

Task 15:

Dealing with conflict

To complete this task you will look at how to deal with customer conflict and complaints effectively, as well as why it's so important to resolve them positively whenever possible. Dealing with challenging customers can be difficult, but if you handle the situation well, you might even be able to improve your organisation's relationship with them and create opportunities for doing further business.

When completing this task, you will need to:

- think about how you communicate with customers, and how to do so appropriately
- research ways of remaining calm and patient in challenging situations, and explain why it's so important
- find out what records your organisation keeps of customer issues and their resolutions, as well as how to use them correctly
- consider when you can deal with situations and when you need to refer them
- complete case studies detailing what you would do in particularly challenging customer situations
- give examples of how you have dealt with tough situations in your own role, and evaluate how you did.

Key terms

Challenges – tests of abilities or resources in a demanding situation.

Conflict – a state of disagreement between different people or groups.

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Relation to the standards

In this task, you will be looking at how you can increase the likelihood of resolving a conflict in a positive way through the language that you use, by following set organisational procedures and by being proactive about seeking a solution that suits everyone.

As part of this task you will be working towards demonstrating the following skills, knowledge or behaviour:

Knowledge:

By completing this task you should be working towards showing that you understand the different needs and priorities of your customers and know the best way to manage their expectations, recognising how to adapt your style to be effective.

Skills:

By completing this task you should demonstrate that you can:

- handle customer objections in a positive and professional manner
- remain calm and patient at all times when dealing with challenging customer situations
- demonstrate sensitivity to, and interest in, customers' concerns
- communicate in a clear and coherent manner the next steps and/or options to meet the needs and expectations of customers
- resolve customer conflicts and/or challenges in line with the relevant organisational policies and/or procedures
- keep customers informed of progress while resolving issues
- maintain accurate records of customer issues and progress to resolution.

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Behaviours:

By completing this task you should be showing that you can:

- take ownership from beginning to end, building and maintaining a relationship with the customer
- recognise the importance of good customer service to the customer and in turn the organisation, making contact as promised, referring to others as necessary with all required detail, and following up to ensure a conclusion is reached.

Distinction

As part of working towards **distinction** level, the Customer Service Practitioner standards require you to be able to:

- provide appropriate explanations to customers in situations where a mutually beneficial outcome cannot be reached
- take ownership of customer issues, taking the appropriate actions to ensure customers' needs and expectations are met.



Suitable evidence

Suitable evidence to support the achievement of these outcomes could include:

- Witness statements.
- Written and/or digital communication.
- Coaching/observation.
- Mystery shop report.
- Call recording.
- Customer feedback, commendation, survey, etc.
- Referral/handover documentation.
- Case summaries.
- Complaints log.



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Preparatory activities

1. List the main methods of communication (eg phone, email) that you use to communicate with customers. Give an example of when you might use each method, explaining why this is the best one to use.

| Method used | When I would use this method | Why this is the best method |
|-------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

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2. Whichever communication method you use with customers, choosing the right language is important in handling complaints. You always need to be positive and professional. Look at the comments below and write an alternative comment in the right-hand column that would have the same meaning, but would be more positive and professional.

Original comment

Positive and professional comment

All right, darling? What can I do you for?

Good morning, madam. How can I help you today?

No worries, love!

Sure thing, mate. Anything else?

I've got no idea what you're on about.

No, sorry. Not following. Slow it down a touch, will you?

That's not my problem though, is it?

Don't shout at me, it's not my fault the system mucked up your order ... !

3. Research different strategies for remaining calm in difficult situations. Write a paragraph summarising the most useful strategies here.

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6. Make a list of the types of records and documentation that are kept by your organisation, which detail customer issues and their resolutions.

7. Explain why it is important that these records are maintained and kept up-to-date, why they need to be accurate, and why they need to be completed in accordance with the principles of the Data Protection Act.



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Knowledge application

Give **at least three** specific examples of entries that you have personally made in your organisation's customer issues and resolutions records. Remember not to use any names.

Give a more detailed example of an occasion when you have **taken ownership** of a customer issue and **needed to refer** to a colleague or line manager.

What was the problem?

Was there any sort of resolution you could provide without having to refer it to someone else?

What resolution was provided by your colleague or manager, following the referral?

Why was this solution the most appropriate?

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Give an example of an occasion when you have **taken ownership** of a customer issue and resolved it **without the need to refer** it to a colleague or line manager.

What was the problem?

What resolution did you provide?

What other resolutions did you consider?

Why was the solution you provided the most appropriate?

List the kinds of resolutions you can and cannot offer as part of your role.

Resolutions I can offer...

Resolutions I cannot offer...

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Case study 1

You are working in a small post office where you are the only member of staff on counter duty, and there are a number of customers waiting to be dealt with. Conflict arises between two customers who both insist they are next in the queue. The customers are both becoming angry, and their words and actions are becoming threatening.

What communication strategies would you use to ensure that the situation does not get out of hand?

How would you deal with the situation in a way that would ensure that the needs and expectations of all the customers are met? What next steps or options would you suggest?

Are there any procedures or policies for dealing with a similar situation in your organisation? If yes, describe them here.

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Case study 2

One of your most important customers has just walked into your office unannounced and burst into an angry rant because your organisation has failed to make a delivery on time. Because of this, the customer was unable to demonstrate a key product, which meant that he lost an important sale.

What communication strategies would you use to ensure that the situation does not get out of hand?

How would you deal with the situation in a way that would ensure that the needs and expectations of the customer are met?

Are there any procedures or policies for dealing with a similar situation in your organisation? If yes, describe them here.



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Case study 2 continued

You do your best to reason with the customer, but nothing you say helps the situation. The customer only gets angrier, shouting accusations and flying further into a rage. Within a few minutes he walks out, vowing never to do business with your organisation again.

What next steps or options would you suggest to retain the customer's business? When and how often would you make contact with the customer regarding the resolution of the issue?

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Case study 3

A customer has returned a desk lamp by post, which they purchased online three weeks previously from your organisation. Your customer returns policy says that returns will be acknowledged within five working days.

Your colleague dealing with this return has sent the following email to the customer:

'We acknowledge receipt of one desk lamp model ASP45, purchased 21st April. Thank you for doing business with us.'

The customer telephones, saying they are not satisfied with this response. Your colleague states that he has dealt with the return in line with the stated company policy. You are tasked with resolving the conflict between the customer and your colleague.

Do you think your colleague has dealt with the return in line with the company's stated policy? Give reasons for your answer.

How would you word an email to a customer in a similar situation?

How would you deal with the situation in a way that would ensure that the needs and expectations of the customer are met? What communication strategies would you use? What next steps or options would you suggest?

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Are there any procedures or policies for dealing with a similar situation in your organisation? If yes, describe them here.

When and how often would you make contact with the customer regarding the resolution of the issue? At what stage(s) of handling the return would you update them?



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The following template has been left blank for you to fill in, describing a situation that you have dealt with by yourself in your own organisation.

Describe the situation you faced, and the customer complaint or conflict.

What communication strategies did you use to ensure that the situation did not get out of hand? How did you ensure that you remained calm and patient?

Which organisational procedures or policies did you follow as part of finding a resolution?

What resolution did you provide? Did it meet the needs and expectations of the customer? What next steps or options did you suggest (if any)?

What other resolutions did you consider?

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Why was the solution you provided the most appropriate?

If you could not resolve the issue immediately and had to follow up the complaint, when and how often did you make contact with the customer regarding resolution of the issue?

Review how well you think the situation you have just outlined was resolved. Is there anything you could have done differently to get a better result?

Think about the organisational procedures and processes you followed. Would you recommend any changes to them that might produce a more satisfactory outcome for the customer and/or the organisation?



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Describe a situation where you demonstrated sensitivity to, and interest in, a customer's concerns. Explain what happened, how you responded, and why it shows that you demonstrated sensitivity and interest in the customer's concerns.

If this was observed by your line manager or a colleague, collect their feedback on your performance. Keep this safe so you can use it for evidence.

What could you have done differently to get even better results? Use any feedback you have received to help you work out if there are any action points.

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Describe a situation where you communicated in a clear and coherent manner the next steps and/or options to meet the needs and expectations of a customer. Explain what happened, how you communicated and what next steps you took to meet their needs and expectations.

If this was observed by your line manager or a colleague, collect their feedback on your performance. Keep this safe so you can use it for evidence.

What could you have done differently to get even better results? Use any feedback you have received to help you work out if there are any action points.



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Describe a situation where you gave a clear and appropriate explanation to a customer when their desired outcome was not possible. Describe what happened and how you explained the situation.

If this was observed by your line manager or a colleague, collect their feedback on your performance. Keep this safe so you can use it for evidence.

What could you have done differently to get even better results? Use any feedback you have received to help you work out if there are any action points.

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Learner reflection

Complete the learner reflection detailing what you have learnt from carrying out the task, how you will make use of your learning in your work and which skills you still need to develop.

Learner reflection

Mentor/trainer/employer feedback

Learner signature:

Date:

Mentor/trainer/employer signature:

Date:
