

CUSTOMER CARE (DES 3102)

LECTURE : 6

TOPIC : Training and Development for Customer Service

AIM : To understand the importance of training and methods used to
Develop effective customer service

LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this chapter you should be able to understand:

1. Importance of training in customer service
2. Training methods

TOPIC OUTLINE

6.1 Importance of training and development

6.2 Identifying Training objectives

6.3 Training and Development methods



Training and development is an essential cornerstone in promoting a customer service philosophy. This chapter explores the need to include everyone throughout the organisation in training and development to enhance knowledge, skills and attitudes towards customer service. It outlines the different approaches to training and development that can be adopted, beginning by listening to customers. It also provides practical example of types of training which are appropriate for managers and staff. Finally, it reinforces the need for customer service to be key recruitment criterion and for it to be built into the induction process.

6.1 The growing importance of training and development in customer service

When customer service training was in its infancy in the UK, the focus tended to be on 'catch all' training for front - line staff, which took place in an almost evangelical style. A recent Industrial Society survey found that today firms are putting more emphasis on training and development as they focus more on the customer and encourage employees to become empowered. The report showed that leadership, quality and teamwork are the top priorities for management training; teamwork, quality and customer care were seen as the top three priorities for staff training.

Experience shows that training and development not only helps organisations be more flexible, proactive and customer - focused in the face of fierce competitions, but is also a prime motivational tool. The emphasis on customer service training has changed, therefore, to a philosophy which recognises that to alter the culture of an organisation to one which is customer - focused, training and development needs to be offered to all layers of management and staff.

6.2 Identifying training and development objectives

Listen to customers

Best - practice organisations use the information which customers provide to draw up training and development objectives for their organisations and to ensure they keep a clear focus on the business. As we have discussed in earlier chapters, customer service is what the customer says it is. Only by asking customers their opinion can a business gain a true perspective on what matters to customers and how well they are performing, and thereby identify areas for improvement.

The customer service department of pharmaceutical giant Glaxo Wellcome used this form of gap analysis to identify areas where they could proactively improve their service and add value to the customer. For example, the survey identified the expected response times to queries and the customer's level of satisfaction with the current response. As a result of the survey, the members of the customer service department were able to set service standards and identify training and development needs so that they could better meet customer's expectations.

Quantitative surveys are now common place in best - practice organisations, some times backed up by mystery shoppers to check that service delivery is consistent. One large high street fashion retailer introduced a new refund policy to better meet customer expectations. It provided a training package for all members of staff and their managers. Once the training had been introduced, a quantitative survey was undertaken followed by a mystery shopper to each store to monitor whether the policy was being implemented. The results identified further areas of training need.

Customer focus groups and interviews are other methods that organisations use to get a more 'subjective' feel for customer expectation. The calling back of customers on a sample basis is another technique, used for example by Southern Electric to validate its service delivery. Research conducted amongst customers of Marriott international suggested that a guest's overall perception of a hotel's service be based disproportionately on the performance of front - line staff. In an effort to improve guest's perceptions, a training programme called 'front desk' was introduced. Aimed at front - line staff, the training was delivered by managers in modular format. In every hotel where training took place, there was a one per cent increase in customer satisfaction.

Listening to customers, therefore, helps prioritise the areas most in need of development. Key success criteria can then be agreed.

In setting training and development objectives and deciding on the methods to be adopted, it must be remembered that training and development will be more accepted when the trainee is motivated to learn and, in addition, when management wants the learning to take place. Therefore it is important to create the right environment for learning to take place - training should be enjoyable and not be seen as a chore.

The objectives of the training and development must be clearly explained and agreed by both the trainer/manager and the trainee. A clear set of objectives will allow the training and development to be validated after it has taken place and performance to be reviewed systematically as part of an overall programme of customer satisfaction. This training cycle is illustrated in Figure 6.1.

6.3 Training and development methods

In selecting the most appropriate training and development techniques for the target audience, there is a need to recognise that different people have different learning styles and that the training and development methods adopted must be most suitable for the learning style of the individual participants.

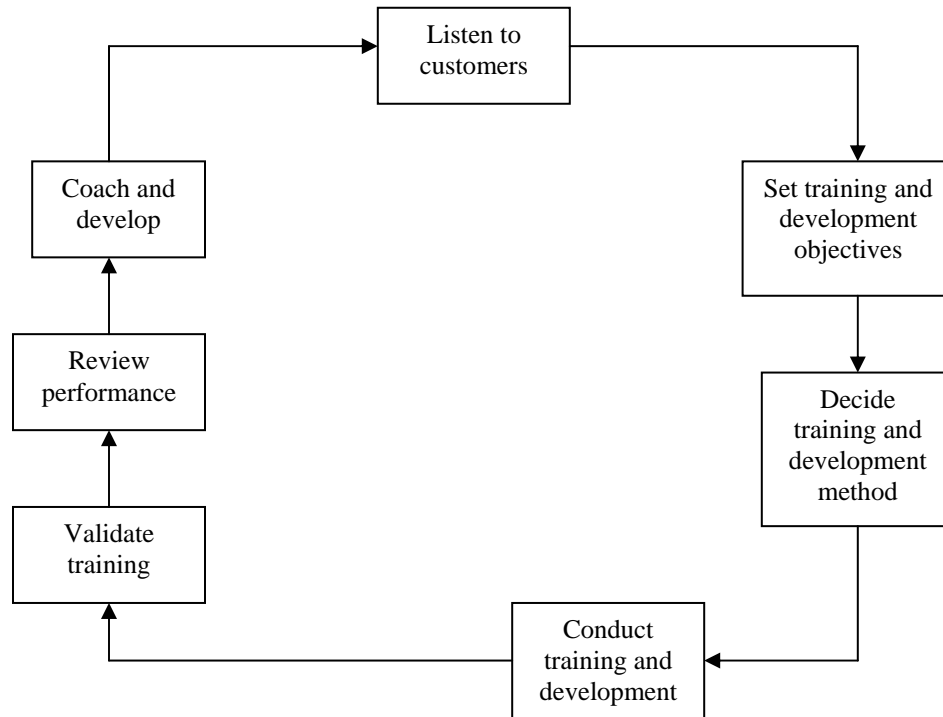
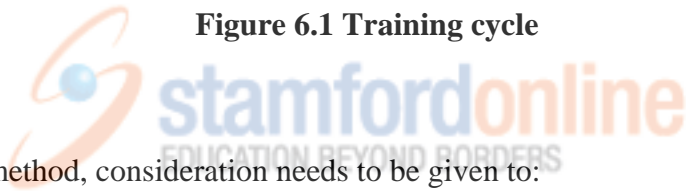


Figure 6.1 Training cycle



Before choosing a method, consideration needs to be given to:

- The learning to take place;
- Trainees' preferred learning style;
- Past experiences of training and development;
- Time available for training;
- Cost;
- Work environment;
- Degree of involvement required.

A lecture or prescribed reading, for example, involves a high degree of trainer/manager involvement, but little trainee participation. Discovery learning or work experience involves the trainee/manager setting a task, then a high degree of participation from the trainees themselves. The range of training methods is shown in Figure 6.2. In most companies the method selected for training and development in customer service is one which encourages participation, dialogue and debate.

Method	Medium	Level of Involvement
Telling and showing	Lecture Prescribed reading Demonstration Video Programmed learning	Trainer involvement high/ Trainee involvement low
Knowledge	Group instruction Workshop Discussion	
Discussion and Experience	Case study Exercise Role playing Business games Simulation	
Skill and understanding	Individual coaching Mentoring Computer-based training Open learning NVQs Work experience The real thing	Trainer involvement low/ Trainee involvement high

Figure 6.2 Range of training methods

Builders' merchants Wickes developed a modular computer-based training package aimed at improving employees' customer service. This was seen to be an effective option in a busy retail environment. Managers reinforced the training with one-to-one coaching and recognition of increased skills and knowledge was provided via certificates and badges and pays increase as each module was passed.

The Medical Information Department of Glaxo Wellcome undertook a programme of customer service training. Preceded by a customer satisfaction survey, the course was intended to give team members greater skills and knowledge of how to deal with customers. The programme was also aimed at generating greater awareness of customer requirements and a proactive approach to exceeding these.

Given the pressures of work and time constraints of a busy department, it was decided to run modular training sessions each week over a nine-week period. All department

members met at 8 am for a two-hour session, which was supplemented by ‘home work’ assignment each week. These were undertaken on topics related to the training and tackled on an individual and a group basis. The programme included areas such as:

- Creating a department customer service vision.
- Benchmarking customer service
- Setting customer service team objectives
- Customer handling skills
- Dealing with difficult customers
- Adding value to customers
- Identifying business opportunities
- Written communication skills
- Teamwork and customer service

Discussion was highly interactive and participative and led by the team coach and departmental manager. Each team member kept a learning log of the programme. Halfway through the modules and also at the end of the programme participants each presented their key learning points to the rest of the team. They also identified ways in which the programme could be continued through ongoing coaching and support.

The evaluation of the programme showed that the participative approach had helped not only develop the skills and knowledge of the team members and their attitudes towards the customer but had also created a greater sense of the team spirit – in spite of the early mornings!

