Customer Interaction Cycle

Customer Service Concerns
A study of customer concerns asked for their opinions about what they felt was important. The study identified five major factors that the customers especially valued.

- **Reliability** - Can I depend on you?
  - Will I get the service that I expect?
  - Will you do what I believe you promised?

- **Assurance** - Did I make the right choice?
  - Will you provide consistent helpful service?
  - Will the service meet my expectations?

- **Tangibles** - How do you look?
  - Is the restaurant clean and neat?
  - Are your signs and menus easily understood?

- **Empathy** - Do you understand me?
  - Will you give me individual attention?
  - Do you understand what I want?

- **Responsiveness** - Will you serve me promptly?
  - Do you respond swiftly to my requests?
  - Is the food fresh and at the proper temperature?

Customer Interaction Cycle
The customer interaction cycle is a specific pattern of behavior that has been found to respond well to the customer concerns. Customers expect to be treated well in each of the five stages – greeting the customer, understanding or knowing the customer’s needs, agreeing on the customer’s requirements, helping the customer, and keeping a positive relationship with the customer.

Using the five-step cycle offers a systematic approach to use in any service situation. Following all steps avoids leaving out responses to important customer concerns.
Greet

In the first stage of the customer interaction cycle, the service provider begins the relationship with the customer. It is often very brief but it is very important. It creates the first impression that will shape the customer’s judgment about whether you care enough to provide the service and products that the customer wants. This stage includes being ready and welcoming the customer.

Be ready – this means that you are prepared to serve your customer. It includes your ability to use equipment and knowing about your products and services. It also means that you are prepared to observe your customers for clues that will help you to respond to each individual as a person.

What to do.

• Stand straight and observe the customers as they approach.
• Wait patiently for the customer.
• Establish eye contact.
• Smile.
• Answer phone calls promptly.

Welcome – this signals the customer that you are ready to provide service. You are communicating your interest and readiness to help. Welcoming acknowledges the customer and includes both verbal and non-verbal messages that you care about helping the customer.

What to say and do.

• Maintain eye contact when speaking.
• Say “Good morning, good afternoon, or good evening.”
• Say “May I help you?” or “What is your request?”
• Be pleasant regardless of customer attitude.

Know

The second stage of the customer interaction cycle focuses on understanding the needs of the customer. It involves listening for facts, observing feelings, asking clarifying questions, and restating important information to assure understanding. It is the most difficult stage of the interaction because you must concentrate on what the customer is saying and avoid being distracted by other things around you. It may seem to be a dull routine to repeatedly ask or answer the same questions all day long. For the customer, it is not repetition. It is a valuable personalized service.

Listen – this is the ability to observe the whole message, both the words, tone of voice, and the body language, and to hear and remember the facts and feelings provided by the customer. It enables you to understand accurately what your customer wants and expects from you and the business. Effective listening helps the customer to feel like he or she has received personalized service.
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What to do

- Maintain eye contact.
- Reassure with non-verbal communication – nod and smile.
- Also confirm understanding by saying “yes” when the customer pauses.
- Listen carefully for to the customer information and comments.
- Observe tone of voice and body language for customer needs such as confusion about the products or the service approach.
- Avoid being distracted.

Ask – your purpose for asking questions is to gather information and to check on items that you may not have understood. Use questions when you want to confirm specific choices, when you want to limit the choices, or when the customer has not been specific about the request.

What to say and do.

- Respond to observed customer needs. Ask, “Have you contacted us before?”
- Do not rush the customer. Say, “Take your time” if they appear to be struggling with choices.
- Ask about the options of products or services.
- Ask whether the need is immediate or scheduled later.
- Ask about specific service preferences.

Offer Information – this includes describing the actions that the customer is expected to take in preparation for receiving their product or service. It also tells the customer your interpretation of the customer’s needs. It is the starting point for setting mutual expectations.

What to say and do.

- Provide suggestions for the most popular product or service items, special options or other recommendations.
- Possibly suggest implementation options.
- Tell the customer about the expected delivery time.

Agree

The third stage of the customer interaction cycle assures shared understanding and agreement on the desired response. It states the expectations and obligations of customer and the service provider.

Restate – this confirms that you heard and understood the customer’s request. You may also respond to the personal (non-request related) message that the customer provided.
Customer Interaction Cycle

What to say and do.
• Restate the product or service response that you have recorded.
• Mention those requests that may require a special response.
• Check to see if there are any additional items – “Is there anything else that you would like?”

Set Expectations – this tells the customer what you can or cannot do. It includes what the customer is responsible for and what the customer can expect of you. It is important to explain the limitations to the service in a positive way. Setting expectations will make sure that the customer understands his or her responsibilities and knows what will be delivered.

What to say and do.
• Tell the customer about the actions that they may be asked to take and the check to understand if they have the skills or knowledge to complete the actions.
• Tell the customer if there are products or services that will be delivered separately.
• If there is a known response delay, tell the customer the estimated delay time.
• Check for understanding. Say, “Is there anything else that I can do for you?”

Get Agreement – this is usually very brief but it is important. It makes sure that the customer understands and accepts the details of the service arrangement. It confirms that the customer finds the response satisfactory. It also offers an opportunity to adjust any errors in the response.

What to say and do.
• If appropriate, say the price of the response.
• Provide information on payment.

Deliver

The fourth stage of the customer interaction cycle delivers the product and service with information and other assistance. It prepares the customer to enjoy a pleasant experience.

What to say and do.
• If there is a delay between the request and the delivery, greet the customer again and restate the requested response briefly.
• Ask for confirmation that the request is correctly understood. Say, “Is everything OK?”
• Ask, “Is there anything else?”

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Customer Interaction Cycle

Continue

Keeping customers builds future business. It is the fifth stage of the customer interaction cycle. This concludes this transaction with the customer and encourages future business. This stage offers an opportunity to build customer loyalty and to get valuable feedback on the customers' satisfaction with your business.

Check Satisfaction – this step confirms that the customer received the quality products and service that was expected. It is important to check for satisfaction, even at the busiest times. It shows the customer that you care about them and their business.

What to say and do.

- When there is an opportunity after the response is delivered, ask the customer, “Is everything OK?”
- Ask if there is anything else that the customer wants.
- Respond to requests as appropriate.
- As the customers leave, ask, “Was our response satisfactory?”

Thank – this step tells the customer that you appreciate their business.

What to say and do.

- Say, “Thank you.”

Bridge – this step encourages the customer to return.

What to say and do.

- Say, “Please call again if you have any other requests for help. Have a great day.”

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Customer Challenge

When an unexpected customer demand occurs, it is important to respond swiftly and consistently to address the customer's needs.

The service provider can use the customer interaction cycle to greet, know the need, help, and keep the customer. There are two important decisions to make in responding to the need.

If it is possible for the service provider to respond immediately to the need, he or she should take responsibility for taking the appropriate action. The business owners will set the boundaries for the actions that the service providers are empowered to take.

Once the customer need is addressed, verify that the customer is satisfied. If the customer is satisfied, the service provider will return to the routine tasks. If the customer is not satisfied, the service provider will contact the manager for additional response.

If the customer request is not something that the service provider can do, he or she will contact the manager for assistance and return to the routine tasks.

Outstanding customer service comes from building positive relationships with the customer. The following principles will help to develop the relationship.

- Be consistent
- Pay attention to the customer
- Understand customer expectations
- Verify understanding
- Assure agreement
- Request feedback
- Thank and build a bridge