



## What Makes for Good Customer Service?

When running a workshop, one of the first things that we often ask people to do is to recount their own everyday experiences of customer service – good and bad. After a few seconds of silence, examples come passionately flooding in!

So what makes for good or bad customer service? A great example, from one of our clients, is when the Leader of the Council went to quite an upmarket restaurant. One of his guests ordered a Bacardi and Coke, but was promptly told that the restaurant had run out of Bacardi. It was pointed out by the Leader that there was an off-license opposite and that someone from the restaurant should pop-out and buy a replacement bottle, but this idea was rejected by the waiter. The Leader then offered to purchase the bottle himself, but was told that this wasn't allowed. Needless to say the group left the restaurant and found somewhere else to eat and drink.

Ok, so what has this got to do with customer service in Local Government?

The point for me was that the waiter was not putting himself in the shoes of the customer. This is why it is so critical to select the customer advisers who can empathize with customers and then to provide the right training. The acid test is to listen to an agent who keeps getting calls on the same issue. Do they get increasingly irritated by being asked the same question by each subsequent caller, or do they recognise that the council has failed in communicating adequately with its customers, and therefore, as a result, has generated these enquiries? Furthermore do they take it upon themselves, or do they pass it up to a supervisor to resolve the root cause, e.g. get the wording of a letter amended, and to ease the symptom, e.g. perhaps placing a message on the call queue explaining the issue?

If you want a quick reality check of your own council, then call back a few customers at random and talk to them about their 'total experience'. Which telephone number did they dial? and why? how long was it before it was answered? Did they get passed on? Did they have to recount what they had previously said? Was that person able to resolve their query?

If you want something a little more scientific, then consider commissioning some mystery shopper research. Seeing the council through someone else's eyes and ears (video and audio footage obtained using hidden tie & handbag cameras and microphones) can be a real catalyst to change for a council.

But whatever you do, look to invest in your customer advisers training and development. This is one area where a real return on investment can be seen – satisfied customers means fewer calls, greater adviser productivity, fewer complaints, and reductions in recurrent problems. It can make quite a compelling business case.

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