



# Soft Skills Training Manual Sample



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# 1 Soft Skills for Supervisors

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Soft skills are often the most difficult skills to teach, supervise, and coach. Unlike technical skills where there are clearly outlined steps and buttons to press that always lead to the same results, soft skills are applied in unpredictable scenarios and do not necessarily end with the same results.

This chapter will discuss the keys to achieving excellence in customer service by utilizing the service mentality to ensure every interaction with internal (employee) and external customers is a positive one. Communication skills, such as active listening, and using positive language will be reviewed. Additionally, the cardinal rules of customer service and the steps to service recovery will be covered.

Unlike other chapters, the information presented here will be offered on two levels: for individual growth, and for coaching for success. The skills introduced should be mastered by the Supervisor, so they can be more successful in modeling the behavior, and coaching their staff in performing star-level customer service.

## 1.1 Excellence in Customer Service

What do we look for in our star agents? How do they exemplify excellence in customer service? Defining the actions we look for in a successful customer interaction is key. Being clear in the desired behaviors we would like the agents to exhibit will help them have well defined goals to work towards.

A star level customer service interaction exhibits the following.

- Going beyond what is expected
- Adding value and integrity to every interaction
- Doing ordinary things extraordinarily well
- Being at your best with every customer
- Treating every customer as they would their friends or family

In order to achieve this level of success in a customer interaction, we must begin with the mindset of wanting to provide top notch service. Remember that your attitude determines the level of service the customer receives. We are here to serve people. Although we do provide a service, as a municipality owned utility we also have the responsibility to provide service to the public we serve. Therefore it is important to start every interaction with a mental focus on service. Following we will discuss the key points to what makes up having the right service mentality.

## 1.2 The Service Mentality

The Service Mentality is comprised of seven key points. The agent on the call has to make the conscious decision to exhibit each of these key characteristics during every interaction with a customer. As a Supervisor, you should model the behavior you want to see in your employees on a daily basis. Coaching these behaviors becomes easier if they can see you displaying these traits whether when dealing with customers or staff members alike.

### Key Points of Service Mentality

- Empathy
- Enthusiasm
- Ownership
- Responsibility
- Adaptability
- Balance
- Resiliency

## 1.2.1 Empathy

Empathy is defined as having the capacity for understanding. Being aware of, and sensitive to the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of a customer. It is perhaps the most important behavior an agent should exhibit during a call with a customer. It sets the mood for the interaction at the very beginning just by using the right tone of voice. Showing empathy allows the agent to see the issue from the customer's point of view, and attempt to understand the feelings the customer is dealing with during the interaction. Empathy is different from sympathy in that you are being understanding of the feelings of others, but you are not internalizing those feelings as your own.

Dealing with difficult calls repeatedly can sometimes desensitize the call taker, making it difficult to show empathy towards the customer on the line. It is imperative that the agent make a conscious effort to treat every customer with the same level of empathy as the first call of the day. Remember, that this call may be your 30<sup>th</sup> today, but this is the only call for this customer. The customer expects to have a professional customer service experience, and that includes an empathetic agent on the line.

Being empathetic requires that you actively listen to the customer without interrupting them to clearly understand what the customer is upset about. Listen without judgment, and offer verbal cues in the form of empathetic statements so the customer feels heard. Some empathetic statements you could use are:

- *"I can understand how frustrating that could be."*
- *"I'm truly sorry to hear that."*
- *"Thank you for bringing this to our attention."*
- *"I really appreciate your patience while I resolve your issue"*
- *"I apologize for the inconvenience. I'll be happy to help you resolve this issue."*

However, empathy isn't just shown when there is something negative or sad stated by the customer. For example, if the customer mentions that they are moving into a new home they just purchased, this would be an appropriate time to interject with a simple, *"congratulations on your new home."*

Empathy isn't simply shown in the words you say, but in how you say it. Be sure that when speaking to the customer, the tone of voice is one that is friendly yet professional. It isn't enough to say that you are "happy to help" if your tone of voice sounds like you are bored or upset. Remember that during each customer interaction, you must make a conscious choice to make it an exceptional customer service experience.

### **What is an empathy statement?**

Empathy statements are short statements that communicate to the customer that you are completely focused on them and are taking responsibility to resolve their issue. It helps to create trust and build rapport with the customer.

### **Key components to an effective empathy statement**

In order for an empathy statement to be effective it needs to have three key components.

- Personal Pronouns
- Active Verbs
- Authenticity

When speaking of personal pronouns, it is important to use the words I and You especially when dealing with irate customers. Using personal pronouns lets the customer know that you are "personally" taking responsibility for the call and will do everything you can to resolve it.

Using active verbs indicates to the customer that action is taking place immediately. Instead of using passive verbs like "will be resolved" say "will ask our team to resolve this." By changing the verb to an active one, you are communicating to the customer that the issue is being worked on while on the call and not at some unknown future point in time.

Finally, in being authentic when you speak with the customer you are building a sense of trust. Be honest and let your personality shine through. You might need to communicate facts that the customer does not want to hear, but if you are honest with them directly, it will build trust instead of resentment when the customer challenges the information. When speaking try to be yourself, speak calmly, and use positive words.

*"18 Empathy Statements That Help Improve Customer-Agent Rapport" – CallCentreHelper.com, The Leading Contact Centre Magazine. Published on: 30<sup>th</sup> Nov 2016 – Last modified: 4<sup>th</sup> Nov 2019*

Below are some examples of empathy statements divided into types. This is a good starting point when needing to provide some examples while coaching your staff on what to say to customers during a call. Using these statements as guides will help the staff and you develop your own empathy statement inventory that you can pull from in the future.

### **Assessing the Situation**

1. *"Is there anything I can do for you today, big or small?"*
2. *"Can you tell me a little more about it, please?"*

In both of these statements the agent is requesting more information from the caller in order to truly understand what the real issue is, so they can better develop a solution. The key here is not just to ask the questions, but to listen attentively to the answers.

### **Clarifying the Situation**

3. *"I want to make sure that I really have an understanding of what you're telling me. I'm hearing that..."*
4. *"When I am done, if I got something wrong, I would appreciate it if you would correct me, if that is OK?"*

When using clarifying empathy statements, you are trying to dig deeper into the details of the problem. These statements serve two purposes. First, to reassure the customer that you are in fact listening to what they are saying by paraphrasing what they just said and asking for validation. Second, it allows you to confirm the information you just heard to make sure that you understand the problem at hand.

### **Reassuring the Customer**

Once you have clarified the matter and confirmed with the customer that you understand what they are asking, it is important to let the customer know that you take their call seriously and will work towards resolving the problem.

5. *"Thank you very much for alerting us about this..."*
6. *"I will help you get this issue resolved."*
7. *"You're absolutely correct, Mr./Ms. Xxxx..."*

Empathy statements will help reassure the customer that they have been heard, and you are now resolving their issue. Additionally, when appropriate adding reassuring sounds while the customer speaks will help them know that you are still on the line. Silence can sometimes be interpreted in a negative light as being ignored.

### Providing a Sense of Immediacy

Most callers spend considerable time on hold prior to being able to speak with an agent. Additionally, the customer has to spend more time explaining their situation. In order to appease the customer and help they feel like they are valued, it is important to provide them with a sense of immediacy.

8. *"I appreciate you bringing this to our attention, so that we can deal with this immediately."*
9. *"I can see where the problem is, Mr./Ms. Xxx..."*
10. *"What I'm currently doing to help you is..."*
11. *"This should be fixed by the end of the weekend, Mr./Ms. Xxx..."*

### Making a Commitment

Communicating to the customer that we are going to fix their issue immediately requires that you show a level of commitment. It is important to summarize the steps you will take to resolve the problem, and inform the customer of anything else they may be required to do on their end.

12. *"I will contact you as soon as we have had an update."*
13. *"I will work to resolve the problem. You just enjoy your (birthday/holidays/vacation, etc.), and I will be in touch shortly."*
14. *"Do let us know if you have any further questions, Mr./Ms. Xxx."*

### Maintaining Strong Customer Relations

There will be times when after talking through the solutions with the customer, they will still not be satisfied with the answers or solutions you provided. The customer will likely be vocal about their dissatisfaction and relay feedback to you. It is important to communicate to the customer that we take their concerns seriously and will consider their feedback. Remember that the goal is to ensure we retain the customer, so we have to work on restoring that relationship.

15. *"We always value customers who are keen to give us their feedback. I will be sure to pass on what you have told me to our managerial team."*
16. *"I have experienced a similar problem recently, so I understand what you are saying. Let me see what I can do to help you."*

### Closing the Call

When it comes to ending the call, it is imperative that you remember to use the same level of empathy as when you started. At this point in the call it is your responsibility to make the customer comfortable in voicing any other concerns and be satisfied with the service they received. Be mindful of your tone of voice and be respectful in the language you use.

17. *"Is there anything else that I can help you with today, Mr./Ms. Xxx?"*
18. *"Your satisfaction means everything to us. Have we covered everything that you wanted to discuss today?"*

Using an empathetic statement in your closing will illustrate to the customer your willingness to help them in the future and helps build the relationship with the customer. Using the word "us" ties in the entire organization as being a part of the solution.

## 1.2.2 Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm is described as bringing an observable high level of energy or interest to a project or situation. Generally when we begin our work days we put forth a high energy level when dealing with customers and coworkers alike. Unfortunately, as the day wears on, we tend to lose energy and show waning enthusiasm levels. Speaking to the customer while showing low energy and enthusiasm will make them feel as though you are uninterested in helping them. In order to avoid losing that energy, we must commit to provide the same level of enthusiastic service to our last call as our first.

Showing enthusiasm does not mean being over the top energetic. Expressing too much enthusiasm can also have a negative impression on the customer. Exaggerated volume, tone, or tempo when speaking can set the wrong tone for the conversation and lead to misunderstandings in intentions. Remember that making a conscious effort to regulate the energy you exude in each interaction will give you greater control over the results of the call. The customer is expecting to speak with someone who is energetic and ready to help. As the call taker you should strive to show a professional, energetic enthusiasm that signals the customer that you are present for them and ready to handle whatever issue they need help with.

## 1.2.3 Ownership

Taking ownership of a call means that you are possessing the commitment to solve a problem or you can steer it to someone who will. When a customer calls in with an issue they expect the person on the line to be able to help them. After waiting on a long hold, the customer does not want to hear that the agent is unable or unwilling to help them. It is imperative that the agent make the customer feel like their issue is not only important to them, but that the issue will be resolved without having to be transferred or having to call back.

The call belongs to you the moment you answer it. You are representing OUC and the customer expects you to be able to help them. Take ownership of the issue and do everything in your power to resolve it. It is okay if you need to research the account, do analysis, or get more information. However, don't pass the call on when it is something that you can resolve. It shouldn't take two people to provide good customer service.

In the case that you cannot resolve the issue yourself, explain to the customer that you will take down all of the information and provide it to the correct party and have them call the customer back. This is still taking ownership of the call, as you are doing all you can for the customer prior to completing that call.

## 1.2.4 Responsibility

At OUC it is expected that you live up to any previously agreed upon commitments. This is called taking responsibility. Whether you are dealing with internal or external customers, it is crucial that you live up to your commitments by being responsible and following through. Remember that following through with call backs, emails, research for a customer, or even just being on time for your shift are key to showing your commitment to your job. Being responsible is key to your success and to providing excellent customer service.

## 1.2.5 Adaptability

In the world of customer service we deal with changing situations constantly. Having the flexibility to effectively deal with different types of customers and situations is key to providing star level customer service. Exhibiting adaptability in your handling of customers and challenging calls will show the customer that you are able to help them solve any situation.

Working in customer service you will be in contact with customers of all age groups, ethnicities, nationalities, educational, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This means that at times you might struggle understanding what is being said on the line due to many factors; i.e. accents, speed, language being used, a bad connection, or noise on the line, etc. On the other hand, the customer might struggle understanding you due to similar factors. It is important to be adaptable in these situations so that you can find a way to communicate clearly with the customer in order to help them with their issue.

Be sure to keep an open mind and focus on helping the customer. Adapt to the situation at hand and find ways to resolve the issues for the customer. Being flexible in your approach and offering options will make the interaction more efficient and will make the customer service experience a positive one.

### **1.2.6 Balance**

It is important to achieve balance when resolving a customer issue. We must have the capacity to successfully satisfy the customer while taking into account the resources and needs of your organization. When working to resolve an issue for a customer it can be difficult to find a solution that is fair to both the customer and OUC. It is your job as the representative to find solutions that are fair and balanced in order to ensure the customer is satisfied with the results, but OUC is also protected from loss.

At times when dealing with an irate customer our instinct is to want to give them what they want in order to make the customer happy. However, the situation is rarely that simple. A full analysis of the account and the issue must take place to determine what the cause of the issue is and what OUC is responsible for, so you can make recommendations. There will be times where the error was made by OUC and there are steps you can take to rectify the situation. However, there are other times where the customer is responsible for the issue and OUC is in no part responsible. This is why it is extremely important to do a thorough analysis prior to suggesting possible solutions to the issue. In either case, it is important to find a balanced solution so that both the customer and OUC are satisfied with the outcome.

One of the greatest needs of the customer is to feel like they have been heard and treated fairly. Keep in mind that the agent has to operate within OUC policies and guidelines. The secret to balance is knowing that you can always acknowledge the feelings of the customer even if you disagree with the facts they are conveying. Remember that acknowledgement does not constitute agreement. You can acknowledge the feelings, then move on with the facts and reach an agreement that is balanced and fair.

### **1.2.7 Resiliency**

Working in customer service can be challenging at times. It is therefore very important to have the ability to bounce back from adversity. Being resilient is a trait found in star customer service providers. Resiliency allows the representative to be able to bounce back from a difficult call, to handle the next call with a fresh perspective and positive attitude. Resiliency is seen in people who can remain calm in difficult situations and recover quickly from crisis. We need to be able to bounce back emotionally and professionally so that we do not take it out on the next customer.

Coaching staff members on developing a Service Mentality is an important task for all Supervisors. It is not necessary to teach all of the key points together to help an agent improve. Simply coach the individual on the key points that they are weakest on and help them build on their skills. It would be beneficial to make these characteristic traits a part of the group culture on the floor, and make it a part of the everyday mentality by keeping it fresh in everyone's minds. Find ways to remind your staff of the importance of keeping a Service Mentality and the skills they should practice to meet those standards.

## **1.3 Effective Communication**

Communication is comprised of more than just the words conveyed either in writing or spoken. When speaking with a customer or a staff member there are several factors of vocal communication that come into play when conveying a message. The way you say something will often change the meaning of the words spoken simply by using the wrong tone of voice. There are four aspects of vocal communication to keep in mind when working on becoming an effective communicator.

- **Tempo**

How fast or slow you speak can make the message you are trying to give to the customer either clearer or more confusing. You should take care not to speak too quickly so as to confuse the customer when giving them several pieces of information at once. Take your time so they can clearly understand what you are explaining to them. However, do not speak too slowly as that might show a lack of urgency or interest in your part. The customer might take your slow speed as a lack of interest in your part.

- **Volume**

How loud or soft your voice is when speaking can make it difficult for the customer to understand what you are saying. If you are too soft spoken, the person on the other side of the phone would likely have difficulty hearing all of the important information you are explaining to them. On the other hand, being too loud can be seen as aggressive or threatening. Do your best to keep an even volume level so that your voice carries clearly over the line and the customer can hear every word you say.

- **Inflection**

The natural rise and fall in your voice can change the meaning of what you say from a statement to a question. Remember that raising the inflection at the end of a sentence will make it sound like a question, leading the customer to think that you are not sure as to the information you provided. For example, saying "*you should be getting this at the end of the week,*" with normal inflection is a statement of fact. However, if you say "*you should be getting this at the end of the week?*" with rising inflection at the end sounds like you aren't quite sure if that is a fact or a best guess.

- **Tone**

The tone in your voice sets the mood for the interaction. It is seen as the attitude behind what you are saying. There are times where saying the same statement, but changing the tone of voice completely changes the meaning behind the statement. We must always be aware of our tone of voice when speaking with customers, so as to not give the wrong impression. For example, saying something as simple as "*thank you for holding,*" if said with a sarcastic tone will send the message to the customer that you don't really mean it and often make the customer feel uncomfortable before even beginning their conversation with you.

Tone is a skill that can be practiced and learned. Sometimes a person may have a natural tone that sounds more aggressive than friendly to others. That person may not, in fact, be angry at the time but it is just how they sound. In that case, this person would have to make the conscious effort to work on their tone to make it sound more friendly and approachable. For example, smiling, even though customers cannot see your face, can also positively impact your mood and tone. If you find yourself becoming tense due to a difficult situation, take a moment to breathe, which can help calm you down and keep your tone even and consistent.

It is often said that ten percent of conflict is due to a difference of opinion, but 90% is due to the wrong tone of voice. This is why it is so important to be aware of the tone of voice we are using when speaking with a customer. It is easy to escalate an argument by simply expressing your message with an aggressive or callus tone of voice. If the customer hears what they perceive to be an "angry" voice on the phone they are more likely to become more aggressive in response.

Don't just watch what you say. Watch **how** you say it.

Whether you are speaking with a customer on the line, you are addressing a coworker, or a staff member, keep in mind that your tempo, volume, inflection, and tone of voice will set the expectations and mood of the person receiving your message. Pick your words wisely, but pick your tone even more carefully. Simply by making a conscious decision to use a professional and friendly tone of voice can set the listener at ease and make them more receptive to your message.

## 1.4 Listening Skills

Working in the customer service industry, listening skills are of supreme importance. Being an effective listener means that you listen with the intent to understand, instead of the intent to reply. Many times we as individuals become distracted as we listen to others speak. Losing your train of thought, thinking of what your response may be, or even thinking of something altogether unrelated to what the customer is saying can be problematic resulting in having to ask the customer repeatedly to explain their situation. The customer can easily become upset and frustrated when they feel they aren't being heard, their needs are not being addressed, and they think they are being ignored by the agent.

As a Supervisor, when coaching your staff on their listening skills it is important to help them understand the different types of listening skills and how to apply them while speaking with a customer. Effective listening will lead to a more successful call resolution, as they will be able to get to the root of the problem and help the customer resolve the issue.

### 1.4.1 Listening Skill Types

There are two types of listening skills: passive and active. **Passive listening** is a simple way of communicating to the customer that you are listening and paying attention. This is important because we want the customers to feel that they are being heard, and that we care about their issue. It starts with listening and being engaged in the conversation. Since they cannot see our body language cues, such as, nodding or smiling in response to their statements, it is important to use verbal cues to let them know that we are in fact listening.

Some phrases, or verbal nods you can use as part of passive listening include:

- *"I see..."*
- *"I understand..."*
- *"Perfect..."*
- *"Okay..."*
- *"Yes..."*

**Active listening** demonstrates or confirms to the customer that you understood what was said. In this type of listening, you are listening with intent. This requires your undivided attention and it is helpful to use clarifying questions to ensure that you understood the situation. Some clarifying phrases you may use:

- *"If I heard you correctly, you would like to know..."*
- *"Let me see if I understood you correctly; you need..."*
- *"Absolutely, I can assist you with ..."*

### 1.4.2 How to Become an Active Listener

**When someone is speaking, put a premium on "being present."** It's easy to be present when there is a face to face conversation. But how can you be present over the phone? That's when your passive listening skills come to play. Letting the customer know you are listening to them and paying attention is important to reassuring the customer they are being listened to.

**Don't allow distractions, even in an open floor call center.** There is a lot of movement, TVs monitors, conversations, and many other things happening at the same time. Your customer should always be your #1 priority. Create an invisible "bubble" where you don't allow any distractions to interfere between you and your customer.

**Avoid judgment and criticism at all times.** You will speak with people from different levels of education, background, ethnicity, and ages. It is up to you to adapt to them and treat them with the same care as you would treat your closest friend or relative.

**Allow the other person to explain the situation.** Don't try to jump in and finish the customer's sentence. Allow them to state their question/issue or concern without interruption. Their issue might not be what you assumed it would be.

**Don't get pulled into responding emotionally.** Sometimes customers might be upset when communicating with you. Don't take things personally and remember that you are not being personally attacked. Try to be compassionate and understand their needs so that you can better assist them.

**Don't change the subject or move in a new direction.** Have you ever talked to someone where you are sharing something personal that happened to you and suddenly they say something completely unrelated like, "I like your shoes?" How would that make you feel? The first reaction is thinking that you are being ignored and the other person wasn't listening to a word you said. This is precisely what the customer would experience if you were to change the subject abruptly when they are trying to explain something to you over the phone. Allow the customer to explain the situation without interruptions or changing the subject. Instead, as you listen to them ask questions that are relevant to the situation and that address the issue in question.

### 1.4.3 Listening Skills Key Points

When dealing with a call, always make the dedicated effort to be present. Start off with the decision to be an active listener. Take ownership of the issue by reassuring the customer that you will help them. Remember to concentrate on what they are saying so that you get the details, and keep an open mind. Jumping to conclusions will only derail the flow of the call. Make sure you give verbal feedback to the caller so they know you are listening. Take notes as necessary so you don't have to ask the same question twice.

- **Decide to be a better listener.** Hearing is physical; listening is intellectual.
- **Welcome the caller.** "You've called the right place."
- **Concentrate.** Focus; avoid distractions.
- **Keep an open mind.** Don't jump to conclusions.
- **Give feedback that you're listening.** Use a variety of verbal cues.
- **Take notes.** Have paper and pen by every phone. Repeat or rephrase the message back to the caller.

## 1.5 Positive Mental Attitude

Attitude, whether positive or negative, is contagious. If a person at work is constantly complaining, blaming others for their problems, treating others disrespectfully, and/or ignores others when they speak, it will lead others to take on that negativity as well. However, if that same person were to come to work with a positive attitude, using positive talk, taking responsibility and ownership for any issues, treating everyone with respect, and listening intently to everyone, then that positivity would spread. A positive mental attitude can set the stage for success.

It is very easy to spout positivity and post messages about having a positive attitude. However, putting that positive attitude into practice can be difficult at times. A positive mental attitude provides you with a tendency to perceive the benefits and opportunities in situations rather than focusing on potential setbacks. Having a positive mental attitude can influence every aspect of your life. Being in control of your emotions will help you to have more effective conversations/interactions with your customers, coworkers, and staff members.

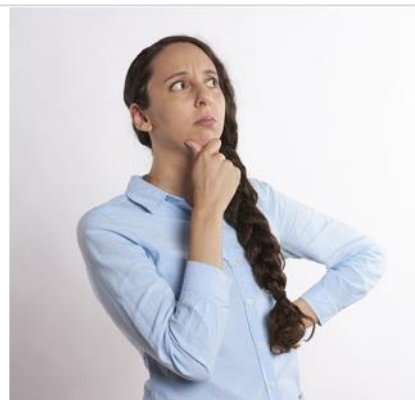
## 1.5.1 How to Reprogram Your Mind for Positive Thinking

(Based on the video by Brendon Burchard)

The recurring thoughts that plague our minds on a daily basis are primarily unconscious; meaning that we don't actively decide what we are thinking at every moment of every day. These unconscious thoughts are primarily preprogrammed responses we have created through past experiences. The consistency, importance, and duration of the events and corresponding thoughts have programmed these thoughts as automatic responses when faced with similar situations. For example, if every time you leave work and get on the highway you end up stuck in traffic, the feelings are generally those of frustration and anger, and your thoughts are very negative, then your thoughts will be programmed to automatically become negative the moment you get in your car after leaving the office regardless of the road conditions that day.

The way thoughts are programmed in your mind is by the relative weight of importance we give the thought and the duration of the thought and event. Motivational speaker and performance expert Brendon Burchard calls it **RWID**: **r**elative **w**eight of **i**mportance and **d**uration. Let's consider the first part of that equation: weight of importance. Sometimes we give a high level of importance to a relatively small issue.

- **R** – Relative
- **W** – Weight
- **I** – of Importance
- **D** – and Duration



*Figure 1 Burchard's RWID Equation*

For example, you might become extremely upset at how long someone is taking with their coffee order at the coffee shop. In the big scheme of things, the extra minute or two isn't going to make a huge impact in your life. However, you have decided to give it a high level of importance and are focusing all of your energy into negative thoughts during the event. By giving it a higher level of importance your mind is weighing this event and its negative thoughts as something it should remember in future.

The second part of that equation is duration (or repetition). If this type of event happens several times, in other words, its duration is increased, it will cement the response in your mind. Once your mind programs itself to respond negatively to being in line at the coffee shop, then every time you are in the same situation your mind will immediately turn on the negative thoughts. If you take a moment right now and think of similar situations, you will find that you can think of at least two situations where your thoughts are automatically set to negative even before the action takes place.

### How do we change our programmed thoughts?

The first step in making a change to your programmed, negative thoughts is to become aware of them. You need to pay attention to what you are thinking at the time. Focus on what your mind is telling you when you are experiencing a negative feeling or event. Ask yourself what your thoughts mean and if they even truly apply to the situation at hand. Focus on the language you are using in your thoughts. Are they purposefully negative? Do they need to be? The more we notice what we are thinking about the more control we have to redirect it towards a positive one.

Once you are aware of the negative self-talk, make the conscious decision to give positive thoughts a sense or feeling of importance. In other words, give the positive thought the weight of importance that it deserves pulling it away from the negative. Remember the RWID programming formula? Give the positive thought the relative weight of importance that it needs to tell your mind that this needs to be programmed and add the duration to make it permanent. How would this happen? Simply put, replace that negative thought with a positive alternative, and give it the same weight of importance and emphasis as you did the negative. For example, let's say while waiting in line behind the person at the coffee shop the negative thought was *"I always get stuck behind unprepared people! Why me?!"* How would you change this thought?

In order to change that thought first become aware of your thought in the first place. Did you think that even before the person in front of you began their order? At times the negative thought is there even before anything happens because it was programmed to be expected in a given situation. Yes, it might be the case that the person in front of you is unprepared, but it won't *always* be the case. The fact that you thought it enough times and gave it so much weight of importance made it now a preprogrammed response. Next, you will have to decide on a positive thought to replace it. Let's say in this example we change it to, *"The coffee here is so good that it's worth the wait."*

Changing the negative to a positive thought isn't as simple as just replacing what you are saying. For it to be a permanent change you must give it the weight of importance that it requires. In other words, mean it and believe it with as much emphasis and emotion as you did the negative thought. Pick a positive thought you can really get behind and give it the importance it needs to tell your mind to program it. However, that is just one part of the equation. It also requires duration. In other words, you need to repeat this behavior/thought over and over in order for it to be cemented into your mind and the new programmed response to this situation.

#### **How to redirect our thoughts from negative to positive.**

We cannot control what happens around us or to us, but we can control how we react to any given situation. Having a positive mental attitude doesn't mean that we never have negative thoughts, or that we are never allowed to be unhappy. What it does mean is that we make the conscious choice to take control of our thoughts and chose to be positive in as many of our interactions as possible.

Here are some tools we can use to help keep us in control of our positivity. A good way to take control of your thoughts is to ask yourself directed questions that require positive answers. In other words, if you find yourself in a negative frame of mind and are having a difficult time changing your perspective to a positive one, stop and ask yourself a set of questions that require you to think of positive responses. For example, come up with five questions that you can ask yourself at any given time. Here are a few sample questions to get you started.

- What am I grateful for in my life and/or job right this moment?
- How could I make my day more fun right now?
- How can I demonstrate love and/or encouragement to another person right now?
- Is there something I could do to give someone a happy surprise today?

Create questions that are meaningful to you and either save them on your phone, email them to yourself, put them on a post it and stick it on a wall where you can see them. Have the questions available to you at any moment. Taking a couple of minutes to change your frame of mind will help you refocus on the positive and help you let go of the negative stress of the current situation.

Another wonderful tool at your disposal are personal affirmation statements. This might seem as something not that important, but it will help you refocus your mind. Write down three words that describe positive qualities you possess. For example, you might say *"I'm smart, efficient, and very funny."* Sometimes we get caught up in the hustle and bustle of the business day, being constantly berated by irate customers and you need a gentle reminder of who you really are. Add these words as a reminder alert in your phone, or post them up by your computer screen. Whenever you find yourself letting all the negative comments directed at you start to drag you down the path to negative thought look at those words. Remind yourself of your own best qualities. Don't forget your self-worth. Re-energizing yourself with positive affirmations will allow you to brush away those attacks and realize that the customers aren't really angry at you personally, but at the situation. Get back on track with a positive attitude and solve the problem.

Finally, don't forget to take action. Faking it until you make it is just that, fake. You should take deliberate actions with full intention. Choosing to be positive everyday means taking action every day. Use the tools available to you so that you can control what your mind thinks. Direct your thoughts to positivity. By choosing to be positive, you take control of the situation and are able to better help the customer through any issue.

### 1.5.2 Using Positive Language

Having a positive mental attitude doesn't just relate to your thoughts; it also should be reflected in what you say and how you say it. Avoiding negative language can make the experience better for both the customer and the agent. By avoiding negative or hesitation related words or phrases it conveys the message to the customer that you are not only taking ownership of the issue, but that you are confident that you will be able to resolve it.

Changing negative speech is a difficult task, as we use negative talk in our daily lives. In order to avoid using negative language you will need to make the conscious decision to use a positive phrase where you would normally use a negative one. This process may seem difficult at first, but with practice it will become part of your positive mental attitude and a habit you will use in every aspect of your life.

When faced with a situation where you would ordinarily use a negative or hesitant phrase or statement, make the decision to convey the information in a positive way instead. This takes practice so think of alternatives to the most common negative responses you routinely have to give a customer on any given day. Below are some examples of the top five forbidden negative phrases and how you can replace them with a positive phrase instead.

#### Five Forbidden Phrases:

- **"I DON'T KNOW"**: Replace with: "That's a great question! Let me check and find out."
- **"WE CAN'T DO THAT"**: "Replace with: "Here's what we can do." Offer a positive alternative.
- **"YOU'LL HAVE TO..."**: Replace with: "You'll need to..." Take orders rather than give them.
- **"JUST A SECOND"**: Replace with: "Are you able to hold?" Wait for a response.
- **"NO"**: Think before you answer. Eliminate the "NO" and begin with the next word.

### 1.6 Six Cardinal Rules of Customer Service

Often times the cardinal rules in customer service may seem like common sense, but ironically enough, that is precisely why it's easy to forget them. Sometimes we take certain behaviors for granted, and forget to pay attention to ensure that we are not forgetting to keep to these rules. Below we will discuss the six cardinal rules of customer service. Following these rules will help you provide excellent customer service by putting the customer first.

1. **People Before Busy Work**: Give the customer or visitor your complete attention. Remember that the customer or visitor always comes before busy work or any other task. When you focus on the task instead of the customer it makes the customer feel like they aren't important to you.

2. **Don't Rush Customers:** Learn how to redirect callers. Take time to get all the information. Callers feel threatened when rushed. Avoid rushing your customers and coworkers. If you are naturally a fast talker, try to match the tempo of the customer. Give your customers the time they need to explain their situation.
3. **Be Friendly Before You Know Who It Is:** Treat all callers equally, whether they are your friend or a complete stranger. Make an effort to show your personality to avoid being perceived as cold or rude on the phone. Remember to be friendly and professional when speaking to a customer or a coworker. Customers will mirror the way they are treated, so treat them as you would a friend or family member.
4. **Don't Be Too Busy To Be Nice:** Don't give short, one word answers, or be abrupt with customers or coworkers. This type of communication style will signal the customer that you don't value their business enough to spend the time to have a professional conversation with them. Give each call the attention it deserves and keep your sense of humor. Just because you are busy doesn't mean that you have to be rude and short with the caller.
5. **Don't Use Military Language On Civilians:** There is nothing more frustrating than calling a customer service line with an issue and speaking with someone that uses jargon and internal acronyms to answer your questions. Using that type of language ends up confusing and frustrating the customer. Use easy, understandable words. Avoid using company jargon on customers and new employees. Explain unfamiliar words and terms.
6. **Be Personally Accountable – Don't Pass The Buck:** Take ownership; be accountable and responsible. Remember your ABCs – don't accuse, blame, or complain. Always seek solutions and don't be afraid to accept responsibility.

Keeping the customer in mind and making them a priority will help the call be more successful and efficient. Remember that you are building a relationship with the customer and representing OUC. It is up to you to make the customer feel important, heard, and ultimately resolve their issue.

## 1.7 Six Steps to Service Recovery

What is service recovery? Service recovery is the strategy we use to solve a customer's problem and retain them. Why would we need a strategy? Simply put, because sometimes things go wrong and we need to be able to fix the situation for the customer in a way that they will be happy to remain with our company. There are six simple steps you can follow to recover a customer after a negative experience. When the customer contacts you, follow these steps to help you guide the call down a positive and productive path.

### Six Steps to Service Recovery

1. Respond Rapidly
2. Take Ownership
3. Apologize Sincerely
4. Solve the Problem
5. Manage the Feelings
6. Verify Satisfaction

When taking a call, respond rapidly. Welcome the customer, listen to their concerns, and let them know they are in the right hands. Take ownership of the issue(s) at hand and communicate that to the customer. It is as simple as saying, "I'll be happy to resolve that for you." If something has gone wrong for the customer do apologize **sincerely**. Nothing is worse than listening to someone say they are sorry when you can tell by their voice that they don't mean it. Saying I apologize is more meaningful than just saying I'm sorry, so make your apology count. Apologizing does not mean accepting guilt. You can apologize for the inconvenience they are dealing with, or the long wait, and still not take blame for the issue at hand. Most importantly, during **this call** solve their problem. Don't ask them to call back, don't transfer them, don't put them on never ending holds, just solve their problem as efficiently as possible.

In dealing with an unhappy customer with an issue that needs to be resolved, remember to also manage their feelings. Use your empathy. Listen carefully to what the customer is saying and respond accordingly. Offer words of sympathy or support as appropriate. Once the issue has been resolved and before finishing the call, verify with the customer that they are satisfied with the resolution. If the customer gives you a rating less than perfect, always ask what you could have done to earn a higher rating, then see if it is something you could do right now for them. If what they ask for is within OUC's scope, and a reasonable action, do what you can to satisfy the customer's request. In the end, we want the call to be a success for both the customer and OUC.