthusiastic				
Persistent				
Determined				
Positive Thinker				
Smile/Say Hello				
Helpful				
Go out of your way				
Sincere (care)				
Appearance				
Initiative (Self Starter)				
Consistent				
Punctual				
Total Rating				

Effective Questions

Consider how more effective these questions are when they begin with a Who, What, When, Where, How, or Why.

Close Ended

1. Can I help you?
2. Can you call back?
3. I don't know. Can I call back to you later?
with the information?
4. Do you need them right away?
5. Can anyone else answer your questions?

Open Ended

- HOW can I help you?
- WHEN can you call back?
- WHEN can I get back to you?
- HOW soon do you need them?
- Who else might be able to answer your question?

Focus to Overcome Language Barriers

To overcome these barriers, you need to refocus your listening and speaking skills and remember to:

1. Ask the customer to speak slowly. Help them relax by speaking slowly to them and being patient. Don't raise your voice.
2. Paraphrase what is being said. Use the same words the customer is using while speaking.
3. Keep speech simple. Avoid using modifiers such as "scarcely", "barely", and "almost" which can lead to confusion especially with people who have a poor command of English. Also remember to avoid technical jargon, slang terms and long sentences, all which can confuse your customer.
4. Look for new ways to communicate. You may ask someone to spell a word or name for you if they are having trouble pronouncing it or if you are having trouble understanding. If your facility gets frequent visits from customers who speak Spanish, keep a phrase book nearby to look up words your customer uses.

Unspoken Customer Needs

1. Listen. customers want you to pay attention to them.
2. Be reliable. Customers want to know that they can count on the agency its representatives for dependable service.
3. Give accurate information. don't guess at the right answer. If you don't know - find out, don't misinform.
4. Stop telephone transfers. Connect then with the right person the first time. don't make them wait or leave them on hold.
5. Be consistent. Always treat customers with respect, regardless of how you are feeling or how you are treated on a certain day.
6. Offer courteous service. Always be patient and helpful.
7. Take action. Be responsive and prompt.
8. Communicate. Keep customers informed.

Listen to Yourself

How well do you really listen to your customer's? Review the following statements. Are any of them characteristic of your encounters with customers? Be honest; no one is grading your responses:

1. I pretend I'm paying attention to a customer when my mind is actually drifting away.
2. When a customer is speaking to me, I sometimes look around the room to see what else is happening.
3. I shuffle papers on my desk or start doing some other task when someone talks too long.
4. When a customer is speaking, I'll plan on what I am going to say next.
5. When a customer speaks too fast or uses words that I don't understand, I let it go and listen only for what I understand.

Helpful tip: Consider which of these poor listening habits you most often fall into. Decide what you can do in the immediate future to improve your listening skills.

Responding Effectively to Upset Customers

Although there are countless reasons for why a customer may be upset, five of the most common reasons are:

1. They had a misunderstanding.
2. They don't know what they want.
3. They can't get help.
4. They had a bad experience.
5. They have been mishandled.

Eight rules that can help you to respond more effectively to upset customers:

1. Don't take the customer's comments personally !
2. Don't argue with the customer !
3. Don't interrupt the customer !
4. Speak slowly !
5. Don't be in a hurry !
6. Don't point a finger too quickly !
7. Don't fight their emotions !
8. Don't tell the customer that they should not get mad !

Basic strategy steps when dealing with upset customers:

1. LISTEN - Show interest, maintain eye contact.
2. APOLOGIZE - The word "sorry" is a great diffuser of anger. Apologize even if it wasn't your fault.
3. RESPOND WITH A SOFTENING STATEMENT - Acknowledge the customer's feelings of anger, frustration and disappointment.
4. VERIFY - Make sure that you understand the problem.

Choose the Right Words

Rate each statement as "E" Effective or "I" Ineffective.

- | | E | I |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. "We apologize for the mistake, Mr. Baker." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. "We'll do everything we can to change the situation for you." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. "I understand." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. "If you are unhappy with the facility's rules, write your State Representative." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. "Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. "That would be against our policy." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. "I'd be mad too if this happened to me." | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

SCORE: If any statements were rated incorrectly, be sure to understand the reason for the preferred response and use these strategies for future encounters.

Telephone Techniques

Techniques to make the telephone a more enjoyable experience for everyone - you and the caller:

1. Speak slowly and clearly !
2. Answer using your name - "Wings Correctional Facility, Officer Joe Fellows."
3. Open with caring questions - "How may I help you."
4. Get the caller's name - "Who may I say is calling ?"
5. Verify the spelling of the name, even if it is a common name - " How do you spell your name ?" or "Do you spell your name"
6. Ask permission to put the caller on hold - "May I put you on hold" or "May I put you on hold while I transfer your call ?"
7. Limit hold time - While you may be answering all phone calls into the facility, don't forget about those customers on hold. Do not leave a customer on hold for more than 30 seconds.
8. Thank the caller for holding - "Thank you for holding."
9. For transferred calls that go unanswered - "No one is answering at that number, may I direct your call to someone else ?"
10. Thank the caller.

Are You Meeting Expectations ?

- | | Yes | No |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Do you keep callers on hold only very briefly ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Do you listen closely to clue in on customer's problems or concerns ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Do you go all out to meet any extra needs a customer may have ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Do you know where to find facility information that callers may need ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Are you patient and respectful with upset or difficult customers ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Do you apologize when you make mistakes that affect customers ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Even when a customer's questions implies something negative about the Department of Corrections, do you answer willingly, rather than defensively ? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you scored at least seven YES answers, you're meeting several key customer expectations - KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK !