



*AADNS Staff Educator*

# Providing Good Customer Service



American Association of  
Directors of Nursing Services

# AADNS Staff Educator – Providing Good Customer Service

## Content Outline

- Customers are everyone with whom there is contact in the work setting, such as residents, families, visitors, vendors, neighbors in the community, and coworkers.
- Appearance and body language convey messages.
  - Components of good appearance
  - Positive and negative body language
- Components of courteous communication.
- Handling complaints.
- Importance of nursing assistants' recognition of the power they have in creating image about facility and the quality of its care.

## Related Learning Activities

*To reinforce the theory presented in this learning activity, learners can:*

- Describe their own positive and negative experiences as a customer
- Role-play situations that show positive and negative customer service examples

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Have you ever found yourself returning to the same restaurant even though there are other restaurants with similar food and prices and just as convenient a location? Or, despite all things being equal, do you shop at one store rather than another on a regular basis?

If you've answered yes, take a minute to consider why you select some businesses over others.

Often, though the product, price, quality, and location are similar, you are drawn to one business over another because of what you *experience*. If you're greeted with a friendly smile, treated courteously, offered the help you need, and given the message that you're important to the merchant, you leave with a positive feeling. You'll probably not hesitate to give the merchant your business again. You may recommend the business to your friends. And, if you do have an occasional problem, you'll probably show a little more understanding and patience because you know that this is not a normal occurrence.

### Customer Service in Long-Term Care Facilities

Restaurants and stores aren't the only settings in which customer service is important. Nursing homes and other healthcare settings *are* businesses. A large part of their business success depends on the quality of customer service they deliver. Without that success, they will not be able to offer services, pay salaries, and stay in business.

Everyone in the facility plays a part in customer service, but you carry an extra burden for this as you have more direct

contact with the facility's "customers" than any other employee. Being on the front line, you will spend more time with residents, come in contact with more visitors, and interact with more departments than any other category of employee.

You play an important part in creating the image of the facility that your customers carry away with them. Therefore, it is important that you understand and offer good customer service. Let's take a look at what that means.

### Who Is the Customer?

You can probably identify the primary customers in your facility as being *residents*. These are your most important customers, as they are the reason for your being employed. Without them, there would be no need for a long-term care facility or its staff.

But technically, a customer is anyone with whom you have any dealing in your work. That causes many people, other than residents, to be viewed as customers, including:

- Family and friends of residents
- Other visitors
- Vendors
- Neighbors in the community

In addition to the above list, there is another group whom you may not consider customers: *other employees of the facility*. Being helpful and respectful to coworkers is

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an important part of good customer service. In fact, promoting good attitudes and positive feelings among fellow employees can have a ripple effect in helping to improve attitudes and feelings shown toward residents.

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Everyone with whom you have contact in your work is a customer.

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### What Makes for Good Customer Service?

Take a look at the pictures of the two men below. If you had a question or needed some help, which one of them would you be most likely to approach?



Chances are, you would feel more comfortable approaching the man on the right. Without knowing either of these men and without hearing them say a word, you could make a judgment as to which would be easiest to speak to and most likely to assist you. This emphasizes the importance of *the impression you make when you have contact with someone*.

### Appearance and Body Language

Your appearance and body language send a message to others before you even open your mouth and without the person knowing anything about you.

You should always try to present a neat, well-groomed appearance. Your uniform should fit you properly and be clean. Extreme hairstyles are best for settings

outside of work. Hair should be prevented from falling in your eyes or face. Excessive jewelry is inappropriate, as it could scratch residents during caregiving and carry germs. Avoid gum chewing or eating in resident areas or when communicating with customers.

Your work is important and requires 100% of your attention. For this reason, using cell phones during the workday when you are on the unit is inappropriate. Even if it is your break time, when you are talking on the cell phone in resident areas it can give the impression to others that you are “goofing off” and not paying attention to residents.

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**Jot down the types of things that you think affect customer service:**

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The box on the next page lists some common behaviors that can communicate negative messages to others. With that list in mind, you may want to consider the following as you try to show a positive, helpful attitude:

- Face the person when speaking.
- Wear a smile.
- Make and keep eye contact during the conversation.
- Keep your hands to your side and avoid fidgeting.
- Respect the other person’s personal space by being close enough to be able to communicate without being so close as to make the person uncomfortable.

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### Negative Messages Our Behaviors Can Communicate

- Standing with hands on hips: aggression, impatience
- Rolling the eyes, looking around room, tapping a foot: boredom, impatience
- Arms crossed on chest: defensiveness, impatience, reluctance to talk
- Sitting with legs crossed, hands behind back and leaning back: superiority
- Tapping fingers on surface, fidgeting: impatience
- Playing with or rolling hair in fingers: insecurity
- Looking away during conversation: disinterest, disbelief
- Biting nails: nervousness, insecurity

### Courteous Communication

Most of us appreciate being treated courteously when we speak to another person. It makes us feel respected and valued. Chances are, we want to treat people politely in return.

The lack of courtesy in our communication can have many serious effects. Consider this example:

*A nursing assistant was standing at the nursing station talking to the unit clerk when a visitor approached. The two employees were in the middle of a conversation about weekend plans and both ignored the visitor. "Excuse me," the visitor interrupted, "I want to tell you—" Before the visitor could speak another word, the nursing assistant turned to him and said, "Can't you see we're talking? I'll be with you in a minute." Shaking her head, she turned her attention back to the unit clerk. The*

*visitor, upset at the way he was treated, quietly walked off the unit.*

*About five minutes later a loud yelling was heard at the end of the hall. The nursing assistant ran to see what was wrong and discovered that a resident had slipped on spilled water and seriously injured herself. "Where did all this water come from?" the nursing assistant asked. Another resident responded, "From the broken pipe. My husband just went to the nursing station to report it."*

*Perhaps if the visitor had been treated more politely he would have had more of an interest in reporting this problem and could have saved the resident from injury.*

As this example demonstrates, when communication breaks down, people not only feel bad but may not share important information. To avoid this, try to remember the following when you communicate:

- Use good body language that shows you are interested and approachable.
- Introduce yourself if the person doesn't know you.
- When possible, address residents, coworkers, and visitors by name.
- Speak clearly; avoid slang (such as *yeah, what's up, hey*).
- Speak on a level that is appropriate for the other person.
- Listen and hear what the person is saying. Don't assume beforehand that you know what the person is going to say.
- Try to "let the buck stop with you." Responding that something isn't your job doesn't tend to be helpful

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to the person who has the problem. Try to handle and help solve the problem. Don't offer excuses or complain about the facility or coworkers.

- If you can't attend to the request at the moment, politely tell the person you'll get to him in ten minutes (or other realistic amount of time). If you are unable to address the issue in a reasonable time, get help.
- Explain what you are going to do.
- If there is a complaint or matter that is getting out of hand, politely say, "I think it would be helpful if my supervisor could help us," and call your supervisor.
- Be patient, honest, and nonjudgmental.
- Try to say something positive to every person with whom you have contact.

### Handling Complaints

Long-term care facilities are fertile territory for complaints to arise. Residents are not at their best due to illness and disability, and chances are that a facility is not where they would prefer to reside. Family members are often stressed with the burden of having a loved one in a facility. In addition, you and your coworkers usually have heavy assignments, and when you are doing many things there is a greater chance of something going wrong.

One of the unfortunate realities about your work setting is that *you* are often the target of complaints. The resident is in pain due to her disease and blames you for not being able to make her comfortable. A resident's

son, feeling guilty about placing his father in the facility, reports you to the director of nursing services for ignoring his father when you don't answer the call light within two minutes. A coworker gets written up for lateness and begins complaining that you have an easier assignment. You may be totally innocent in these situations, but you are the target of the complaints. Not a fun place to be!

The box on the next page offers some tips for solving complaints.

#### Tips for Handling Complaints

- Listen to the complaint without interrupting the person.
- Try to clarify what the problem is. For example, Are you saying that your mother said she wasn't bathed today? Your husband's TV was broken?
- Do not react to emotionally charged comments. (For example, You people shouldn't even be able to work with animals. You're all lazy.)
- Focus on the issue, not personal criticisms.
- Acknowledge the person's feelings without placing blame. For example, you can respond, I can understand that it upsets you to see your husband's TV broken.
- Offer help in solving the problem. If you can't solve the problem right then or need to involve someone else, explain what your next step will be.
- Call your supervisor immediately if the situation gets out of hand.
- Follow up to make sure a solution has been found.
- Report all complaints to your supervisor.



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Your words and actions are extremely powerful. They represent the facility and give a strong message about the quality of care that is provided to residents. Be aware of the power you possess in the area of customer service and always put your best foot forward. And remember that satisfied customers help keep the facility in business and help you to have a job!

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It is not uncommon for you to be the target of complaints even when the problem isn't your fault.

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93% of our communication is nonverbal.

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Try to spread joy by saying at least one positive thing to every person you have contact with.

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### Knowledge Check

1. Customers are:
  - a. Residents
  - b. Visitors
  - c. Coworkers
  - d. All of the above
2. True or False: Most of our communication is nonverbal.
  - a. True
  - b. False
3. Standing with your hands on your hips can give the impression that you are:
  - a. Nervous
  - b. Insecure
  - c. Aggressive
  - d. Interested
4. The wife of resident Mr. Clark approaches you in an angry mood. She shouts, “The thieves on this staff have stolen my husband’s new sweater.” You try to calm her and offer to look for the sweater. She responds, “Why should I trust you? For all I know you could be one of the lying thieves who took it.” What is the best action for you to take?
  - a. Gently explain that she has no proof that the staff are thieves
  - b. Tell her firmly that if she calls you a thief again you will sue her
  - c. Tell her that you think it would be best if your supervisor were called
  - d. Announce for all the unit staff to come to Mr. Clark’s room and explain what could have happened
5. True or False: Looking away while someone is talking with you puts them at ease and allows them to communicate more openly.
  - a. True
  - b. False
6. Slang is helpful in communication in putting people at ease and should be woven into conversation whenever possible.
  - a. True
  - b. False
7. List four behaviors or displays of body language that can communicate negative messages:
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### Word Search

Find at least 10 words related to customer service

U	T	E	O	R	E	S	P	E	C	T	A
N	P	W	R	P	X	M	K	A	M	O	K
D	E	E	P	O	L	I	T	E	B	A	I
E	L	Y	E	I	A	L	I	S	T	E	N
R	I	S	M	I	L	E	V	C	R	A	D
S	C	O	U	R	T	E	S	Y	S	Z	N
T	U	L	Y	I	J	S	A	C	A	R	E
A	K	V	X	J	O	E	U	O	Z	U	S
N	H	E	L	P	F	U	L	H	W	T	S
D	P	N	P	O	S	I	T	I	V	E	X
M	S	U	P	P	O	R	T	X	I	A	U
P	A	T	I	E	N	C	E	W	A	F	O

### Telephone Courtesy

If you've ever been left on hold for what seemed to be an eternity or could not understand the person on the other end of the line when you telephoned a business for assistance, you can appreciate the impact that telephone communication can have on customers' impression of a business.

All employees need to promote a positive image of the facility by applying the principles of telephone courtesy:

- Answer the telephone within three rings.
- Speaking clearly and slowly, identify yourself and the location.
- Greet the caller, and when possible, acknowledge him or her by name.
- Wear a smile when speaking.
- Avoid jargon or slang terms, such as *They're in the ITC now* or *Okay honey*.
- Do not chew gum or eat while talking.
- Before placing the caller on hold, ask if it is convenient for the person to wait.
- Check on the status of holding calls frequently.
- Offer to take a message and be sure the person for whom the call was intended gets the message.
- Before transferring the call, tell the caller you are going to do so and give him the extension in the event you are accidentally cut off.
- If the caller has reached your number by mistake, help her to find the correct number.
- Return calls as promised.
- Do not give personal information about residents or employees to callers unless they are facility personnel who are known to you and who have the right to this information.
- Don't leave the phone off the hook so that the caller can hear conversations.
- Say goodbye before hanging up.

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### Knowledge Check Answers

1. D    6. B
2. A    7–10 See box on page 4
3. C
4. C
5. B

### Solution to Word Search

