



# PEOPLE AND CUSTOMER ORIENTATION

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# 1 THE OBJECTIVE - WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

In this session, you will learn:

- Why people skills are important in life and work;
- How you can improve your people and customer-oriented skills;
- About the strategies for customer support;
- About the importance of self-awareness and empathy and how to improve them.

## 2 WHAT ARE PEOPLE AND CUSTOMER-ORIENTED SKILLS AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT

**People-oriented skills** are skills that make your interaction with people more productive and enjoyable. Situations such as having a relaxed conversation, expressing feelings or resolving an argument all require people skills.

Strong people skills allow you to establish healthy connections with people by better understanding their feelings and needs and effectively presenting your ideas and arguments. In the workplace, they make you a better co-worker, team-worker and motivator.

**Customer-oriented skills** are a part of people skills. They help you understand customer's needs and solve their problems.

Employees, working in Customer service are the face of any company. Businesses value employees who can provide good customer service as it fosters customer loyalty and good reputation.

People and customer skills are connected and strongly depend on skills like **communication, active listening, empathy, problem solving** and other skills needed to establish interpersonal connections.

### 3 EMPATHY

Empathy is the ability to genuinely feel the emotions of other people. It helps you to put yourself in their position and understand the reasons why they act the way they do. Because you understand them, you can connect with them on a personal level and really care about them. When you care about them, you are motivated to help them.

The most important thing about empathy is **to make people feel genuinely understood**. This makes them more open to having a positive relationship with you and finding solutions to problems.

To better understand empathy, let us look at its specifics:

- **See other people's world** – You understand what others are telling you and can see it through their eyes.
- **Appreciate them as human beings/no judgement** – We often judge people so we can have an excuse not to try to understand their point of view. To avoid this, you must be able to see them as human beings who are valuable and have their needs.
- **Understand feelings** – You need to get in touch with your emotions to be able to truly connect with feelings of others. That is why it is important for you to first be mentally in balance and understand yourself before you can understand the feelings of other people.
- **Communicate understanding** – The final aspect of empathy is to make people feel understood. To give them a feeling that they are seen and heard. This can be hard and needs practice, as it demands good understanding of communication and people's feelings and needs.

## EXERCISE

Try to answer with Yes or No. The results will show you if you are an empathic person.

- You are very good at really listening to what others have to say.
- People often tell you about their problems.
- You are good at noticing how other people are feeling.
- You often think about how other people feel.
- Other people come to you for advice.
- You often feel overwhelmed by tragic events.
- You try to help others who are suffering.
- You are good at telling when people are not being honest.
- You sometimes feel drained or overwhelmed in social situations.
- You care deeply about other people.

**Results:** more “Yes” answers you have more empathic person you are.

### 3.1 Empathetic listening and mediation

For a successful mediation, follow these rules:

- **Be neutral** – As a mediator you must treat everybody equally and not take sides.
- **Do not decide** – As a mediator you do not have the power to decide who is right or wrong, you can only guide them to find a solution acceptable by all.
- **Gather information** – Listen and ask questions to understand the nature of the problem and the needs of all involved.
- **Control negative emotions** – Be aware of negative emotions of the people involved and re-direct this negative energy towards finding a solution.
- **Be a problem solver** – Be focused on finding a solution that is acceptable by all, think creatively and help all the parties see all the possible solutions.

**A mediator must gain trust and cooperation of all parties involved in a dispute.** To do this, the mediator must be able to listen with empathy to understand their emotions and needs. Only then can the mediator guide them to a mutually satisfactory solution.

Empathic listening is a form of **active listening** focused on understanding the feelings of the speakers and building mutual trust. To be a good empathic listener, learn about the do's and don'ts of empathic listening.

DO	DO NOT
<p><b>Be engaged:</b> Show that you are interested and listening. Be focused and make eye contact. Give acknowledgement by nodding your head, saying, "I see", or "Tell me more about it". Use positive non-verbal communication to establish a constructive atmosphere.</p>	<p><b>Do not ask too many questions:</b> Too many questions can look like you are interrogating the listener.</p>
<p><b>Be neutral:</b> Allow the speaker to reveal feelings and thoughts without criticizing or judging them.</p>	<p><b>Do not be patronizing:</b> Do not minimize the value of the speaker's emotions by using cheap phrases like "It's not that bad," or "You'll feel better tomorrow". Do not teach or give advice.</p>
<p><b>Act like a mirror:</b> Mirror the speaker to show them how you understand what they are saying and feeling.</p>	<p><b>Do not be provoked:</b> Do not react with anger or frustration and do not get involved in the argument or judge the speaker.</p>

#### 4 EMOTIONAL SELF-AWARENESS

Emotional self-awareness is the ability to recognize and understand your feelings and emotions. It enables you to know how emotions influence your actions, decisions and behaviour and use this knowledge to your advantage.

This is especially important when dealing with negative emotions like fear or anger that can make you unproductive and irrational in your decisions and actions. Emotional self-awareness allows you to anticipate and recognize situations and circumstances that cause you negative emotions and react in a controlled and constructive manner.

Practicing and developing emotional self-awareness has the following benefits:

- Better understanding and control of your emotions;
- Better understanding of other people's emotions and motivations;
- Better decision making, more proactivity and self-confidence;
- Better productivity and relationships in the workplace.

***How does emotional self-awareness work in real life? Here is an example:***

After being unemployed for some time, you are offered a job that fits your qualifications but demands active knowledge of a foreign language, which you feel you lack. Your first impulse is not to accept the offer, as you are afraid that your lack of language skill will be too big of a problem.

Instead of giving in to fear, you ask yourself, what the reason you are afraid is. After some thinking about the source of your fear, you realize that your language skills are not really the problem. The real problem is that you are simply afraid to have conversations in a foreign language.

You decide to accept the offer and resolve the problem by taking a conversation class and practicing with friends.

To improve emotional self-awareness, do the following:

- **Write a journal** – Write about your feelings and reactions in various situations, how did you feel;
- **Think about your roles** – List your daily roles as a husband, wife, parent, brother, sister, friend, employee etc. Think about the feelings associated with each of them like happy, sad, angry etc. and write them down;

- **Predict your emotional reactions** – Think about a situation you will face in the future and try to predict how you will feel about it. Learn to predict and accept the feelings by saying, “I may feel frustrated” or “I may feel afraid”. Predicting and accepting these feelings will give you control over them;
- **Know your values** – Be aware of your values and principles in life. They will guide you through life and make you more relaxed and confident;
- **Be aware of your assumptions** – Your assumptions about things can be negative like “I am not smart enough to learn this” or positive like “everything will turn out fine in the end”. Being aware of your assumptions determines how you approach things in life and gives you the ability to change negative attitudes.

### EXERCISE

One of the best ways to improve your self-awareness is to write a daily journal.

Have a notebook and pen with you for the next two weeks.

A few times each day, write about your thoughts and feelings in detail. Each time write for 3-5 minutes. Try to answer the following:

- Why did I choose to write at this exact moment, what was the reason?
- What emotions am I experiencing?
- How these moments and emotions are connected and how would I categorize them?

During these two weeks, observe how your mind will function. At first, you will probably have a hard time recognizing your emotions and organizing your thoughts. However, in time you will gain more control and focus and be able to write better and with more detail. To get optimal results, focus especially on the last question. You can also do the exercise together with someone and then compare results.

## 5 EMOTIONAL SELF-REGULATION

Emotional self-regulation is the ability to control your emotions and impulses. Before you develop emotional self-control, you must develop emotional-awareness.

Self-regulation allows you **to make a pause and think before you react**. It makes your reactions more rational, allowing you to maintain good relationships and achieve your goals. Even a second of pause can give you enough time to calm down and react more calmly.

Controlling your emotions in stressful situations can be very hard. Next time you find yourself in an emotionally charged situation, take a pause by following these steps:

- **Do not react** – This is the hardest part. If you are able to stop yourself from reacting emotionally, you will be able to complete the rest of the steps.
- **Take a deep breath** – Taking a deep breath calms your mind and body and gives you the ability to think rationally.
- **Think for 5 seconds** – After you take a breath, take 5 seconds to think about why this person is acting this way, what are this person's needs and motivations.
- **Respond with compassion** – Instead of blaming the other person for the situation, try to think, "What can I do to help this person to fulfil their needs?".

In this way, you will use self-regulation to do something positive for someone and make yourself feel valuable in the process.

## 6 TEAMWORK

One of the most important people skills is **teamwork** or the ability to work and collaborate with people in a team.

For successful teamwork, each member of a team must develop certain behaviours:

- **Openness** – Team members must be ready to embrace different ideas and perspectives. This is achieved by being willing to know other members better. This helps everybody understand and accept that different people have different ideas and points of view;

- **Trust and self-disclosure** – Team members must trust each other enough to share ideas and feelings. Trust is established gradually by mutual respect and honesty;
- **Support** – Team members must show mutual support to reach their goals. They must not be competitors but colleagues who support one another if there are problems;
- **Respect** – Team members must communicate in a respectful manner. Their focus must be on finding solutions to problems rather than on blaming each other if something goes wrong. Constructive feedback and respectful communication is the way to go.

### 6.1 Johari Window – Understanding relationship with yourself and others

A simple method for improving communication and understanding between team members is the “The Johari Window”. The method improves group relationships by promoting disclosure, self-disclosure and feedback. The basic idea of the Johari is that trust is built by revealing information about yourself to others and that you learn about yourself by receiving feedback from others.

The Johari window is represented by four quadrants:

<p><b>1. OPEN AREA</b> (Known to self and known to others)</p>	<p><b>2. BLIND SPOT</b> (Unknown to self but known to others)</p>
<p><b>3. HIDDEN AREA</b> (Known to self but unknown to others)</p>	<p><b>4. UNKNOWN AREA</b> (Unknown to self and unknown to others)</p>

#### Quadrant 1

This quadrant is an OPEN AREA. Here you put information about yourself that are known to you and others. This can be information about your personality, emotions, skills and

knowledge. The goal is to increase this quadrant without disclosing too much personal information. Additional information can be added to this area by accepting feedback from group members.

### **Quadrant 2**

This is the BLIND SPOT. It represents information about you that is unknown to you, but others know it. This is a great opportunity to explore your “blind spots”. This can be something simple or it can be something that is difficult for an individual to see and accept, for example low self-esteem. Group members help you uncover your blind areas by providing feedback about the things they see about you that you do not know.

### **Quadrant 3**

This is the HIDDEN AREA. It represents information that you know about yourself but is unknown to others, like secrets, fears, weaknesses. Your aim is to reduce this area by revealing information about you to the group members thus moving it to the open area.

### **Quadrant 4**

This is the UNKNOWN AREA. It represents information about you that is initially unknown to you and to others. You uncover these unknowns by exploration, using open communication. You may uncover new skills, emotions, obstacles etc.

**The aim of Johari is to enlarge the open area. This is done in two ways:**

- By self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is achieved by two-way communication between you and other members of the group. As new information is gained, the hidden area gets smaller and the open area grows larger.  
Tip: Be careful what you disclose about yourself. Disclosing small secrets builds trust and relationships but disclosing sensitive personal information can hurt your reputation and put you in a disadvantaged position.
- By receiving feedback from others about things, you cannot see about yourself but others can. Feedback makes the blind spot smaller and makes the open area grow.

Tip: When giving feedback it is very important that the feedback is honest but not too negative because it can hurt mutual trust.

### EXERCISE

Tell your friend something about you that they do not know yet. How did that make you feel?

## 7 RESOLVING CUSTOMER SERVICE ISSUES

There are different approaches to handling customer complaints. The most important thing is **to stay calm, friendly and focus on the solution of the problem.**

Problem-solving often seems easy, but that is not always the case. Sometimes it is complicated. Dealing with customer service issues systematically makes the problem-solving process easier and more effective.

To successfully resolve customer service issue, follow these basic steps:

1. Stay calm and identify the problem;
2. Listen well and find out what the customer needs;
3. Acknowledge the problem and try to clarify it;
4. Find out how the issue impacts the customer;
5. Offer possible solutions and discuss them with the customer;
6. Plan to implement the solution.

## EXAMPLE

Resolving customer service issues demands skill and the right approach. Here is an example of how to deal with a very angry customer. It does not matter if the customer is justifiably angry or not.

When you are dealing with an angry customer, you can use the so-called “**ASAP**” approach.

It goes like this:

**Apologise sincerely:** Always personally apologise by saying, “I am sorry” or “I am truly sorry” even if the customer is in the wrong.

**Sympathize:** When customers feel they have been wronged, they wish to hear that someone understands their situation. Show them that you sympathize with them even if you do not really understand why they are so angry. Say something like “I can understand that you are upset” to show them you care about their problem.

**Accept responsibility:** As an employee of your company, you must take responsibility for customer problems. That does not mean that you are actually responsible for the problem and it does not allow the customer to be unreasonable in their demands. Taking responsibility allows the customer to have someone to talk to and work with to resolve the issue.

**Prepare to help:** After showing the customer that you care about them, be ready to solve the actual problem. It often turns out that the problem that the angry customer had was very small and easy to solve in just a minute or two. In reality, being nice and sympathetic to difficult customers is often more important than the problem itself.

## 7.1 Resolving customer service issues using supportive communication

The goal of supportive communication is to lead to a positive change or a solution to a problem and at the same time maintain or even improve the relationship between the people involved.

Supportive communication is essential when dealing with people with negative attitudes like unsatisfied customers. They are often emotionally affected because they feel that they were wronged in some way even if this is not the case.

Supportive communication supports problem solving by promoting:

- Accurate communication in difficult situations;
- Positive relationships while addressing negative issues;
- Keeping the focus on solving the problem, not assigning blame.

To achieve this, learn and use the techniques of supportive communication described below:

TECHNIQUE	DESCRIPTION
<b>Focus on the problem and possible solutions</b>	Focus on the problem and look for solutions. Do not blame the other person or criticize their personal characteristics. This will make them less defensive and more prepared to contribute to the positive solution.
<b>Use descriptive language</b>	Describe the problem accurately and objectively. Do not use evaluative language because it sounds like you are judging people and making them feel incompetent.
<b>Be inclusive</b>	Show people that they are valued and respected. Do not speak as if you are above them because it will make them feel less important or inferior.
<b>Promote inclusive dialogue</b>	Remember that communication is a two-way process. Use active listening to show people that you are listening and are interested in what they have to say. Let others speak. Welcome their input to let them know that their opinion is valuable.

## 7.2 How to provide high-quality customer service

If you are in a customer service, a large part of your success lies in your ability to provide **high-quality experiences to customers**. To support and gain loyal customers follow these rules:

- **Understand and control emotions** – Be in touch with your emotions. Be aware of any negative emotions you have and learn how to calm yourself with breathing. Take slow,

deep and controlled breaths. Learn to read people's emotions. Understanding how they feel will provide you with valuable information on how to interact with them.

- **Care about customer's needs** – Work on developing understanding of the customer's needs. Find a reason to actually care about them and be willing to help them. Look at people as individuals and treat them, as they are your friends. Ask yourself "What do they need" and what must be done to make them satisfied. Take responsibility beyond your interaction with them. Avoid statements like "That is your opinion" or "I can't tell you my last name" when talking to customers.
- **Be positive** – Be open and genuine. Use light humour to create a friendly atmosphere. Engage with the customers and build positive relationships.
- **Listen to the customers** – Listen to them and show them that you are interested to make them feel valued. Do not interrupt them and take your time to listen. Listen beyond words by paying attention to their tone, volume, body language etc. to better understand what they want. Use empathic listening. Show interest in what they are saying, acknowledge them by nodding or saying, "I understand", do not ask too many questions, and do not criticize them.
- **Show positive emotions** – Be calm and use simple language. Use positive statements. Do not react emotionally to their negative emotions but show compassion and gentle resolve.
- **Focus on finding solutions** – Do not focus on the problem, acknowledge it, apologise and move on. Focus on the positives. Be aware of possible conflicts and dissolve them. Do not get provoked.

### 7.3 How to develop and improve customer-oriented skills

Consider the following hints when you are working on your customer-oriented skills:

- Practice active listening with the goal of learning something and focus on the speaker.
- Ask for direct feedback from customers or colleagues. Direct feedback can help you understand whatever you are providing a great experience for others on a daily basis. Avoid taking negative criticism personally. Keep track of your feedback and reflect on it with each new round to get an idea about your improvement.

- Ask the manager for feedback. It might be helpful to forward or print out your communications for your manager to highlight your strengths and area for improvement.
- Practice new skills. Be willing to learn. You can practice skills like friendliness and be patient with anyone. You will also find that improving your knowledge of the service or product your employer offers will improve your ability to resolve customer issues.

Developing the skills that make a strong customer service worker will, together with practical experience, help you to be successful and advance in your career.

## 8 CONCLUSION

People-oriented skills allow you to establish healthy relationships with people. In the workplace, they make you a better co-worker, team-worker and motivator. Customer-oriented skills are a part of people skills. They help you understand customer's needs and solve their problems.

Empathy is the ability to genuinely feel the emotions of other people and understand the reasons why they act the way they do. The most important thing about empathy is to make people feel genuinely understood.

Disputes can be solved through mediation. Mediator must gain the trust and cooperation of all involved in a dispute. Mediator must be neutral and can only guide people towards a satisfactory solution.

Emotional self-awareness helps understand how emotions influence your actions, decisions and behaviour and use this knowledge to your advantage. You can improve it by becoming aware what situations and circumstances negatively affect your emotions and be better prepared to react positively.

Emotional self-regulation is the ability to control your emotions and impulses. It allows you to make a pause and think before you react. This makes your reactions calmer and more rational. Instead of reacting angrily, take a deep breath, think for 5 seconds about why someone is acting that way and then react with compassion to calm the situation.

Teamwork is one of the most important people skills. To be successful team members must be supportive and respectful and be able to communicate openly. One of the best methods to develop this is the Johari window.

When dealing with unsatisfied customers, use supportive communication. To provide high-quality customer service you must be able to care about customer's needs. Listen to what they are telling you, be able to control your emotions, stay positive and focus on finding solutions.

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