



High School

National FFA Organization

Lesson HS.50

COMMUNICATING WITH CUSTOMERS

Unit. Stage One of Development—ME

Problem Area. How Do I Begin to Grow.

Precepts. **M5:** Operates effectively in the workplace.

National Standards. NL-ENG.K12-4 — Communication Skills — Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.



Student Learning Objectives. As a result of this lesson, the student will ...

- 1 Explain five common techniques to improve communication with customers.
- 2 List four positive non-verbal ways people communicate with customers.
- 3 List the four basic steps to respond to customer complaints.
- 4 Demonstrate proper communication techniques with customers.



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Time. Instruction time for this lesson: 50 or 100 minutes.



Resources

Harris, Clark R. *Leadership and Personal Development: Student Reference*.

Columbia, Missouri. Instructional Materials Laboratory, 1991.

Sewell, Carl and Paul B. Brown. *Customers for Life: How to Turn that One-Time Buyer into a Lifetime Customer*. New York, New York. Pocket Books, 1998.



Tools, Equipment, and Supplies

- ✓ Writing surface
- ✓ Overhead projector or visual presenter
- ✓ Transparencies of HS.50.TM.A, and HS.50.TM.B
- ✓ HS.50.AS.A—one per student
- ✓ HS.50.AS.B—one per student
- ✓ HS.50.Test.A—one per student
- ✓ HS.50.Assessment.A to assess student skits



Key Terms. The following terms are presented in this lesson and appear in bold italics:

➤ None



Interest Approach

Lead a discussion with the students to discuss bad and good examples of customer service. Have students give examples to be written on the board.



Let's talk about experiences that we have had with people at stores or services. I'm sure we have all had an experience with bad customer service. What are some examples of bad or good customer service you or your parents have seen. *Expected responses: slow service in a restaurant; cold food at a restaurant; not willing to exchange products; talking with other workers instead of helping the customers; talking to a friend on the telephone instead of helping customers; a service person not giving you a specific time that they will come to the house to do a repair or installation; a salesperson promising things that the company will not do*
Transition from the interest approach activity to the content of the lesson.



We have had some good examples of poor communication skills. It is amazing how often poor quality communication occurs. We want to keep these poor examples in mind, but we are going to focus on good ways to communicate with customers.



Customers are critical to business. Customers are not an interruption. They are the reason we are there. Customers are essential whether we work in retail, wholesale, or a service company.



SUMMARY OF CONTENT AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

Objective 1. Explain five common techniques to improve communication with customers.



Customers expect everyone to help with customer service. We should all be prepared to help customers and to solve customer problems.

List the following techniques on the board or show HS.50.TM.A.

I. Common techniques to improve communication

- A. Be friendly and helpful
- B. Be energetic
- C. Be positive about yourself and the business
- D. Be interested and attentive
- E. Listen to the customer

Discuss each of the techniques to improve communication when you write them on the board or uncover them on the overhead transparency.



Be friendly and helpful. Greet customers with a hello. Treat customers as you would friends. Nothing is more frustrating than dealing with unfriendly people.



Be energetic. Show a high level of energy. Don't act tired or worn out. Have a "can do" type of attitude. Your energy can be contagious to customers and fellow workers.



Be positive about yourself and the business. Have a positive attitude about your life, your products and service, and about the world in general. People are interacting with you because they want the service or product that you sell. Most people aren't interested in your problems and don't want to listen to negative comments about the company where you work.



Be attentive and interested. If you are a sales person, be attentive to the customer. That does not mean to be a pest. Watch the customer and be available if they need assistance. Also use positive non-verbal communication.



Listen to the customer. If the customer asks you how much the product is, you don't need to tell them all of the features and why it is better than the competitor's product. They may be ready to purchase if they know the price. Determine what the customer wants, and help them obtain it.



Use a Choral Response Moment to reinforce the learning of the five common techniques.



Remember the five common techniques to improve communication:
You should be friendly and helpful. You should be ...
You should also be energetic. You should be ...
Remember to stay positive. Stay what ...
Be attentive and interested. Be what ...
Lastly, always listen to the customer. Who should you listen to

Objective 2. List four positive non-verbal ways people communicate with customers.

Talk about ways that we communicate non-verbally with customers.



Many times we communicate with customers without even saying a word. We communicate by what we do and how we stand. Think about some ways that we communicate non-verbally with customers. Take 30 seconds to think about non-verbal ways to communicate with customers. Think about our examples earlier, and think of some good examples of non-verbal communication.

After they have had a chance to think about the topic, have them write down four examples.



We have had a chance to think about this. Now take out a sheet of paper and write down four examples of non-verbal communication people can use with customers.

When the students are done writing down examples, go around the room and ask them for examples that you can write on the board.



Let's take some of your good ideas and put them on the board. Give me an example of non-verbal communication that people use with customers.

Give supportive responses to the people giving ideas. Keep going around the room until all of the good ideas have been exhausted.

As you write on the board look for ideas such as:

I. Good non-verbal communication

- A. Smiling and making eye contact
- B. Being neat and clean
- C. Nodding head in agreement
- D. Listening to the customer
- E. Approach the customer
- F. Standing upright and acting interested
- G. Putting down other things to help a customer
- H. Being friendly



II. Poor non-verbal communication

- A. Standing with arms folded
- B. Having a slumped posture
- C. Talking on the phone when a customer needs help
- D. Looking at other people as you are talking with a customer
- E. Ignoring customers
- F. Standing right next to customers who just want to look

After the class has made the list, place a star next to the ideas that you think are important and that you want the students to know. You need to write down the list that is important for future assessment.



The ideas that have stars by them are ones that we want to write down and be able to list on the test. Write the ideas in your notebook under the heading of non-verbal communication with customers.

Objective 3. List the four basic steps to respond to customer complaints.

Transition from the discussion about non-verbal communication to the next topic: responding to customer questions and complaints.



Customers are very important to any business. All employees should make a sincere effort to help customers. Since everyone is a customer service employee, we will all have situations where we have customers with questions or complaints.



Questions are a normal part of working with customers. The best way to answer questions is to be prepared. Gain knowledge of the company's products and services. As you increase your knowledge and have experience, you will gain confidence in handling questions.



Also, you need to know how to handle customer complaints. One of the important things is to not become defensive. Don't take the complaints personally. Even if the complaint is directed at you, the problem may be out of your control. But your job is to try to make the situation better. Find out what the customer wants and help them get it, or resolve the problem. It is much less difficult to keep your current customers satisfied than to bring new customers to the company.



An example of handling a complaint is assisting customers that had to stand in a long line. They will be frustrated and may have complaints. Try to be pleasant and diffuse the situation. You might say, "I'm sorry for the wait. We have been very busy today with the special we are running. I am sorry that you had to wait in such a long line. What can I help you with."



Complaints are important feedback to the company. This is one of the main ways that customers can communicate how they feel. You would rather have a customer voice a complaint and give you a chance to solve the problem than to leave and take their business somewhere else.

List the four basic steps to handle complaints or show HS.50.TM.B.



I. Four steps to handle complaints

- A. Be friendly and apologize for the mistake or problem.
- B. Have the customer explain the problem and what the customer would like to happen.
- C. Tell the customer that you will help them resolve the problem immediately.
- D. Solve the problem or get a manager that can solve the problem.

Discuss why the four steps in HS.50.TM.B are important. Possible discussion might include:



Be friendly and apologize for the mistake or problem.

Don't be confrontational.

Let the customer know that you are sincerely sorry that they had a problem and that you want to help.



Have the customer explain the problem and what the customer would like to see happen to correct the situation. If you let the customer tell you what the problem really is, not what you think it is, you may find it is easy to solve. If the customer tells you what they would like to see done to correct the situation, you might find the problem is easy to solve.



Tell the customer that you will help them resolve the problem immediately. Reassure the customer that you are there to help. You will become an advocate for them and they will have confidence in you.



Solve the problem or get a manager who can solve the problem. If it is something within your power and scope of your job, then solve the problem. If not, go to the manager and obtain his/her assistance in solving the problem.



You want the customer to be happy and remain a customer. Carl Sewell, the owner of one of America's top Cadillac dealerships, said that if he can keep a customer for life, the customer will spend \$320,000 during his or her lifetime.



Your company may not make \$320,000 from a customer, but you can see the benefit of a lifetime of return business. As an example, a family of four can spend from \$6,000 to \$10,000 a year on groceries. Keeping a customer satisfied so they continue to shop at a grocery store can make a huge difference. If 10 families decided to shop at another store, that could mean as much as \$100,000 difference for the grocery store.

Pass out HS.50.AS.A. Have the students read the situation and answer the questions.



Problems are not always hard to solve. Read HS.50.AS.A and answer the questions.

After the students have read the story and have answered the questions, discuss the story and questions to help illustrate that good customer service doesn't have to be hard.



Objective 4. Demonstrate proper communication techniques with customers.

Have students create short skits to represent good and bad communication techniques. Pass out HS.50.AS.B to the students and have them work in groups of two or three to develop the short skits.



We are now going to develop short skits that we will present tomorrow. The skits must be at least two minutes, and may be up to five minutes in length. Read HS.50.AS.B, then I will break you into groups to create the skits.

The next day you will have the students present their skits. Have them draw out of a hat to see which group will go first. As they present their skits, complete HS.50.Assessment.A for each group.

After all of the students present the skits, discuss the different types of communication that were demonstrated. Depending on the time left in the period, you might list them on the board as you discuss them. You can also have them think about each skit individually to consider techniques that were used. It is better to discuss the skits after they are all done so that you do not run out of time for the presentation of the skits.



Review/Summary

Have the students do an Eye Witness News Moment to reinforce the learning from the class period.



Break into groups of three, and do an Eye Witness News Moment. One of you should act as the interviewer, asking the other two students about the important topics covered today in class. Ask about the five common techniques to improve communication with customers, the four non-verbal ways to communicate with customers, and the four steps to respond to customer complaints.



Application

►Extended Classroom Activity:

Bring in a panel of employers from a variety of occupations, and have them discuss their customer relations policies, customer relation success stories, or even employee communication problems that occur.

►FFA Activity:

Set up a practice of the Customer Relations Activity that is part of the National FFA Agricultural Sales Career Development Event.



►SAE Activity:

Work with the supervisor for SAEs to develop an opportunity to improve communication skills the students use with customers.

►Evaluation

Objectives 1–3 will be assessed in HS.50.Test.A.

Objective 4 will be assessed in the activity in HS.50.AS.A using HS.50.Assess.A.

Answers to Test:

The answers will vary on the test according to the discussion that you have in class.

1A. Be friendly and helpful. Greet customers with a hello. Treat customers as you would friends. Nothing is more frustrating than dealing with unfriendly people.

1B. Be energetic. Show a high level of energy. Don't act tired or worn out. Have a "can do" type of attitude. Your energy can be contagious to customers and fellow workers.

1C. Be positive about yourself and the business. Have a positive attitude about your life, your products and service and about the world in general. People are working with you because they want the service or product that you sell. Most people aren't really interested in your problems and do not want to hear negative comments about the company where you work.

1D. Be attentive and interested. If you are a sales person be attentive to the customer. That does not mean to be a pest. Watch the customer and be available if they need assistance. Also use positive non-verbal communication.

1E. Listen to the customer. If the customer asks you how much the product is, you don't need to tell them all of the features and why it is better than the competitor's product. They may be ready to purchase if they know the price. Determine what the customer wants and help them get it.

2A–D. Answers will vary depending on the discussion in class. Some possible answers might include:

Smiling and making eye contact

Being neat and clean

Shaking head in agreement

Listening to the customer



Approach the customer

Standing upright and acting interested

Putting down other things to help a customer

Being friendly

3A. Be friendly and apologize for the mistake or problem.

3B. Have the customer explain the problem and what the customer would like to happen.

3C. Tell the customer that will help them resolve the problem immediately.

3D. Solve the problem or get a manager that can solve the problem.



COMMUNICATING WITH CUSTOMERS

1. Explain each of the five common techniques to improve communication with customers.

A. Be friendly and helpful.

B. Be Energetic.

C. Be positive about yourself and the business.

D. Be interested and attentive.

E. Listen to the customer.

2. List four positive non-verbal ways people communicate with customers.

A.

B.

C.

D.



3. List the four basic steps to respond to customer complaints.

A.

B.

C.

D.



ASSESSMENT FORM FOR THE COMMUNICATION SKITS

Skit Participants _____

Title of the Skit _____

Situation _____

Good or Poor Communication (Circle one)

Communication Techniques that will be demonstrated _____

To what extent was creativity used in expanding the situation. _____/ 10

How well was the skit acted out. Were the actors prepared. _____/ 10

How well were the communication skills demonstrated. _____/ 10

How well were the good or poor communication techniques demonstrated. _____/ 10

Overall quality of the skit _____/ 10

Total _____/ 50



COMMON TECHNIQUES TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION

- ◆ **Be friendly and helpful.**
- ◆ **Be energetic.**
- ◆ **Be positive about yourself and the business.**
- ◆ **Be interested and attentive.**
- ◆ **Listen to the customer.**



FOUR STEPS TO HANDLE COMPLAINTS

- ◆ **Be friendly and apologize for the mistake or problem.**
- ◆ **Have the customer explain the problem and what the customer would like to happen.**
- ◆ **Tell the customer you will help resolve the problem immediately.**
- ◆ **Solve the problem or get a manager who can solve the problem.**



A TRUE STORY OF POOR CUSTOMER SERVICE

A customer purchased a rain jacket (XL) and rain pants (XL) from a store. The jacket fit, but the pants were too large. The customer returned to the store to exchange the pants for a smaller size (L). The clerk said they couldn't exchange the pants without a receipt. The customer just wanted to exchange for the same type of pants, and the pants still had the tags on them. The clerk said it couldn't be done. The manager said it couldn't be done.

The clothes in the store were not necessarily sold in matching sets. So the customer then walked into the store and purchased a new jacket (XL) and pants (L) of the same style and color. The customer came to the same clerk to check out. The customer then switched the new pants (L) with the pants that had been brought in earlier (XL) in front of the clerk. The customer then said I want to return this jacket and pants. The customer had a receipt from the purchase and the jacket and pants were both XL. The clerk accepted the jacket and pants and gave the customer the money. The customer now had the jacket (XL) and Pants (L), and it didn't cost him any more money.

Explain whether the problem was solved.

Explain whether the customer was happy.

What impression did the customer have of the store and the employees.

How could this have been solved differently.



CUSTOMER COMMUNICATIONS SKITS

►Instructions:

You and your partner(s) are going to create a two to five-minute skit to present the situations presented below. You will draw a card to decide if your skit will show good or bad techniques when dealing with the customer in the skit. You need to take the situation and expand on it, adding enough depth to make the situation seem believable.

You will be evaluated on your creativity in expanding the situation, how well you acted out the scene, and how well you demonstrated the communication skills.

►Drawing for the Situation

The situations below (and others) will be on slips of paper. You will draw a slip to determine what situation you will have the next day during your skit.

►Drawing for the Approach

You will also draw to determine if you are going to represent good or poor customer service. If the service is poor you can have some aspects that are good or OK customer service.

►The Assessment Form

Complete the top portion of the assessment form (HS.50.Assessment.A) after you have drawn the slips that show the situation and the approach that you and your partner will use.

The assessment form has the following sections for evaluation:

To what extent was creativity used in expanding the situation. _____/ 10

How well was the skit acted out. Were the actors prepared. _____/ 10

How well were the communication skills demonstrated. _____/ 10

How well were the good or poor communication techniques demonstrated. _____/ 10

Overall quality of the skit _____/ 10

Total / 50



► The Situations

1. A customer comes into the store to return a shirt that he or she received for a birthday. The customer doesn't have a receipt.
2. A customer brings a pair of jeans to return to a store, but your store doesn't sell that brand. The customer will not take no for an answer.
3. The customer bought 20-5-5 fertilizer for tomato plants. It caused the tomatoes to grow large, but they never really produced much fruit.
4. A customer bought a bull from you to put with a herd of 10 Angus cows. Only half of the cows became pregnant. The customer wants his or her money back for the bull.
5. A customer wants to buy a special gift for his/her mother for Mother's Day. But the customer needs help in choosing the right gift.
6. A customer comes into the store and says that he or she is just looking. You need to decide at what point to offer more help, and how to offer it.
7. You are talking to a person who is interested in having you mow his or her lawn. The person is not sure you will do a good job.
8. One of the store's best customers came in and wants extra special service. You know that the owner will want you to take good care of the customer.
9. You have created a newsletter on the computer for a customer's organization. The customer isn't convinced that the format, look, etc., is best. You need to convince the customer it is good, or compromise on some points so the customer is satisfied.
10. You are teaching an older customer to use a computer to access information on the company's Web site. There is a tremendous amount of information on the Web.
11. A customer comes into the hardware store where you work and needs help understanding how to do a project—plumbing, electrical, hardware. You need to provide instruction and persuade the customer to buy supplies.
12. The customer wants to complain about a co-worker who was unprofessional. You are a section manager, and should be able to handle the situation.
13. The customer bought seven of an item, but only needed three. The problem is that the customer bought them two months ago, and you have discontinued selling the item.
14. The customer wants to return an item he or she says he or she paid twice as much as it is on sale for today. The customer does not have a receipt.

