

SERVICE ORIENTATION (SO)

Service Orientation implies a desire to identify and serve customers/clients, who may include the public, colleagues, partners (e.g., educational institutes, non-government organizations, etc.), co-workers, peers, branches, ministries/agencies and other government organizations. It means focusing one's efforts on discovering and meeting the needs of the customer/client needs.

<i>This Means...</i>	<i>This Doesn't Mean...</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">questioning the clients to better understand their needs and their concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">saying as little as possible so that you can move on to the next priority/issue
<ul style="list-style-type: none">using your knowledge to think through what would be best for a client as well as the government, and acting accordingly	<ul style="list-style-type: none">doing what is faster and easiest for you
<ul style="list-style-type: none">understanding the viewpoint and objectives of different clients and why these can, at times, conflict with the interest of the government	<ul style="list-style-type: none">steering clear of trying to deal with the sometimes conflicting needs and viewpoints of different people
<ul style="list-style-type: none">making a conscious effort to understand differences and establish common interests with clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none">making contact with clients only when you need to solve a problem or get information
<ul style="list-style-type: none">working hard to build and maintain long-term relationships with clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none">focusing on short-term interactions with a client without considering the long-term implications
<ul style="list-style-type: none">knowing when to take a long-term perspective in addressing a client issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none">responding to a client situation that addresses their immediate need but may not be needed over the long-term

DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES

Level 1-3 Activities

Think of something extra you can do for a client. Do it.

- This could be making a special effort to help someone overcome a difficult problem, such as taking some extra time to explain the reasons for a certain procedure or resolution.

Keep a personal customer service time log for one week.

- Make daily notes of how much time you actually spend providing services to your customers.
- At the end of the week, calculate the percentage of your time that is spent servicing customers versus administrative and other non-service activities.
- Set a goal for yourself to increase the amount of time you spend in service related activities.
- Monitor your progress through your customer service time log the following week, and set a new goal for the next week.

Reflection Tip:

- * Brainstorm ideas about how to make sure this actually happens. Create a plan for implementation.

Analyze your Customer Service style.

- Listen to a recording of your calls and analyze your style.
- Is your tone of voice appropriate?
- Make notes on what is effective and what is not.

Reflection Tip:

- * Discuss this topic with your peers to gather additional information.

Ask your manager for feedback on your customer/client service.

- Ask for specific, behavioural feedback.
- When you are given feedback, do not respond defensively. View this as a learning activity.
- Modify those behaviours that were identified as lacking, deficient, or inappropriate.

Reflection Tip:

- * Are there patterns that emerge within the feedback – areas of under or over-performance?

Identify someone who has received recognition for providing excellent client/customer service.

- Ask questions. You want to understand what the thinking behind what he or she did and said in their customer interactions (e.g., ask him or her to identify the customers' needs as they see them).

Competencies that support INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

- Try to incorporate these behaviours in your own ways of dealing and interacting with customers.
- Do this with a number of peers and identify the effective behaviours that they have in common.

Reflection Tip:

- * Try to identify these behaviours in others. The first step in learning a new behaviour is being able to accurately identify it.

Ask your manager about a particularly challenging or difficult client problem he or she is currently involved with. Ask to work with him or her in helping to resolve the situation.

- Prepare yourself by really learning about general and specific client issues.
- Get ideas from your colleagues, read about client issues, test your ideas with others.
- Apply your expertise to consider what will be best from the client's point of view.
- Working with your leader, act to ensure the client gets what they need.

Reflection Tip:

- * Make note of the specific actions that your manager takes. If you're not sure why a particular action was taken, make sure you ask.

Improve your Customer/Client focus.

- Use your knowledge to think through what would be best for a client and act accordingly.
- Conduct an interview with a customer to determine his or her needs and satisfaction with current services.
- Immediately inform a customer if problems in your area will impact on them.
- Take responsibility to resolve a customer's problem if it goes beyond the normal demands of the job.
- Be patient and polite with others.
- Take ownership for a customer's concerns.

Reflection Tip:

- * Be sure to focus on both internal and external customers.

Respond to customer needs in a timely, responsive manner.

- Listen carefully to requests or complaints and probe for all relevant information.
- Test your understanding of the customer by summarizing what you heard.
- Address customer needs in a responsive manner. Inform the customer of the specific actions that you will take, and make clear when you will be back in touch with the customer to report your progress.
- Make a note of how the customer reacted.
- A useful way to respond to customer needs is to ask them to help you write these lists:
 - ⇒ things you should start to do;
 - ⇒ things you should stop doing;
 - ⇒ things you should continue to do

Reflection Tip:

- * Keep track of customer reactions in order to track which of your responses was most effective.

Compare successful and difficult interactions.

- Review your activities for the past week and identify one successful and one difficult interaction.
- Discuss your observations with your manager and then make note of any advice he or she provides you with to improve the customer interaction next time.
- Take action to improve on your activities in future similar situations.
- In a similar situation with that customer make a point of testing your improvement tactics. Ask the customer for feedback as appropriate.

Reflection Tip:

- * To be aware of similar interactions that might be happening between your peers and their customers. Discuss with them their methods for handling in particular situation, and the reasons behind their actions.

Level 4-5 Activities

Try to understand your customer's point of view.

- After an interaction with a customer, put yourself in their shoes and try to imagine what they were feeling or thinking during your interaction with them.

Competencies that support INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

- Think about how what you did influenced that person in either a positive or negative fashion.
- Write down what you would do differently next time to make the interaction more positive, and use that information to develop a plan for the next time you interact with that customer.

Reflection Tip:

- * Make an effort to collect some evidence that supports and reinforces your thoughts. Collecting evidence lets you know if you were correct about the impact you thought you had.

Design and conduct a focus group session with your colleagues.

- Develop a list of questions for the following topic areas:
 - ⇒ Who are your key clients?
 - ⇒ What do your key clients expect from you?
 - ⇒ How well are we currently meeting client expectations?
 - ⇒ What would be the biggest complaint clients have?
 - ⇒ What gets in the way of focusing on the client?
- Generate solutions to improve Customer/Client Service Orientation.
- Transfer these solutions into an action plan.

Reflection Tip:

- * Use these ideas to begin to formulate a longer term plan that focuses on satisfied customers.

Spend time thinking about what your customers want.

- Make a list of all those people who rely on you and your work - they are your customers.
- Think about what is important to each kind of customer.
- Identify the expectations each group of customers has of you. What criteria do they use to determine if the product and/or service that you provide is acceptable to them?
- Verify your list of expectations with each customer and update your list on a regular basis (i.e. quarterly).
- Share your list of expectations with your peers and manager and ask for feedback.

Competencies that support INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

- Determine whether it is feasible to reach your customer's expectations while still following the "rules" of the organization, or with the current resources the organization provides you.

Reflection Tips:

- * Reflect on what should happen in order for that type of customer to become a satisfied customer.
- * What criteria do they use to determine the produce and/or service that you provide is acceptable to them?

Get to know your customers and their underlying needs.

- List all of the different groups of clients you currently have (e.g., the groups of individuals who receive service from you). Be sure to include both internal and external clients on your list (i.e., targeted public/private stakeholders, professional groups, other ministries, etc.).
- List the expectations each group of clients has of you. In other words, what criteria do they use to determine if the service that you provide is acceptable to them?
- Verify your list of expectations with each client group. Share your list of expectations and ask for feedback. How accurate was your original assessment?
- Meet with your most important customers (internal and external) to discuss their "business" with them. Ask them for suggestions on things you can do to better understand their needs and environment. This could include "job shadowing" - spending the day or part of the day accompanying them through their regular activities.
- Update your list of clients and client expectations on a regular (e.g., quarterly) basis.

Identify opportunities for collaboration with people from other divisions/ministries within the government on customer initiatives or programs.

- Work with your manager to establish a task force which would be able to focus on these programs.
- As a group, explore potential opportunities that could benefit all areas. When discussing possible plans of action, try to come to a consensus on the following issues:
 - ⇒ Who are your key customers?
 - ⇒ What do your key customers expect from you?
 - ⇒ What would be the biggest complaint clients have?
 - ⇒ How well are we currently meeting customer expectations?

- ⇒ What gets in the way of effective customer service?
- ⇒ What suggestions do we have to improve customer service.

Level 6 Activities

Develop alternative ways of looking at customer service problems.

- Describe the customer service problem in a brief statement.
- Identify the key factors in the problem from your perspective. Pretend you are going to tell someone a story about the problem. What are the three or four key characteristics or details you would want to convey?
- Identify the key factors in the problem from the perspective of others. Ask yourself the following questions:
 - ⇒ How would upper management view this problem? What factors would they see at their level?
 - ⇒ How would managers in other areas view this problem? What factors would they see from their perspective?
 - ⇒ How does the customer view this problem? What are their most important issues?
- Prepare and present a summary of your findings.
- Identify any immediate steps you could take on your own to help resolve the problem. Take the first steps.

Evaluate your contribution to customers/clients.

- Develop a matrix charting your external customers and your services to those customers. The field of this matrix should consist of the benefits derived from each program or service by each external customer group.
- Working with your team, use this matrix to help assess the effectiveness of each program or service to each customer group. Consider the following questions:
 - ⇒ What will be our customers' future requirements?
 - ⇒ What priorities should we focus on?
 - ⇒ What will we need to do to develop new services?
 - ⇒ How should we communicate our strategy (internally and externally)?
 - ⇒ How can we test the strategy or policy with our customers before going ahead with the implementation?

Get to know your customers and their underlying needs from a long-term perspective.

- List all of the different groups of customers you/your team are currently servicing (e.g., the groups of individuals who receive a product and/or service from you/the team). Be sure to include both internal and external customers on your list.
- List the expectations each group of customers has of you. In other words, what criteria do they use to determine if the product and/or service provided is acceptable to them?
- Identify the criteria by which your customers judge your performance for them (e.g., timeliness, cost, participation in decision-making).
- Develop or identify measures to help to quantify your performance against the customers' expectations and criteria.
- Rate your unit over a reasonable length of time on these measures. Get key customer feedback as appropriate to help you make an accurate rating of your unit's performance.
- Meet with your key customers (internal and external) to discuss their "business" with them. Ask them for suggestions on things you can do to better meet their needs, given their environment.
- Share two or three of the most applicable suggestions with your team.
- Update your list of clients and expectations/criteria/measures on a regular (e.g., quarterly) basis.

Reflection Tips:

- * Share this list with your peers. Do they have any additional suggestions?
- * Discuss this list of criteria with a couple of customers with whom you have a particularly strong relationship. Use this opportunity to communicate the purpose of the exercise, probe for additional criteria, and check for accuracy of the criteria you have chosen.
- * You may want to consider putting some sort of ongoing feedback tool in place, in order to regularly gather feedback.
- * Work with your team to develop a realistic action plan to implement the most relevant of the suggestions.

Publicly recognize individuals and groups who have clearly exceeded expectations for customer service.

- Use real life examples of excellent customer service skills when giving an internal speech or presentation.

- Talk about the value of customer-oriented individuals to the organization.
- Describe how customer service makes a difference in keeping customers, and to the perceived value of government services.
- Participate in internal forums and discussions on the value of developing individuals with a customer service focus relative to the services provided by the government.
- Use customer service skills and strategies when dealing with internal and external clients.

Enlist the support within your organization to make a change.

- Identify the people whose support you need to implement a new idea, project or plan, aimed at improving customer service.
- Find out what each of these people thinks about your proposal, and develop a plan to do what is necessary in each case to ensure the support you need.
- Take specific steps to learn more about individuals throughout the organization who provide important client support, or who can help you accomplish your goals.
- Monitor the success of your plan and modify it as you go along.