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Introduction to learner and experience with Customer Care

My name is Julie-Smith and I am 29 years of age.

My first experience in customer care was when I started a job in a local bar in Letterkenny where I worked for almost 7 years both full and part time. Being the first point of contact for customers when they entered the premises it was very important that I showed a friendly disposition and polite demeanor with a happy personality. I had many good experiences meeting new people from many different areas, learning about them and making many friends.

An example of good customer care I experienced was when a customer left a tip with my boss and said that it was for me as I had made him feel very welcome, and that I was very friendly. These little gestures make you yourself feel happy in your job.

I first joined Systems Limited in 2002 and my primary role was a customer service representative handling various types of inquiries, some were of a technical nature and transactions related to new and existing Systems Limited accounts via telephone. I was required to investigate requests/problems from customers, determine an appropriate course of action and a follow through to a resolution in order to drive high levels of customer satisfaction.

In my daily role I could handle up to 60 calls per day dealing with many different callers, shareowners, agents, brokers, sales assistants, all of whom I had to make sure were getting 100% customer care. Due to the amount of calls coming in on a daily basis you may have a day where a caller may be irate, due to poor service that they received maybe on a prior call, poor customer care to me is to talk over the caller and to argue with the caller, the main lesson that we learn is always to listen to the caller, empathize, find the problem and then resolve it even if we need to go a step further e.g. a supervisor, management.

In recognition of good customer care we have a rewards and recognition program in place with monthly rewards for the best performers. I feel that this helps employees to drive for exceeding results.

Overall in Systems Limited our main goal is customer care, each and every department in the call center are scored on a daily as well as a

monthly basis on customer satisfaction, should that be from scoring calls that they take via a recorded system or sitting on and doing side by sides or from customer feedback either via the IVR telephone system or via email.

When I was first promoted to a team lead I had to attend a one day training course on customer care which was presented by Dublin Management Consultants Ltd. In this course I learned that continuous effort is required in all businesses to continuously improve customer care to ensure success of the business.

I manage and develop a team of up to 15 direct reports to achieve key performance measures including customer care. For my team I am responsible for creating staff development plans to assist with their call quality and customer impression as well as giving regular performance feedback coaching on how to get that 100% customer satisfaction that we aim to provide.

Learning Outcome 1: Describe the Fundamentals of Customer Care

1.1 Explain what you believe Customer Care is?

I believe that Customer care is the ability of an organization to constantly and consistently exceed the customers' expectations. Customer Care is creating an organization where all your customers want to come back.

There are many definitions I believe for Customer Care

1. Meeting all customer needs and requirements
2. Finding the best way to deal with each customer
3. Giving customer service that pleases everyone – the customer and the company.
4. Achieving 100% satisfaction for every customer

I believe every organization today should have all the systems in place in order to ensure that maximum satisfaction is provided, for example faster service, better computer systems and other alternatives for the client to receive this information should that be via, mail, internet, email or fax.

In my current role as team lead I have come across many examples of good and bad customer care. I have scored many calls that were handled by representatives on the phone and I have heard both good and bad customer care being provided.

An example of good customer care I had ---- I took a call where the client was calling to get an account balance on their Synergy Fund Account I believe I went above and beyond on this call. The client said that they had been waiting to get through for almost 15 minutes and were not happy; I asked if they were aware that they could access their account on line, they were not aware of this and the caller was very grateful that I had made them aware. I enrolled the client on line so that he could view his account on line to save having to call during busy periods. The caller was very impressed with the service they were getting that they asked to speak to my supervisor so they could provide the positive feedback. My supervisor took the call and then followed up with an email to his manager so they would know that we had a satisfied client and that I had done a great job.

An example of bad customer care that I experienced was when a caller called up and she was not impressed with the person that took the prior call and she wanted to make a complaint. The caller said that when she started to explain an issue she was having with a check they received, the representative she spoke to spoke over her and did not listen to her request. The caller had requested that no taxes be withheld from her redemption check however the person who processed the redemption had withheld taxes. Instead of apologizing and being empathetic the prior representative said she would need to pull the previous call to ensure this is what they requested, no apologies were provided. I immediately apologized to the caller and put in a request to have her taxes reimbursed. I sent a note to management in regards to complaint and the prior rep was immediately issued with an informal warning for not showing any empathy on the call. It is extremely important that all employees follow the procedures for good customer care and in this example the representative just did not seem to care for the customer.

1.2 Describe the importance of customer care:

Good customer care matters because keeping existing customers is easier than finding new ones and satisfied customers will do a lot of our advertising for us. Most people consider doing business with a certain company because of a recommendation by a friend or acquaintance. Dissatisfied customers spread the bad news and undermine your business, which ultimately threatens everyone's jobs.

So, our objective must be to provide the highest standard of Customer Care possible and to always aim for excellence. A customer who feels good doing business with you and through you, the company is more than likely to stay with you and recommend you to others.

Six essential tips for good customer care are;

1. Know and Understand your Business/Customers
2. Identifying Customer Needs
3. Use Customer-Friendly Language and Words
4. Practice Excellent Service

5. Handle Difficult Customers with Care
6. Exceed Customer Expectations

The bottom line is that one of the key components in marketing and business growth is to spend the majority of your time and effort nurturing customer relationships, so that you get business from existing clients and customers.

To summarize if continuous improvement in Customer care remains our aim, we will strive, as individuals and as a company to always give customers the best service possible therefore keeping our customers happy and knowing they will always come back.

1.3 How important is customer care in my organization and how is customer Care managed in my Organization?

Customer care is the most important objective in the call center department that I am currently employed in.

My company wants customers that are loyal advocates and also employees that are excited, enthusiastic, energetic, and empowered to make decisions that benefit both the customer and the company. They want commitment, they want people who love and take pride in their work and will represent the organization in the best possible light.

Systems Limited I believe creates an environment where people feel cared about, where people feel valued, where their personal growth is encouraged and nourished and where there is every effort made to build self-esteem and self-worth.

The world is becoming more competitive. Our range of available responses to a rapidly changing marketplace is directly related to the amount of intelligence and creativity we unleash in the hearts and minds of those we work with. Caring is the seed of the passion needed to be successful in every organization today and this is what Systems Limited always aims to provide.

Customer care is managed very effectively in my organization on a daily basis.

We have many different departments in the call center and each area has a customer satisfaction survey completed on a monthly basis to measure the effectiveness of the customer care we provide.

The Call Center strives to provide the highest quality service & assistance to our customers therefore we also have a high standard call coaching measurement in place to ensure all employees meet if not exceed the requirements of good customer care.

1.4 Consequences of good/bad customer care

The consequences of good customer care are as follows:

- Increase in profitability

Every customer wants clear answers, quick response times, and that personal touch that makes doing business with you an enjoyable experience that they will come back for (and recommend to friends and family)!

The success of your business depends on your ability to keep your customers satisfied. In today's busy marketplace, consumers refuse to settle for second-rate customer service, and if they can't get the timely answers, refunds or exchanges, and top-notch customer service experience with you, they won't hesitate to take their business elsewhere therefore in order to keep customers and to increase profits we need to be providing the best customer care service available.

- Customer Loyalty

Once you learn the psychology and strategy behind providing excellent customer service, you'll never leave a customer unhappy again, nor will you leave a customer interaction feeling like it should have gone differently. By providing a good customer service and by coming across as a representative who cares for their customers, every single customer you ever have will leave your place of business thrilled with you and your service. They will leave a devoted and loyal customer all because of you.

- Positive Feedback/Rewards & Recognition/Retention of Staff

Positive feedback from customers is always a great advantage for not only success in business but also for the benefit of employees.

Positive feedback for individual employees can lead to the possibility of developing their careers further in the company. When employees

get a pat in the back for work well done it makes them feel self-worth and satisfaction of a job well done, thus they tend to want to stay in that job. Employees also like competition so with rewards and recognition for a job well done this also gives employees satisfaction.

- New business from business partners

If a business is run with well trained employees and enthusiastic managers that are encouraging staff to always improve to ensure customer satisfaction is 100% then it is more likely for business partners to want you to have more positions in the company.

- Pressure on competitors

The better the customer care in your company, the more pressure on other companies to match your criteria in order for them to prevent their customers from going elsewhere.

The consequences of bad customer service are as follows:

1. No Profit

If a business has a reputation for providing bad customer care the news will spread and customer loyalty will seize. Customers will go elsewhere and the company will fail. In today's market competition to be the best is very important and customer care is the most important factor in all to be successful.

2. Damaged Reputation

If it gets to the point that a company's name is damaged it would be very difficult to restore confidence in customers to return to your company. In many situations you hear of customers having bad customer care in businesses, restaurants etc. and then from word of mouth you tend not to use them. Customer care needs to be the most important factor in all businesses to retain customer loyalty. Training staff to understand this will be the only way to succeed in today's marketplace.

3. Increased turnover of staff

As above if you employees are not getting the required training in order to do their job then how are they expected to ensure they are meeting the business needs. Employees who are not trained are most likely going to leave and go elsewhere as they will not feel any job satisfaction; these employees are going to feel that the company does not care.

2. Discuss customer needs and customer expectations

2.1 How does your organization determine customer needs and expectations?

Knowing and understanding customer needs is the centre of every successful business. In order for the organization to function effectively it is important that each group, and even each individual within those groups, thoroughly understands who the customer is, what they want, and how his or her job contributes to satisfying those requirements. The key to business success is to know what your customer wants and what new thing you can give them that will excite them and make them loyal to your company. When this happens the company will rise to new levels of success.

In Systems Limited customer needs are determined in many ways Customer surveys are sent to employees to determine why the customer wants/buys/needs our products. This will define the added value that the customer will attain from the product or service, and how it adds benefit to the customer.

Every customer wants a faster and better service and Systems Limited aim to provide this by adapting this approach with faster systems and better trained staff to ensure customers get the care they deserve and want.

Systems Limited deals with both internal and external clients via telephone, email and mail. It is vital in our business that we have the relevant systems in place to ensure that we meet the business requirements. We have many updates made to systems to help improve the overall customer satisfaction. If an employee has a good system in place to do their job then the job is going to be done more efficient and in a timely manner thus, improving customer confidence.

2.2 How do you measure if customer needs have been met?

Systems Limited use many methods to ensure the complete satisfaction of our clients on a daily basis. Examples of some of these are as follows;

- Surveys and Voicemail Options

Surveys are set up on the phone system for customers to complete once their call ends. This survey allows the customer to provide the

feedback on the customer service representative they just spoke to, in order to find out if the customer was satisfied and if the representative did a good job. We also have a voicemail for clients to leave a message if they wish.

- Call Coaching

As part of the team lead role for the Synergy Fund team in the call center one of my responsibilities is to monitor calls handled by the representatives to ensure the customer service we aim to provide is being provided as requested. As mentioned earlier the team is scored out of 100%. Some of the areas we score on are as follows

- ❖ Call Techniques
- ❖ Call Accuracy

2.3 Attempts to exceed Customer Expectations

As the team lead for the Synergy Funds team I always try to ensure that my team exceed customer expectations. Recently in Systems Limited we set up a customer impression focus group to come up with ideas that would improve the overall customer care that we want our customers to receive.

Ensuring the call is resolved on the first attempt is very important. One call I listened to by one of the representatives was excellent they did everything for the caller processed a financial transaction, used the caller's name however they did not mention to the client that they could access their account on-line and therefore lost 9% out of their scorecard.

Learning Outcome 3: Describe the customer focused attitude

3.1 How to be customer focused

Being Customer-Focused means NOT focusing on your great products or wonderful services! It means, instead, focusing on the customer's needs. First, you need to find out what the customer wants, what the customer cares about, and what objectives the customer is trying to achieve.

In order for any company to show that they are customer focused it is crucial that the right training is provided to all staff members. It starts with you imagining yourself in the customer's shoes from the beginning to the end of a call

In Systems Limited we learn that there are certain steps to being customer focused

- ❖ Make the Customer #1
- ❖ Appropriate Attitude
- ❖ Determine Customer Needs
- ❖ Build Relationships
- ❖ Effective Problem Solving Resolution

In today's market place customers have so many options therefore every organization needs to ensure that they have a customer focus strategy in place.

When you follow the correct procedures and listen to the caller, empathize with the caller and resolve the call to the customer's satisfaction then this is ensuring that the customer will stay loyal and come back to the company.

An example of bad customer service that I experienced was when I was staying in a B&B above a public house in Galway, the room seemed to be cold due to a draft coming in under the doorway and I reported it to reception. The receptionist said that there was nothing they could do as it was due to the fact that the B&B was old and that other residents would just put a towel at the door and this would stop the draft. I asked her to file a report to management as this was not very nice for customers paying to stay and she said management were aware and there is nothing they could do. I thought that her

response implied that the proprietors ignored the needs of their customers and refused to confront problems as long as they were getting customers they did not need to be customer focused. To show that they were customer focused she should have acknowledged my problem, empathized with me and filed a report for a resolution. I left the next day and relocated to a nice hotel.

3.2 Importance of training employees & empowering employees

Every organization or business need to ensure that all employees have adequate training to perform their daily role to their utmost satisfaction and to the customer's satisfaction.

Systems Limited have adopted the appropriate training and development techniques for the target audiences, we recognize that different people have different learning styles. It is essential that all new employees go through these training and development classes before they begin their new roles. Systems Limited ensure that all employees know the procedures rather than throwing them in at the deep end and hoping they do a good job.

Once employees are adequately trained there is always continuous coaching and development to review progress.

If the employees do not have sufficient training then how can we ensure our customers are satisfied. If a customer is dealing with someone that is not experienced then they will lose confidence in your organization and maybe go elsewhere.

By letting employees feel empowered it will also help improve customer care. Empowerment is the process of enabling or authorizing an individual to think, behave, take action, and control work and make decisions. Empowerment rules as a development strategy. As long as employees have adequate training then they will know when they are making the right decision and they will feel satisfied in their role.

3.3 Continuous Improvement.

Keep improving customer care and/or product itself to ensure customer keeps coming back.

Improvements should be introduced every day for example in Systems Limited we have an added value focus group which has members from each team in the call center. This group allows individuals to bring process improvements and ideas to the meetings and then management can follow up to see if these ideas are applicable or possible to implement.

One example of a new process was the side by side call coaching which was introduced this helped establish areas that the team needed extra training in to ensure they had all the knowledge necessary to improve customer satisfaction.

Other ways that we continue to improve in customer care is to ensure that we have adequate staff and if need be we will go through the interviewing process to hire new staff during peak periods. Customer needs are very important and these change on a daily basis so we need to ensure we are making improvements on an ongoing basis.

Learning Outcome 4: Demonstrate effective communication skills

4.1 Describe the importance of first impressions in customer care

Customers form first impressions about you and your office/business the very first time they come in contact with a representative whether face to face or over the telephone. Therefore, it is important for you to create a positive, lasting impression. You may handle many customers in the course of a day. Remember that every customer deserves the same courteous treatment. Take care of each customer in a professional manner. The fact that you must handle many customers during the course of a day may affect your mood. If you are in a bad mood, the customer will sense it and feel very uncomfortable. Therefore, you should learn to control your moods and your temper.

In the call center business the first technique we learn to ensure we are providing an excellent service is to always have a smile as the customer can sense right away whether you are pleasant, it is all in the tone of your voice.

A positive first impression is an important start to building a relationship with your customers; the initial impression can set the tone for the entire customer experience.

Customer will stay loyal as long as they get a good first impression of a business or organization. Remember *you never get a second chance to make a good first impression*. An initial bad impression will only lose you a customer to one of your competitors.

4.2 How do you establish rapport with customers?

There are a few steps to establishing rapport with a customer. If you follow these simple steps then you could build a relationship with the customer without making them feel uncomfortable.

- ❖ Smile when you answer the telephone and when you meet the customer face to face and maintain eye contact when meeting a customer face to face.

- ❖ Have a well-prepared opening statement to welcome the customer and also to acknowledge the company you work for.
- ❖ Pay them a sincere compliment, if you get the chance.
- ❖ Find common interests and get them to talk about them.
- ❖ Do not talk about your own problems.
- ❖ Use the customer's name and use it often. Do not presume to address them by their first name. Ask for permission.
- ❖ Limit the use of the words "I" and "me".
- ❖ Be enthusiastic and confident without being pushy or conceded or condescending
- ❖ Always exercise good manners and never use bad language

4.3 Importance of Positive body language

Attitude, behavior and mannerism can all be determined in our role from the employees tone and in other roles by body language. Up to 93 % of communication is non-verbal body language can be determined from eye movement, posture, hand gestures, facial expressions and more. The pressure of body language can especially be felt in emotional situations. Body language usually prevails over words.

In the call center it is important when on the phones to ensure you sit up straight and do not slouch and have a smile on your face when answering the phone. The enthusiasm of the person dealing with customer is obvious when a customer makes a telephone call to a customer service representative.

A positive and friendly impression illustrates a helpful and pleasant attitude.

4.4 Ending on a positive note

Ending a telephone call can seem to be a simple matter. Yet, when it comes to customer satisfaction, you need to place as much emphasis on concluding a telephone call as you do on your initial greeting.

There is a need to maintain the positive and friendly attitude with which a call was received. It is important to use the customer's name, review plans of action, offer a further assistance, thank him or her for calling and finally making sure that the consumer is finished and hangs up before the agent does. When these tips are followed, calls from customers can always be ended positively and successfully.

For every call that is handled by a customer service rep in Systems Limited it is important to summarize what it is you have done or what you will do to assist in their query or transaction. It is also important to annotate the account with a phone log of what was discussed on the call in case the customer calls back.

When you recap what you are doing the customer knows exactly what you will be doing. Wait for the customer's acknowledgement and acceptance to make sure you handled everything correctly. If you recap and it is incorrect the customer then has the option to let you know. Asking the caller if they need anything else is also a way of showing the human touch, it gives the customer a chance to pause and before hanging up. They will appreciate the memory jogger. Also when finishing up a call it is always nice to remind the customer of your name that if they need to call back that they can request to speak to you.