



Customer **1** Care Champions



Communication



SECTION 1

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We all think we can communicate - but can we really? Good communication is about how you make the other person feel. It uses not only words but also ears, eyes, imagination, insight - even body language.

In Section 1 you'll be learning how to communicate with greater confidence and to better effect.

To pass this section you'll need to be able to demonstrate the following:

1.1 An ability to ask open questions

- Do you know how to use 'what, when, how, where' questions?
- Can you devise questions that will guarantee interesting answers?

1.2 An understanding of how to generate customer feedback

- Can you find inspiring ways to create feedback?
- Can you respond in a way that makes a customer feel listened to?

1.3 An appreciation of active listening

- What does it take to be a good listener?
- Do you understand how body language is used in active listening?

This section is the first step towards being a Customer Care Champion. Over the coming months you can either dip into the four sections when you choose or methodically work your way through them - the choice is yours.

Remember, your manager is there to support you, so make use of their expertise – you never know what you'll learn!

1.1 OPEN QUESTIONS

Closed questions invite one word answers, usually yes and no. Open questions are those that encourage conversation to develop. Starting questions with 'what, when, how or where' is the easiest way to open up a dialogue.

! Have a look at these examples:

- Closed** • Are you doing anything tonight?
- Open** • What are you doing tonight?
- Closed** • Do you take sugar in your coffee?
- Open** • How do you like your coffee?
- Closed** • Do you finish work at 9?
- Open** • When do you finish work?
- Closed** • Can we meet up later?
- Open** • Where shall we meet up later?

Using open questions demonstrates a real interest in the person you are addressing and is a sure-fire way to start easy, sincere conversation. Just try it and see!

Think of some open questions starting with 'what, when, how and where' that you can ask your customers:

What

When

How

Where

Communication Tip 1

- Never ask 'why' as it can sound argumentative
- Allow for pauses and thinking time in a conversation

Communication Tip 2

- If you feel you are talking too much, then you probably are!
- Keep questions short and simple

1.1 INTERESTING QUESTIONS, INTERESTING ANSWERS

'Where did you go today?' – it may not be the most imaginative question in the world, but it *is* an open question, and the answer to it *will* give you clues for developing a conversation further (see *Active Listening later*).

But can you think of questions that you could ask a customer to really get a conversation flowing? If you get stuck, try putting yourself in their shoes and thinking about the sort of questions you would like to be asked. (Avoiding sex, religion and politics in conversation may be a very old rule, but it's still a very good one!)

Find reasons to start a conversation with customers. It could be about the weather, last night's sport, or a visitor attraction you've recently been to.

What would you ask?

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Talking about a subject you are already enthusiastic about makes conversation much easier – but take care not to overwhelm people with your in-depth specialist knowledge as it could have the opposite effect!

Take time to think about topics you are interested in: what interests do you have that you could share with your customers?

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1.2 CUSTOMER FEEDBACK

Have a look at your in house questionnaire or feedback forms. Where are they currently kept, and how do customers know about them? Can you see room for improvement?

How about actively promoting them to customers by:

- Handing them out personally
- Making them available in a range of different places
- Introducing an element of competition at work by seeing who can collect the most

Of course, feedback forms are only one way of finding out what customers want. How about:

- Asking customers what else you can offer
- Seeing what internal or local services you can promote
- Collaborating with other businesses in your area to make your customer experience even better: what local products could you sell or display?

Make a list of new ways of getting customer feedback

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Think of some open questions you could use to really find out what your customers want

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Communication Tip 3 - Follow the 4 steps for successful planning:

1. Be clear about what you want to achieve
2. Put a timescale in place for when you want to achieve it
3. Identify who you need to inform (your manager, for instance?)
4. Tell that person what you are going to do and when

1.2 WHAT ARE YOUR CUSTOMERS TELLING YOU?

Feedback tells you what you're doing right and where you could improve. It can come in many shapes; it may be formal or informal, it may be written (feedback forms, thank you letters and emails) or verbal (a telephone call or a passing remark). But good or bad, it should always be taken seriously.

Collect examples of positive feedback from customers. What positive feedback have you received this month?

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Give examples of receiving negative feedback from a customer and how you dealt with the situation.

How did you manage negative feedback or a complaint?

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Communication Tip 4 - Find out who deals with your feedback forms, what they do with them and who gets back in touch with customers.

1.3 ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening means really listening to what someone is saying, and requires you giving that person your full attention.

Tick yourself against the list of do's and don'ts on active listening and discover how good a listener you really are.

DO

- 1 Face the person when they are speaking Do
- 2 Use good eye contact (mixture of looking and looking away) Do
- 3 Mirror their movements (if they lean forward copy them, if they cross their legs copy them) Do
- 4 Match your tone of voice and volume to theirs. (if they are speaking softly and slowly, match their pace) Do
- 5 Give them your undivided attention Do
- 6 Show them you understand by sometimes repeating what they've just said in their own words Do

DON'T

- 1 Have a conversation with your back to the person or when you are walking away Don't
- 2 Keep changing subject to something you'd prefer to talk about Don't
- 3 Avoid eye contact (it makes you appear uninterested) Don't
- 4 Constantly interrupt or finish their sentences for them Don't
- 5 Act as if you are listening whilst checking email, answering the phone, etc Don't
- 6 Fiddle with your clothes, file your nails, or do anything else that shows you are not really paying attention Don't

Communication Tip 5 - Use your feedback skills - ask a work colleague or manager to score your active listening skills. Do they agree or disagree with your result?

1.3 ARE YOU LISTENING?

Try this exercise with a colleague.

PART 1

Sit opposite each other and take it in turns to talk about something to do with work that you'd like some advice on. (The role of the listener is to ask questions but NOT to give advice.)

PART 2

This time sit back to back. Both take a turn at talking and listening, as above.

PART 3

Still back to back, repeating the same as above. This time, the person not speaking behaves distractedly.

- 1 What was it like being listened to sitting opposite your partner?

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- 2 What did it feel like to be listened to back to back? How was it different?

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- 3 Finally, what was the impact on you when your 'listener' was distracted?

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So now you know how it feels, can you make a list of ways that you could improve your active listening?

What can you resolve to do better?

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