

How to Provide the Best Multicultural Customer Service

Greet Your Customers

- Identify your customer and then speak directly to them (not to translator or child)
- Address the oldest person first
 - Hierarchy is very important in many cultures
 - Identify the person who is most respected
 - Could be the oldest male or the most fluent in your language
- Shake hands only when appropriate or initiated by the customer
 - Touching is viewed as inappropriate business behavior
- Use people's last names and titles
 - Know which is the first and last name
 - Ask: "How would you like to be addressed?"
- Always err on the side of formality
- Notice body language: are they confused? lost? uncomfortable? uneasy?
- Apologize as necessary, and ask permission to get help: "I am sorry I am having difficulty with your language...."

Establish Rapport

- Don't take your customer's attitude or behavior personally
- Help customers save face and avoid embarrassment, preserve dignity and respect
- Treat customers as individuals. Let them lead you. They will show you how they expect you to behave.
- If you can, take time to get to know your customers, and let them get to know you.
- Appearance is important
- Good posture is viewed as sign of power and respect
 - Don't lean, chew gum or yawn
 - Standing up when someone enters is seen as a sign of respect
 - Never touch, pat or hug customers, unless they do it first
 - Be careful with hand gestures; they can be misinterpreted

Determine, Meet and Exceed Customer Expectations

- Questions can be considered intrusive, rude, or impolite. Watch your customers to see if questions are acceptable.
- If questions are considered impolite, use conversation to learn what customers want.
- Look and listen for a "No" in every "Yes."
 - Some cultures never say "No."
 - If you say "No," *you* lose face.

Help to Bridge Language and Accent Barriers

- Speak slowly and distinctly, not loudly.
- Pause frequently to allow customer to translate and think about how to respond.
- Mirror the customer's vocabulary – increases your chances of being understood.
- Be specific and clear, using fewest words.
- Be organized, and present information step by step.
- Avoid humor and sarcasm. What is humorous in one culture may not be in another.
- Avoid “-ing” verb form.
- Never laugh at a customer.
- Always restate, paraphrase, summarize and confirm – this ensures understanding.
- Ask for feedback to show whether your customer understands you.

Bridges When Listening

- Listen actively – show that you are paying full attention.
- Look and listen for signs of dissatisfaction, frustration, confusion.
 - Calm or moving about?
 - Repeating what you're saying to someone else?
 - Who is doing the talking: you or the customer?
 - Customers interrupting or asking questions?

Avoid Misunderstanding

- Never tell customers you don't understand them – this causes them to lose face.
- Tell them you want to be sure you have all the information.
- Ask them to summarize what they have said.
- Repeat what they said up to the part you didn't understand.
- Listen to the whole message before deciding you don't understand.