Identifying positive and negative moments of truth

Identify and underline the moments of truth in the following situation. Label them positive or negative.

Judy can not understand the layout of her city tax bill, and is confused about the way the total is arrived at, so she visits the city government offices.

When she arrives she sees a large directory naming the different city departments. She is not sure which department applies to her but tries one on the second floor. She is told to wait outside the office by the attendant at the door. Three minutes later a department representative greets her in a polite and friendly manner. The representative doesn’t apologize for the delay. Judy asks to have the bill explained. The representative is able to explain some of the layout, but suggests that she will need to speak to the supervisor.

The supervisor is busy and suggests Judy make an appointment for next week. Judy is told once again to wait outside the office when she returns next week.

Techniques for Establishing Rapport with the Customer

You can choose from the following techniques. Obviously, you do not need to use all of them in every customer interaction.

- **Acknowledge** the customer’s presence.

- **Use the customer’s name.**

- **Make the customer feel important.**
  *This need is demonstrated when customers tell you who they are, what or who they know, or what they are doing, how busy they are. In addition, when people dress extravagantly, by wearing expensive clothing or jewellery, they may be expressing the need to feel important.*

- **Show Appreciation.**
  *Thank the customer when they do something to help you. For example, the customer fills out a form, answers questions, or waits while you find information.*

- **Empathize** with the customer.
  *This must have been frustrating for you. You must have been disappointed when this occurred.*

- **Talk in the Customer’s Language**
  *Do not talk down’ to the customer or over the customer’s head. “Match and mirror the customer’s level of proficiency. Do not use acronyms, buzzwords, technical jargon, etc. that the customer may not be familiar with.*
The Five Key Determinants of Service Quality

Reliability – The first and by far the most important is reliability; the ability to perform the service right the first time. Reliability is demonstrated by always keeping commitments and promises. Compensating for the absence of reliability is virtually impossible.

Responsiveness – The ability to help with prompt service. It can be as simple as returning a phone call, minimizing wait times by bringing on more customer service staff to as complex as changing a policy or a government practice that is unfair to certain groups.

Assurance – Trust in the organization and confidence that it will provide the service as requested. NOT saying its ‘not my job’ but taking ownership of the customer’s concerns or requirements.

Empathy – Transmitting the sense that the organization and service provider cares about the customer and wants to help by providing the required service.

Tangibility – Providing physical evidence that the service providers and their organization are quality-conscious. Judged by the appearance of the waiting room, the clarity of the notice, the appearance of the personnel.

Difficult customer types

Concept: You will need to be calm and professional when dealing with difficult customers.

Most customers have a specific type of product or service in mind when they make contact with your organization. They are also willing to let you help them if you do so in a positive, pleasant, and professional manner. There are others who, because of their outlook on life, attitude, personal habits, or background, may cause you frustration and require additional effort. You should expect to encounter difficult people and try to serve them to the best of your ability. With difficult customers, you should remain calm and professional.

Angry Customers

Dealing with angry people requires a certain amount of caution. For you to effectively serve an angry customer, you must move beyond the emotions to discover the reason for his or her anger. Here are some possible tactics:

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• Be positive. Tell the customer what you can do, rather than what you cannot do.
If you say, “Our policy won’t permit us to give you a refund,” you can expect an angry response. On the other hand, you might offer, “What I can do is issue a store credit that may be used at any of our 12 branch stores in the city.”

**Note**: Before dealing with customers, check with your supervisor to find out what your policies are and what level of authority you have in making decisions. This relates to empowerment discussed earlier in the book.

By having this information before a customer encounter, you will have the tools and knowledge necessary to handle your customers effectively and professionally.

- **Acknowledge the customer’s feelings or anger.** You cannot and should not try to deny the customer’s anger. Doing so could result in a serious confrontation. Instead of saying, “You really don’t have to be upset,” try, “I can see you’re upset. I want to help solve this problem, so could you please help me understand what’s happened?”

  By taking this approach, you’ve acknowledged the customer’s feelings, demonstrated a willingness to assist, and asked the customer to participate in solving the problem.

- **Reassure.** Reassure the customer. Indicate that you understand why he or she is angry and that you will work to solve the problems. Statements such as these can help ease the frustration of your customers: “I’m going to do my best to help resolve this quickly,” “I can assure you that this will be resolved by Monday,”

  “You can rest assured that I am going to make this a priority.”

- **Remain objective.** As mentioned earlier, becoming part of the problem is not the answer. Even if the customer raises his or her voice or uses profanity, remain calm. This may be difficult, but it will help keep the situation from escalating. If necessary, count to ten in your head and take a deep breath before responding.

  Remember, angry customers are usually angry at the organization, product, or service that you represent, not at you. If they do not settle down, calmly but assertively explain that although you want to assist, you cannot do so until they help by providing information. If possible, suggest moving to a private area away from other customers and ask for help from a supervisor or team leader, if appropriate.

- **Determine the cause.** Through a combination of asking questions, listening, feedback, and analyzing the information you receive, try to determine the cause of the problem. The customer may simply have misunderstood what was said. In such an instance, a clarification may be all that is required. Try something like, “There seems to be some confusion. May I explain?” or possibly, “It appears that I was unclear. May I explain?”

  When people are angry, they need a chance to vent their frustration and be heard. Avoid interrupting or offering “Yes, but . . .” types of remarks. This only fuels their anger. Suppose that a customer calls to make an appointment for an oil change and is told that the special sale ended yesterday. The customer then says that there was no
indication in the newspaper advertisement that there was an expiration date. You respond with, “Yes, that’s true, but we always run our sale ads for only one week. Everybody knows that.” Naturally, the customer is now upset. A better response would be something like, “Although that sale ended yesterday, we will honor the coupon because the expiration date was inadvertently omitted from the advertisement.” Whether the customer is “right” or “wrong” makes no difference in situations like these. You will build stronger customer relationships when you make this kind of concession, because you are bringing in money you might not have received if the customer got upset. Moreover, the customer is now satisfied, may tell others, and will likely return. In cases such as this, inform your supervisor of the problems caused by the omission of expiration dates in ads.

- **Reduce frustrations.** Don’t say or do anything that will create further tension. For instance, don’t transfer a caller to another extension if the customer told you he or she has already been transferred several times, interrupt to serve another customer (especially for a telephone caller—unless your organization’s policy requires that you do so), or put the person on hold repeatedly to handle other customers or tasks not related to serving the original customer.

- **Negotiate a solution.** Elicit ideas from the customer on how to solve the problem. If the customer’s suggestions are realistic and feasible, implement them. Or negotiate an alternative. By using customers’ suggestions, you are likely to gain their agreement. Also, if something goes wrong later, they may be less likely to complain again since it was their idea in the first place.

- **Conduct a follow-up.** Don’t assume that the organization’s system will work as designed. If there is a breakdown, the customer has your name and may complain to your supervisor. Or, the customer may not complain but instead go to a competitor. Either way, you lose. Once an agreed-upon solution has been implemented, take the time to follow up to ensure that all went well. This may involve personally calling the accounting department to ensure that proper credits were made, delivering an order or materials or shipping them yourself, or calling or writing the customer after a period of time to make sure the customer is satisfied and to offer future assistance. Whatever it takes, do it to ensure customer satisfaction. As a rule of thumb, *under promise and over deliver.*

### Dissatisfied Customers

Occasionally, you will encounter customers who are **dissatisfied** or unhappy when you meet them. Possibly they have been improperly served by you or one of your peers, or by a competitor in the past. Even if you were not personally involved in their previous experience, you represent the organization or you may be considered “just like that last service employee.” Unfair as this may be, you have to try to make these customers happy. To do so, try the following strategies:

- **Listen.** Take the time to listen actively, as discussed in Chapter 5. Often, when people are upset, all they want to know is that you’re willing to attend to their concerns. Work with a partner. Discuss situations in which you had to deal with an angry person. Think
about what made the person angry and what seemed to reduce tension. Make a list of these factors and be prepared to share your list with the class. Use the results of this discussion to develop strategies to help calm angry people in the future.

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• **Remain positive.** Even though angry customers drain your energy, don’t get drawn into mirroring their anger or agreeing with their putdowns of your company, competitors, peers, products, or services. This only fuels the fire. If appropriate, smile and interject positive comments into the conversation as you listen, and try to determine an effective course of action. Keep in mind what you read about the power of **positive wording** in Chapter 3. Figure 7.4 shows some examples of negative wording and some possible alternatives.

• **Smile, give your name, and offer assistance.** Sometimes a typically cheerful greeting is not possible because a customer verbally attacks first (e.g., you pick up a ringing phone or a customer walks up as you are serving another customer or looking down or away). In such instances, listen to what the customer is saying, use positive nonverbal cues (e.g., nodding, open or no threatening body posture, and possibly smiling) and inject paralanguage (e.g., Uh-huh, Hmmm, Ahhhh, or other vocalizations). By demonstrating positive nonverbal behaviors, you may be able to psychologically “bond” with the customer. People usually do not attack a “friend,” someone they know, or someone who is trying to assist them. This is why many law enforcement officers are trained to introduce themselves and to use a person’s name.

• **Don’t make excuses.** Typically, customers are not interested in why they did not get the product or service they wanted or thought they paid for; they just want the problem solved (in their favor). Look for ways to correct a mistake rather than cover it up. Remember: if you get defensive, you become part of the problem and not part of the solution.

• **Be compassionate.** Try to remain warm, compassionate, empathetic while you are trying to uncover the cause of the problem. You can then attempt to service the customer properly and promptly. An approach often used by service and sales professionals to help defuse a customer’s emotion when he or she is upset or frustrated (not really angry) is known as the **“feel, felt, found” strategy.** When using it, the service provider might state something like: “I know how you feel Ms. Winston. Others have said they felt the same way when they experienced this problem. However, we have found that by making a small adjustment to the ________ that the problem is quickly resolved.” In effect, what this strategy does is empathize with the customer, shows he or she is not alone in the way he or she feels and shows there is a solution. Many times this strategy can begin by using statements such as:
FIGURE 7.4
Positive Wording
When faced with a customer encounter that isn’t going well, remain positive in language. This will help you avoid escalating the situation.

Negative Words or Phrases Positive Alternatives
Problem Situation, issue, concern, challenge
No What I (or) we can do is . . .
Cannot What I (or) we can do is . . .
It’s not my job (or my fault) although I do not normally handle that, I’m happy to assist you. You’ll have to (or you must . . .) would you mind . . .? Can I get you to . . .?
Our policy says . . . While I’m unable to . . . What I can do is . . .
I see.
I can relate to that.
I understand what you’re saying.
I can appreciate your point.
I know how you feel. (Use caution with this statement if someone is very emotional. This type of comment could increase the customer’s anger and escalate the situation).

• **Ask open-ended questions.** By using specific open-ended questions, you can obtain the information you need to serve the customer. For example, “Mr. Washington, can you explain exactly what you expected from our service contract?”

• **Verify information.** To prevent misunderstandings or the possibility of escalating an uncomfortable situation, be sure that you received the correct message. Too often, we believe we understand the meaning of a message, only to find out later that we misinterpreted it. Test your interpretation of a customer’s message by stating it in your own words. For example, “Mr. Rasheed, if I heard you correctly, you were told by the clerk who sold you this table that it would be assembled upon delivery, but the driver refused to do so. Is that correct?”

• **Take appropriate action.** After you have gathered all pertinent information you need to make a decision, work with the customer to satisfy his or her needs.

Indecisive Customers
You will encounter people who cannot or will not make a decision. They sometimes spend hours vacillating. In some cases, **indecisive customers** truly do not know what they want or need, as when they are looking for a gift for a special occasion. Sometimes such customers are afraid that they will choose incorrectly. In these situations, use all your communication skills. Otherwise, indecisive customers will occupy large amounts of your time and detract from your ability to do your job effectively or to assist other customers.

Be aware, however, that some people really are just looking as they check out sales, kill time between appointments, relax, or they may be lonely and want to be around others. Strategies for dealing with an indecisive person are given in the following sections.
Be patient. Keep in mind that, although indecisive people can be frustrating (especially if you have a high D behavioral style preference), they are still customers. Greet such customers just as you would any other customer and offer assistance. If the customer refuses your help or wants to browse, that’s fine, but indicate where you will be and watch for the customer to signal for assistance. Take a few minutes to think about your organization or one with which you are familiar. Look for factors that might contribute to customer dissatisfaction. Make a list of them, and then list some strategies for eliminating or reducing them. As an alternative, you might want to work with someone else and compare lists.

Ask open-ended questions. Just as you would do with a dissatisfied customer, try to get as much background information as possible. The more data you can gather, the better you can evaluate the situation, determine needs, and assist in the solution of any problems.

Listen actively. Focus on verbal and nonverbal messages for clues to determine emotions, concerns, and interests.

Suggest other options. Offer alternatives that will help in decision making and reduce the customer’s anxiety. For example, “Ms. Sylvester, if you find that the color of the fabric doesn’t match your wallpaper, you have 30 days to return it.” This approach shows that you are informed and trying to assist, and it may help the person make up his or her mind. Suggesting a warranty or exchange possibility may make the customer more secure in the decision-making process.

Guide decision making. By assertively, not aggressively, offering suggestions or ideas, you can help customers make a decision. Note that you are helping them, not making the decision for them. If you push your preferences on them, they may be dissatisfied and return the item. Then you, or someone else, will have to deal with an unhappy customer.

Demanding or Domineering Customers
Customers can be demanding or domineering for a number of reasons. Many times, domineering behavior is part of a personality style, as discussed in Chapter 6. In other instances, it could be a reaction to past customer service encounters. A demanding

Indecisive people can be frustrating as you try to serve their needs. What steps would you take to help a customer make a decision?

Think about a recent time when you were indecisive about purchasing a product or service, and then respond to the following questions:
1. What caused your indecisiveness?
2. What ultimately helped you to make a decision?
3. How can you use your own strategies to help satisfy an indecisive customer?
Part Two *Skills for Success* customer may feel a need to be or stay in control, especially if he or she has felt out of control in the past. Often, such people are insecure. Some strategies for effectively handling demanding customers are discussed in the following sections:

- **Be professional.** Don’t raise your voice or retaliate verbally. Children engage in name-calling, which often escalates into shoving matches. Unfortunately, some adults “regress” to childish behavior. Your customer may revert to negative behavior learned in the past. Both you and the customer lose when this happens.

- **Respect the customer.** Showing respect does not mean that you must accommodate your customer’s every wish. It means that you should make positive eye contact (but not glare), remain calm, use the customer’s name, apologize when appropriate and/or necessary, and let the customer know that he or she is important to you and your organization. Work positively toward a resolution of the problem.

- **Be firm and fair and focus on the customer’s needs.** As you read in Chapter 3, assertive behavior is an appropriate response to a domineering or demanding person; aggression is not. Also, remember the importance of treating each customer as an individual.

- **Tell the customer what you can do.** Don’t focus on negatives or what can’t be done when dealing with your customers. Stick with what is possible and what you are willing to do. Be flexible and willing to listen to requests. If something suggested is possible and will help solve the problem, compliment the person on his or her idea (e.g., “Mr. Hollister, that’s a good suggestion, and one that I think will work”), and then try to make it happen. Doing this will show that you are receptive to new ideas, are truly working to meet the customer’s needs and expectations, and value the customer’s opinion. Also, remember that if you can psychologically partner with a customer, he or she is less likely to attack. You do need to make sure that your willingness to assist and comply is not seen as giving in or backing down. If it is, the customer may make additional demands or return in the future with similar demands. To avoid this, you could add to the earlier statement by saying something like, “Mr. Hollister, that’s a good suggestion, and although we cannot do this in every instance, I think that your suggestion is one that will work at this time.” This puts the customer on alert that although he or she may get his or her way this time, it will not necessarily happen in the future. Another strategy is to make a counteroffer. If you are thoroughly familiar with your organization’s policies and procedures and your limits of authority, you will be prepared to negotiate with demanding customers. If they want something you cannot provide, you might offer an alternative that will satisfy them. Remember that your goal is customer satisfaction.
Survey customer service professionals in various professions to see how they handle demanding or domineering customers. Make a list for future reference and role-play a variety of scenarios involving demanding customers with a peer.

**Rude or Inconsiderate Customers**
Some people seem to go out of their way to be offensive or to get attention. Although they seem confident and self-assured outwardly, they are often insecure and defensive. Some behaviors they might exhibit are raising the voice, demanding to speak to a supervisor, using profanity, cutting in front of someone else in a line, being verbally abrupt (snapping back at you) even though you’re trying to assist, calling you by your last name, which they see on your name tag (e.g., “Listen, Smith”), ignoring what you say, or otherwise going out of the way to be offensive or in control. Try the following strategies for dealing with rude or inconsiderate customers:

- **Remain professional.** Just because the customer is exhibiting inappropriate behavior does not justify your reacting in kind. Remain calm, assertive, and in control of the situation. For example, if you are waiting on a customer and a rude person barges in or cuts off your conversation, pause, make direct eye contact, smile, and firmly say, “I’ll be with you as soon as I finish with this customer, sir or madam.” If he or she insists, repeat your comment and let the person know that the faster you serve the current customer, the faster you can get to the person waiting. Also, maintaining decorum may help win over the person or at least keep him or her in check.

- **Don’t resort to retaliation.** Retaliation will only infuriate this type of customer, especially if you have embarrassed him or her in the presence of others. Remember that such people are still customers, and if they or someone else perceives your actions as inappropriate, you could lose more than just the battle at hand.

**Talkative Customers**
Some people phone or approach you and then spend excessive amounts of time discussing irrelevant matters such as personal experiences, family, friends, schooling, accomplishments, other customer service situations, and the weather. The following tips might help when dealing with talkative customers:

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**Before you can deal with a customer’s business needs, you must first address the customer’s emotional issues and try to calm him or her. What would you do to calm such customers?**

Working with a partner, develop a list of rude comments that a customer might make to you (e.g., “If you’re not too busy, I’d like some assistance”) along with responses you might give (e.g., “If you could please wait, I’ll be happy to assist you as soon as I finish, sir (or madam). I want to be able to give you my full attention and don’t want to be distracted.”).
• **Remain warm and cordial, but focused.** Recognize that this person’s personality style is probably mainly expressive and that his or her natural inclination is to connect with others. You can smile, acknowledge comments, and carry on a brief conversation as you are serving this customer. For example, if the person comments that your last name is spelled exactly like his or her great aunt’s and then asks where your family is from, you could respond with “That’s interesting. My family is from . . . but I don’t believe we have any relatives outside that area.” You have responded but possibly cut off the next question. Anything less would probably be viewed as rude by the customer. Anything more could invite additional discussion. Your next statement should then be business-related (e.g., “Is there anything else I can assist you with today?”).

• **Ask specific open-ended questions.** These types of questions can assist in determining needs and addressing customer concerns.

• **Use closed-ended questions to control.** Once you have determined the customer’s needs, switch to closed-ended questions to better control the situation and limit the opportunity for the customer to continue talking.

• **Manage the conversation.** Keep in mind that if you spend a lot of time with one customer, other customers may be neglected. You can manage a customer encounter through questioning and through statements that let the customer know your objective is to serve customers. You might say, “I know you said you have a lot of shopping to do, so I won’t keep you any longer. Thanks for coming in. Please let me know if I can assist in the future.” Imply that you are ending the interaction to benefit the customer.

5 Working With Internal Customers (Coworkers)

**Concept: Relationships with your internal customers are important. You should meet your commitments and build a professional reputation.** As we discussed in earlier chapters, you have to deal with internal as well as external customers. Although your interactions with internal customers may not be difficult, they can often be more sensitive than your dealings with outsiders. After all, you see peers and coworkers regularly, and because of your job, office politics, and protocol, your interactions with them are ongoing. Therefore, extend all the same courtesies to internal customers that you do to external ones—in some cases, more so. Some suggestions that might help you enhance your interactions with internal customers are given in the following sections.

**Stay Connected** Since relationships within the organization are so important, go out of your way to make contact with internal customers periodically. You can do this by Go on a field trip to a variety of businesses or stores (possibly a mall). As you visit these establishments, play the role of a customer and engage customer service professionals in lengthy conversation. Take note of the techniques they use to regain control of the conversation. Chances are, most, especially the more experienced, will allow you to talk and will respond to you rather than risk being rude. Remember the effective techniques described and jot them down. 192
Chapter 7 Handling Difficult Customer Encounters 193 dropping by their work area to say hello, sending an e-mail, or leaving a voice mail message. This helps keep the door to communication open so that if service does break down someday, you will have a better chance of hearing about it and solving the problem amiably. You might describe your coworkers as your “normal” internal customers, but do not forget the importance of your relationships with the cleaning crew (they service your office and work area), security force (they protect you, your organization, and your vehicle), and the information technology people (they maintain computer equipment). All these groups and many others within the organization add value and can be a big help to you.

Meet All Commitments
Too often, service providers forget the importance of internal customers. Because of familiarity, they sometimes become lax and tend to not give the attention to internal customers that they would give to external customers. This can be a big mistake. For example, if you depend on someone else to obtain or send products or services to external customers, that relationship is as crucial as the ones you have with external customers. Don’t forget that if you depend on internal suppliers for materials, products, or information, these people can negatively affect your ability to serve external customers by delaying or withholding the items you need. Such actions might be unintentional or intentional, depending on your relationship. To prevent, or at least reduce, the possibility of such breakdowns, honor all commitments you make to internal customers. If you promise to do something, do your best to deliver, and in the agreed-upon time. If you can’t do something, say so when your customer asks. If something comes up that prevents you from fulfilling your commitment, let the internal customer know of the change in a timely manner. Remember, it is better to under promise and over deliver than vice versa. If you beat a deadline, they will probably be pleasantly surprised and appreciative.

Don’t Sit on Your Emotions
Some people hold on to anger, frustration, and other negative emotions rather than getting their feelings out into the open and dealing with them. Not only is this potentially damaging to your health, for it might cause stress-related illnesses, but it can also destroy working relationships. Whenever something goes wrong or you are troubled by something, go to the person and, using the feedback skills you learned in Chapter 3, talk about the situation. Failure to do so can result in disgruntled internal customers, damage to the customer-supplier relationship, and damage to your reputation. Don’t forget that you will continue to rely on your customer in the future, so you cannot afford a relationship problem. Creating an environment where employees learn to recognize and treat peers and coworkers as customers can go a long way toward enhancing the service environment. When employees learn the importance of building rapport and personal relationships with their internal customers, the quality of work life improves and everyone benefits. Service can also become exceptional.
Build a Professional Reputation

Through your words and actions, go out of your way to let your customer and your boss know that you have a positive, can-do, customer-focused attitude. Let them know that you will do whatever it takes to create an environment in which internal and external customers are important. Also, regularly demonstrate your commitment to proactive service. This means gathering information, products, and other tools before coming into contact with a customer so that you are prepared to deal with a variety of situations and people. It also means doing the unexpected for customers and providing service that makes them excited about doing business with you and your organization.

Adopt a Good-Neighbor Policy

Take a proactive approach to building internal relationships so that you can head off negative situations. If your internal customers are in your department, act in a manner that preserves sound working relationships. You can accomplish this in part by avoiding the following negative work habits:

• Avoid gathering of friends and loud conversation in your work space. This can be especially annoying if the office setup consists of cubicles as sound travels easily. Respect your coworkers’ right to work in a professional environment. If you must hold meetings or gatherings, go to the cafeteria or some other place away from the work area.

• Maintain sound grooming and hygiene habits. Demonstrate professionalism in your dress and grooming. Avoid excessive amounts of colognes and perfumes.

• Don’t overdo call forwarding. Sometimes you must be away from your work space. Company policy may require that you forward your calls. Do not overdo forwarding your calls. Your coworkers may be inconvenienced and resentful if you do.

• Avoid unloading personal problems. Everyone has personal problems now and then. Do not bring personal problems to the workplace and burden coworkers with them. If you have personal problems and need assistance, go to your supervisor or team leader or human resources department and ask for some suggestions. If you get a reputation for often having personal problems—and bringing them to the workplace—your career could suffer.

• Avoid office politics and gossip. Your purpose in the workplace is to serve the customer and do your job. If you have time to spread gossip and network often with others, you should approach your supervisor or team leader about the job opportunities in which you can learn new skills. This can increase your effectiveness and marketability in the workplace.

• Pitch in to help. If you have spare time and your coworkers need assistance with a project, volunteer to help out. They may do the same at some point in the future when you are feeling overwhelmed with a project or assignment.
• **Be truthful.** One of the fastest ways for you to suffer a damaged relationship, or lose the trust and confidence of your coworkers and customers, is to be caught in a lie. Regard your word as your bond.

**Paraphrasing**

Do this exercise in pairs. One partner will say what they believe about the statement below while the other paraphrases what they hear to ensure they fully understand their partner’s point of view.

Switch roles after two minutes.

**Statement**

“Government departments shouldn’t waste time interviewing entry level applicants because new young employees need lots of training to be effective workers. Rather the departments should hire on the basis of those with the highest school marks.”

Do you agree or disagree? Tell your partner why you agree or disagree.

Your partner should paraphrase every so often to ensure their understanding.

**Royal Canadian Mounted Police**

**July 7, 2000**

**EFFECTIVE QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES**

The following scenario involves a request for assistance. In your first questions (first five seconds), you should always establish whether the call is urgent or not in a polite and respectful manner. The questions “what” and “where” are essential to do so. This will ensure you go to the right place and prepare appropriately to approach the situation to ensure everyone's safety. It is very important to obtain:

1. the reason for the call, so that you can provide an appropriate response, safely;
2. an address, so you can attend even if the phone line is dead; and
3. a phone number, so you can call back for additional information if necessary.

If you cannot attend to the caller because of more urgent priorities, explain; if someone else is available, pass on the call, or offer to call back as soon as possible. Now read the scenario.
CAUTIONS WHEN QUESTIONING

Asking a question cleverly will increase the likelihood of your getting a good understanding of the issues quickly. However, there are certain things you should avoid:

- **Bombardment / Grilling** - Too many questions will put your client on the defensive or they may allow you to control the conversation which may limit what you ultimately find out. "Why" questions, if improperly asked, often cause individuals to become defensive.

- **Multiple Questions** - If your question contains several questions, you may confuse the client.

- **Questions as Statements** - Avoid leading your client to accept your point of view by turning a statement into a question. Example: Don't you think you should tell the children to go away?

- **Questions and Cultural Differences** - Rapid fire questioning is not received favorably and can create distrust in individuals from non-western cultures.

- The person who is doing the questioning is in control of the discussion. Questions should be used fairly with client service as the goal.

Using the Customer Recovery Model

Read the following conversation

Use the customer recovery model and evaluate the CSR’s performance

Write your answers in the spaces provided below the questions

Customer: Finally, I’ve reached somebody. I’ve been waiting ofr ages. What’s going…

1. CSR: (interrupting) Sorry you had to wait. Can I help?

Customer: Well if you’ll let me I’ll tell you the problem! This charge was supposed to be taken off my bill but it’s still showing up. What’s going on? Don’t you people follow through? I shouldn’t have to keep asking about this.

2. CSR: Complaints aren’t usually handled by my area. The billing department must have made the mistake.

Customer: Look I don’t care who made the mistake. Your company is responsible, so just fix it. You owe me money.

3. CSR: OK. I’ll see what I can do. What’s your account number, please? (Customer gives the number and CSR retrieves the account information)
4. CSR: Now I need to see some identification, please.

Customer: Why do I have to give you identification? I’ve given you my account number. Surely that is good enough.

5. CSR: We always ask for it. Its policy.

Customer: Oh well, I suppose I have to do this, but it seems like a waste of time. (Customer gives identification)

6. CSR: There are two amounts on the bill. I presume the amount you want removed is the first one?

Customer: That’s the one. And by the way,

7. CSR: Because we don’t normally handle this, I’ll have to speak to my supervisor before crediting your account. Can you come back tomorrow to see if it’s done?

Customer: Well, I suppose so.

8. CSR: Go to the Billing Department

Customer: OK. I hope this gets sorted out.

Using the customer recovery model and evaluate the CSR’s performance and write your answers in the spaces provided below the questions.

1. Statement #1
   Explain to the CSR how they might listen more effectively.

2. Statement #2
   • What technique could be used to diffuse the customer’s anger?
   • In terms of taking ownership, what other advice would you give the CSR?
   • Using positive wording how should the CSR rephrase this statement?

3. Statement #5
   Recommend a diffusing technique and suggest a response using the technique you recommend.

4. Statement #7
   What should the CSR do differently to take ownership of the situation?

5. Using positive wording, suggest two phrases the CSR should not have used. Suggest an alternate response for each.
Customer service and your attitude

If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, “Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.”

Martin Luther King Jr.

The quote from Martin Luther King Jr. talks about the importance of our attitude towards our job.

How would you judge whether or not this street sweeper had a winning attitude towards his job? What behaviours would be clues?

For your chosen career, how many of these behaviours would also be used to show a winning attitude?
Can you add some others?

Breakthrough Thinking

Adapted from Gary Patton
Ideas to Grow By Breakthrough Thinking. 2000

When simply making incremental improvements each year of 5 – 10% isn’t going to achieve your goals and objectives on time, then you need to create a new approach. The following is a seven step process intended to help you develop new ways of looking at business issues.

1. Recognize that every problem is unique – this is important so you don’t simply apply past solutions to new problems

2. Focus on the purposes – Looking at purposes prevents you from working on the wrong problem and allows you to strip away nonessentials and to address both the immediate and practical

3. Look for the solution-after-next – Identify an ideal target solution for the larger purpose and work backwards to the current situation. E.g. customers don’t like checking into hotels. Imagine a situation where customers simply walk into their rooms from the taxi. What needs to be done to permit this to occur?

4. Understand that every problem is part of a larger system – don’t overlook the complexities of implementing solutions in the real world.
5. **Limit data collection up front** – Prevents you from getting bogged down and missing the simple solution because you knew too much.

6. **Develop your solution with the people who will use it** – limits hostility and creates ownership of the changes in the solution users.

7. **Adopt an improvement timeline** – Keeps you in perspective by planning for a sequence of purpose directed solutions that will take you to a better future.