

Customer Care in Library and Information Setting

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Abstract

Customer care is a new marketing concept which puts the customer first in planning and delivery of services. A customer can be a buyer, consumer, enquirer, user, reader or a patron. The author provides the different connotations of the notion of customer care; the problems of neglecting the customers; the benefits of customer care and the behaviour skills one has to develop for the customer care in the organisation. The customer is the most important visitor to an organization. By serving the customer one is not doing any favour to him / her, the customer actually is doing a favour to the organization by giving an opportunity to do so.

Introduction

Customer care is a new marketing concept in which every one in an organisation is encouraged to think and act with the customer in mind. It has special significance in the service organisation. At its simplest, it is an approach which puts the customer first in planning and delivery of services. At its best, it thrives on an open dialogue between service provider and customer.

Customer Care

A customer can be a buyer, consumer, enquirer, user, reader or a patron. All these terms have passive connotations. A simple definition is that customer is one who gives customs. Hardcore in our library and information setting may object for this word's usage. In their opinion it smacks of commerce and business. The concept of customer care implies;

- Right information at right time to right customer.
- Staff committed, kind, courteous, listening to customer.
- Anticipating, knowing, putting customer's needs first, meeting and exceeding their expectations.
- Communication, verbal and non-verbal; prompt in person, by post, by phone.

- Handling difficult customers with tact.
- Removing the coffee stains.
- Design of organisational structure.
- Friendly comfortable environment and layout.
- Systems and procedures to suit customers.
- Complaints and comments procedures.
- Organisational culture.

However, customer care does not mean (i) that all our current practices are wrong; (ii) the customer is always right; (iii) no artificial smile all the time; (iv) it is not pleasing one and a few; and (v) no over promising and under delivering.

In a stable world of yesteryear, organisations had their own notions of excellence and customers believed in organisation's judgement. There was no choice. In today's turbulent world, power of information technology, gradual disappearance of trade barriers and competition has contributed to customer awareness of choice and their importance.

The cost of customer neglect is prohibitively expensive, since (i) only 4% of dissatisfied customers complain; (ii) only 10% of dissatisfied customer will return; (iii) every dissatisfied customer tells about 10 others; (iv) it is 5 times more expensive to get new customer than retain an existing one; and (v) if one recovers from service errors, 82-95% of customers shall remain loyal.

Benefits of customer care are (i) customer loyalty; (ii) word of mouth publicity; (iii) fewer complaints; (iv) zero defects (v) no extra cost; (vi) improve staff motivation and (vii) business success and competitive edge.

Behaviour skills for customer care

The courteous behaviour skills shall help one to make every customer feel special and thus a great deal of goodwill for him / her and his / her organisation.

The skills are :

1. Dress neatly always.
2. Smile.
3. Project confidence and warmth through facial expressions.
4. Welcome customers by name.

5. Listen carefully
6. Be aware of the body language and annoying mannerisms.
7. Always treat the customer courteously and with respect.
8. Show enthusiasm for the job.
9. Speak clearly.
10. Present a high standard of job knowledge.
11. Smile and stay calm.
12. Accept customer complaints with professional attitudes.
13. Ignore any rude remarks.
14. Do not interrupt or talk down to customer.
15. Be prepared to empathise if customer has complaints.
16. If the customer cannot be helped, find someone who can.
17. If the customer cannot be attended immediately, acknowledge them and say that he / she shall be attended shortly.
18. If more information is needed to handle the customer, enquire and ask.
19. Never argue with customers.
20. Make sure that customer goes away satisfied and informed.
21. Follow and keep promises in time. Return calls.

Conclusion

To conclude with the words of Mahatma Gandhi that "the customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not dependant on us; we are dependant on him. He is not an interruption on our work; he is a purpose of it. We are not doing any favour by serving him; he is doing favour to us by giving an opportunity to do so".