

Acute Training Solutions

Customer Care - Building Rapport with Customers and Service Users

We all know that rapport building with customers is so important to providing a good service or increasing business. So how do we go about doing it? Here are some tips from customers on how to build customer rapport.

1. Be adaptable
Agents should be able to adapt their approach – there is no reason to think that all customers should be approached using the same style. Use personal experience to build rapport so that the customer feels you are putting yourself in their shoes.
2. Pace and lead
This technique is extremely useful when someone is in an over-excited/anxious state. Start by showing urgency, confidence and concern in your speech patterns and manner to match and reassure them. Then gradually begin to calm and slow up your speech patterns. As long as the customer feels things are happening and that you're in rapport, they will follow you down and become calmer in response.
3. Allow them to 'get it all out'
When the customer is angry, allow them to vent without interruption. Use this time to figure out what has made them angry and frustrated so you can identify a solution to fix their issue.
4. Repeat back
Repeat sentences or important details back to the customer, saying "Okay, just to recap..." This reassures them that you are paying attention and have listened to them.
5. Be aware of your intonation
Go up at the end of the sentence for questions, go down at the end for command (discourage further debate).
6. Get their name first
Ask for the customer's name first, rather than reference number, address, etc. It is easy to get the details we need after we have their name. This makes the customer feel like an individual and you will feel as if you are speaking with a person, not a caller.

7. Make their problem your problem

Take ownership of the enquiry, especially if it is a complaint. Have a one-to-one relationship with your customer so that they have a point of contact that they can come back to.

8. See it from the customer's perspective

Try to imagine yourself in the customer's shoes. Imagine the customer as a close friend or family member.

9. Share their priorities

Every customer, particularly in an emergency situation, will have a list of priorities. Making them your priorities and addressing them in the right order (mirroring them) will reassure them that you know what they want and are taking care of them.

10. Remember the value of an apology

For those who deal with complaints all the time – a simple, genuine apology at the appropriate time can defuse a difficult customer and break down the barriers to allow space to build rapport.

11. You don't have to have 'things in common'

Some people may worry that they do not have anything in common with their customers and will therefore be unable to build rapport. But this doesn't have to be the case. It is understanding the customer.

12. Don't rush

Sometimes we can identify an issue we have seen regularly and then rush to rectify the problem quickly. But it's always best to focus on building rapport first.

13. Smile

Always start the initial customer encounter with a smile – if on the phone the customer will notice this in your voice.

14. Take a personal interest

You can build rapport by showing a personal interest in the customer. For example, if a customer says they have been in hospital, ask them how the recovery is going and ask how they are.

15. Know as much as you can about your business

Know your business well enough to know your customer – this is where rapport begins.

16. Really listen

Be a good a listener and try to repeat what the customer says to assure them that you are listening.

17. Be respectful

Make sure you talk to the customer with respect and in common language. Never talk down to the customer or talk over them.

18. Start off with something positive

If the customer has spent some time explaining a frustrating problem to you, then beginning your response with a short, direct statement of intent can gain the customer's confidence.

Something like "Okay, we can fix this..." or "Right, let's get this problem sorted for you..." will reassure the customer that you are taking ownership of the problem.

19. Keep focused

Stay one hundred percent focused on the customer and don't let colleagues or other things in the office distract you. Never look at your watch.

If the customer doesn't have your full attention, they will always pick up on it.

20. Not all customers want to chat

Remember that angry customers don't want to build rapport – they just want to tell you what the problem is and for you to fix it.

21. Avoid assumptions

Don't make assumptions about what the customer is telling you – actively listen to their story/issue!

22. End on a high

Always ask the customer if there is anything else you can do for them before you end the contact/call. This shows that your priority is giving good service, not just getting the call over with.

23. Be flexible with formality

We address our customers in the way that they introduce themselves. The information we have may show them as Christopher Jones, but if the customer calls himself Chris, we will address them in the same way.

Some customers prefer to keep things more formal and may introduce themselves as Mr Jones. It depends on the business.

24. Smile through the complaints

You need to always smile, even when the customer is complaining. They don't want to hear that you are having a bad day – they want to know that you will be able to solve the issue and then in turn make the customer smile.

25. Don't linger on the tough calls

Leave the last call behind and start afresh every time. Every customer is different.

26. Beware of inappropriate jokes

Everyone must be careful with humour. Sometimes there is too high a risk of a jokey comment being misunderstood, just like sarcasm in emails.

27. Don't leave them waiting

Be careful when putting people on hold or transferring calls or leaving them standing at the reception desk – this can damage rapport as wait times always seem longer when you are lingering in dead space.