

HOW ARE YOU CONNECTING WITH CUSTOMERS?

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SENDING A “GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE” MESSAGE

Recognizing That Quality Is Different From Service

UCLA Medical Center ranks as one of the top five American hospitals and the best hospital in the western United States for the 17th consecutive year. Our product is clearly one of the best but this outstanding achievement will not alone ensure our customers keep coming back. According to Nancy Friedman, an internationally recognized authority on customer service and founder of the Telephone Doctor®, more business is lost due to poor service and poor treatment than due to poor product. In other words, how each UCLA Healthcare staff member is perceived is the equivalent to how UCLA Healthcare is regarded. Positive staff interaction highly determines whether customers will continue to seek out our services. Good service is not about our good intentions or our good nature, it is about how our customers perceive us. It comes down to the *customer's perception* of whether UCLA Healthcare provided good service. The words we say and how we say them sends a message about how friendly, courteous, respectful, and appreciative we are of our customers. We all know that customer service plays an important role in business today. But unfortunately, we are not always aware of the messages we are sending in our day-to-day interactions with customers.

Five Things Customers Don't Want To Hear

It is important to recognize some of the common trigger phrases that can turn a good customer service interaction into a negative one simply by the words you chose. Here are five things customers don't want to hear in which you should eliminate from your customer service vocabulary.

#1 “I Don't Know”

Now you may be thinking, but this is an honest answer so why not be honest? Honesty is good but this reply doesn't help the customer one bit. When we say, “I

don't know” we are telling the customer we are not interested in helping them. Having the right words on hand can make all the difference in how service is perceived. Replace this statement with: *“That is a good question. Let me find out for you.”*

#2 “We Can't Do That”

The word “can't” sends an immediate negative message that is perceived as an inability to provide service. Another service mishap is making excuses for why you can't do something. Customers don't care or want to hear about company policies or bureaucracy. So instead of saying what you can't do or explaining why you can't do it, focus on what you CAN DO for the customer. Offer alternatives to provide choices, which gives a sense of control back to the customer. Don't make excuses.

#3 “You'll Have To...”

The word “you” is extremely confrontational and can sound like an order. How can we offer good service if we are ordering customers around? To soften the message, frame the information in a manner that communicates the steps necessary to complete the service transaction. When possible provide flyers, numbers, and other informational resources to keep the customer well informed of the tasks required. Seek out customer questions before ending the interaction and ensure they know who to contact if they have questions later on.

#4 “Just A Second”

This phrase sounds innocent but it isn't really true. Not much can be done in a second and the statement can be perceived as abrupt as a stop sign. And when a first customer encounter starts off in this manner, there is no time to build rapport or to demonstrate a caring intention. When you cannot immediately respond to a customer that is either in front of you or on the phone, it is best to first offer a friendly greeting and then

set a reasonable wait expectation. Some examples of putting this approach into practice are: *“Welcome! I will be with you in just a few minutes.”* *“Thank you for calling, may I ask you to hold a moment while I finish with another patient...wait for a response then acknowledge...thank you.”*

#5 “No”

The simple truth is that nobody appreciates being told “No.” It sounds unfriendly, unhelpful, and can be perceived as disrespectful. If you must relay information that describes a restriction or limitation in service, it is best to focus on the positive aspects. If asked, *“Will the doctor see me right away?”* Instead of replying with a “no” you may try, *“M/M [Name], the doctor will be with you in about fifteen minutes; please make yourself comfortable and I will call you as soon as he is ready. Thank you.”*

You Really Do Make A Difference!

When we select the right words and phrases each time we encounter a customer, it can go along way in providing consistent good customer service and in ensuring that our customers are receiving the right message about our service intentions. Customer's cannot possibly know about who's responsible for what or how things operate within UCLA Healthcare. Nor do they know how wonderful each staff person is—they only know how they feel during service interactions. When we commit to presenting information in a helpful and positive manner, using proven techniques like those discussed in this newsletter, we are telling our customers that we care. After all, caring is a big part of UCLA HealthCARE. ▶



WHAT IS YOUR BODY LANGUAGE SAYING?

How We Communicate

Did you know that you are constantly sending messages about your thoughts and feelings even when you are not speaking?

Studies show that the words you use account for only 7 percent of the message you convey; just 7 percent! Tone of voice accounts for 38 percent of communication and the other 55 percent is based on what people see in your mannerisms. You may not be aware of your body language but the message is still being relayed so make sure it is the message you want to send.

Forms of Non-Verbal Communication

To communicate a caring, good customer service message you need to ensure your body language is in sync with your words. Put these techniques to the test!

Smile

A smile sends a positive message and is appropriate in all but a life and death situation. Smiling adds warmth and sends a welcoming message. Remember to mentally check your expression and to smile frequently and appropriately.

Eye Contact

Eye contact is the most obvious way you communicate. When you are looking at the other person, you show interest. When you fail to make eye contact, you give the impression that the other person is of no importance. Maintain eye contact about 60% of the time in order to look interested, but not aggressive.

Gestures

The position of your head speaks to people. Keeping your head straight will make you appear self-assured and authoritative. People will take you seriously. Tilt your head to one side if you want to come across as friendly and open.

How receptive you are is suggested by where you place your arms. Arms crossed or folded over your chest say that you have

no interest in what is being communicated or can relay that you don't agree with the person you are communicating with. The best place for your arms are by your side. You will look confident and relaxed.

The angle of your body also sends a message. Leaning in says, "Tell me more." Leaning away signals you've heard enough. Adding a nod of your head is another way to affirm that you are listening.

The distance you keep from others is crucial if you want to establish good rapport. Standing too close will mark you as pushy. Positioning yourself too far away will make you seem standoffish. Neither is what you want so find the happy medium.

Posture is just as important as your grandmother always said it was. Sit or stand erect if you want to be seen as alert and enthusiastic. When you slump in your chair, lean on the wall or desk, have your hands in your pocket, you look tired. No one likes to do business with someone who has no energy.

Tone of Voice

Have you ever heard the saying, "It is not what you say, but how you say it?" Tone of voice accounts for 38 percent of communication and plays an important role in how your message is perceived.

Emphasis

Ensure your tone is not mechanical or monotone to capture the attention of your customer and to express interest and enthusiasm.

Quality

Creates a pleasant atmosphere by sounding friendly and upbeat; not harsh or abrupt.

Rate/Pitch

Adjust your rate and pitch based on the level of complexity or importance of your message. Be cautious not to speak too fast or too slow which can affect understanding. Use your tone to control the conversation

Want to Learn More?

Be on the look out for an upcoming BRITE customer service training course:

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Contact UCLA Healthcare Training for information on course development, the timeline and scheduling. Course availability will be announced in CORE/FORE Group meetings and by email in the coming weeks.

flow. It is best to slow down your rate of speech when communicating over the phone because of the absence of non-verbal communication, which makes up for 55 percent of how we communicate.

Volume

It is important to speak at appropriate levels to ensure you are heard but not misunderstood. Beware of speaking too loud as it can be perceived as yelling. Speaking too softly will make it difficult for the recipient of your message to clearly hear you.

Enunciation

Take the time to enunciate your words to relay a clear and concise message. This is especially important if you have an accent.

Inflection

The inflection of one word can change the entire meaning of a statement. Try it! Say the sentence: *How may I help you?* Each time you say it, inflect on a different word and see how it changes the meaning of your message.

HOW may I help you?

When no inflection is present, you appear uninterested and unenthusiastic. ▶