

Customer Service Notes for Interpersonal Communication

As some of you know, in our workshops, we sometimes provide an assessment that is used as a self-evaluation of the person's interpersonal communication skills, since this is a key part of providing stellar service. The assessment looks at 4 aspects of interpersonal communication: sending clear messages, listening, giving and getting feedback, and handling emotional interactions.

Let's examine these 4 aspects, starting with **sending clear messages**. Although we know exactly what we want to say to a co-worker or participant, the message is not always clear to the receiver. Remember; keep WIC jargon to a minimum. Also, do not speak using lots of lengthy sentences since it's hard for the receiver to comprehend too much information at one time.

Listening is a challenge for many of us. We often are waiting to say something rather than listening to what the other person is saying. Some of us like to jump in and finish the other person's sentences. When working with a participant (whether in person or on the phone), you might take notes of what the person says. You should also try to avoid distractions that will impair your ability to listen. Keep in mind there is a difference between hearing and listening as listening includes understanding. If a participant gives you a lengthy account of her child's eating habits, it may be helpful when she is finished to summarize by saying something like, "So if I understand you correctly, your child eats a full breakfast but is picky at lunch and dinner?" This creates a feedback loop to ensure understanding, as the participant will either acknowledge that your summary is accurate or clarify if it is not.

Giving feedback can be a challenge, particularly if the feedback is not positive. Suppose you need to tell Mrs. Anderson that she needs to provide more fruits and vegetables (and less junk food) to her child. Of course you want to be tactful, but you do need to get your message across. You might use a feedback statement such as, "Mrs. Anderson, it sounds like you are giving Tommy too many snack foods. Let's talk about how you can instead substitute more fruits and vegetables into his diet." **Getting feedback** can also be a challenge for many of us, especially when the feedback is not positive. In these situations, know that the person cares enough about you to give you the feedback, otherwise they would simply ignore it and not mention anything.

Lastly, **handling emotional interactions** is never easy. If a participant is angry or crying, it is important to show empathy and not get defensive or impatient. The person will appreciate that you handled the situation professionally.

Utilize good interpersonal communication skills; your interactions with participants will be even better!

Questions for Reflection:

1. Am I tactful when giving constructive feedback?
2. Do I handle emotional interactions with participants with empathy?

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