



Customer Engagement Through Soft Skills



Our Customer Service Philosophy

- ▶ It is our continued goal to ensure that our customer feels as though they receive **the best possible experience** during our interactions.
- ▶ *That experience begins with how you choose to approach each call.*
- ▶ While you will not be able to please everyone all the time, there are many things entirely within your control that can make or break a phone call.



Your approach to customer service can make or break a phone call.

Basic Terminology



- ▶ **Empathy:** Put simply, empathy is feeling and understanding someone's issue as if it were your issue, as opposed to looking at it as an outsider.
- ▶ **Sympathy vs. Empathy:** "I feel sad for you," vs. "I feel sad with you." Agents need to be empathetic, without getting overly involved in a caller's issue.
- ▶ **Tone:** This can be described as the way your voice sounds when you speak, including its pitch and quality. For example, as an agent, your tone should be warm and friendly.
- ▶ **Engagement:** This is the process of remaining active and building a rapport in the your conversation with a caller. It's taking the lead on the call to help direct the customer on where they need to go. They don't know our business and that's why they called you.
- ▶ **Active Listening:** When you are listening intently to another, you are picking up on not only their words, but on their vocal cues, to gain a full understanding of their needs. You can listen to inflection to assess how a caller may be feeling.
- ▶ **Transitional Phrase:** In conversation, a transition may take you from one thought to another, one subject to another, and one sentence to another, helping you avoid unnecessary pauses.
- ▶ **Soft Skills:** Communication skills, listening skills, and empathy, for example, are soft skills that are used to engage in polite conversation with another.

What makes a great agent?



- ▶ **Just the FACTS, please!**
- ▶ An agent's professionalism can be defined by five key factors, using the acronym *FACTS*.
- ▶ **F**: be **Friendly** and courteous
- ▶ **A**: use **Active Listening** skills
- ▶ **C**: stay **Calm** (even when the caller is not)
- ▶ **T**: use a pleasant **Tone of Voice**
- ▶ **S**: use a **Smooth Transition** to avoid dead air



F: be **F**riendly and courteous



- ▶ The objective is to build a relationship and rapport with the caller.
- ▶ A popular home shopping channel uses a style of presentation they call “over the backyard fence.”
- ▶ The idea is to keep the flow of conversation friendly and comfortable, just as if you were talking to your neighbor over the backyard fence.
- ▶ For most calls, this should be your approach. You don’t want to lengthen the call by adlibbing with a bunch of pleasantries, but *you do want to lead the call with courteous conduct.*
- ▶ Remaining friendly & courteous helps us to avoid sounding robotic on our calls! That’s something you absolutely want to avoid!

A: use **Active Listening** skills



- ▶ In person, it's easy to spot active listeners. They're the people nodding their heads in agreement, making eye contact, and really engaging in the conversation.
- ▶ The caller won't see you nodding your head, and you can't make eye contact through your headset. But when you are truly paying attention to what is being said, the caller will know it.
- ▶ They won't have to repeat themselves because you'll reflect back what you heard. And if necessary, you'll ask a question or two to clarify details.
- ▶ Likewise, callers also recognize when you are distracted or not engaged. We must give every caller our complete attention.

Powering Through Challenging Days!



The moment that you put on your headset, the outside world needs to remain outside.

A: use Active Listening skills

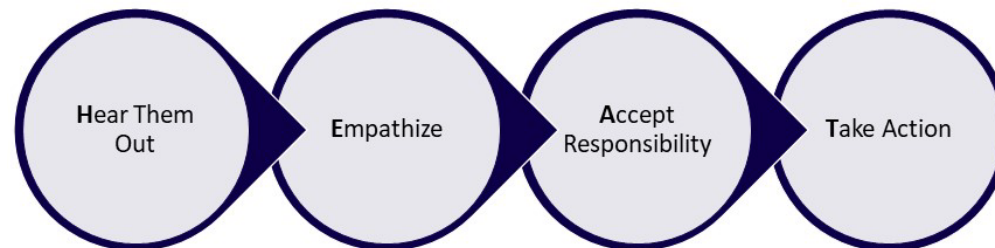


Engagement is a powerful tool in Active Listening

C: stay **Calm** (even when the caller is not)



- ▶ *It's your job to stay calm and reassure your caller that you are here to help.*
- ▶ When tensions are high, it's a natural tendency to echo those tensions in our speech.
- ▶ When you're speaking to someone who is obviously upset and taking it out on you, it may take all of your composure and focus to not get upset right along with them.
- ▶ That being said, it doesn't mean you should take verbal abuse. If a caller is out of control, remember to call upon your H.E.A.T. / de-escalation training.



- ▶ If you have utilized all the tools at your disposal and you are still unable to regain control of the call, then you may need to escalate it to a supervisor.

T: use a pleasant **Tone of Voice**



- ▶ “If a caller can’t see a smile through the phone, do they know you’re smiling?” The answer to our question is a resounding YES! *You can absolutely hear a smile just as clearly as you can hear a frown.*
- ▶ This also applies to those times when you aren’t sure how to do something, it’s taking you a little longer to document the caller’s request, you need to call over a supervisor, etc.
- ▶ *Callers will be considerably more forgiving of any potential confusion on your part if you maintain a friendly, positive tone throughout the call.*
- ▶ So...from your very first, “Hello!” all the way through to, “Enjoy your day!” don’t let your tone drone on the phone. Remember that you don’t want to come across as robotic... A pleasant voice is always the right choice!

Remember to remain Engaged on your calls! Callers know when you aren’t.

S: use a **Smooth Transition** to avoid dead air



- ▶ *No, this does not mean chit-chat like you're talking to an old friend.*
- ▶ It means that when you're on a call, try to avoid those uncomfortable pauses while you're taking notes or searching FAQs. Imagine how much better your calls would flow if awkward silences were kept to a minimum!
- ▶ For example, as you're typing notes, you could say, "Okay, let me make sure that I have this correct," and then you repeat back to the caller what you're typing as it is being entered. That sure beats the old, "One moment please... [insert insanely long pause here]."
- ▶ Phrases such as, "Are you able to hold on for a moment for me," "Let me see if I can find that out for you," and "I'm pulling that information up for you now," would all work.



PRO TIP: Use your experiences as a guide.

Think about the last time you contacted the customer service department of your bank or favorite retailer, or when you've reached your doctor's or dentist's after-hours answering service.

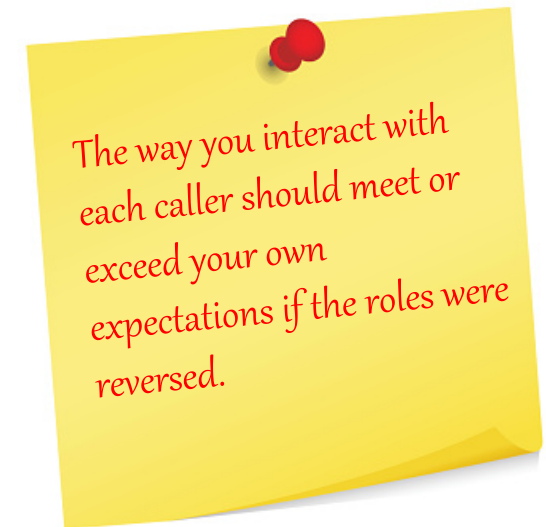
- ▶ Ask yourself these questions.
 - What stood out to you?
 - How did the agent come across?
 - Were they kind or unfriendly?
 - Did they listen, yell at you, or talk over you?
 - Did you feel heard, or did they act as if you were just another call to be answered?





PRO TIP: Use your experiences as a guide.

- ▶ A lot can be learned from your personal experiences.
- ▶ As a consumer and a human being, *you have every right to expect a certain level of treatment from others.*
- ▶ And thus, so does each caller.



Put yourself in the caller's shoes!



- ▶ You may not have had the same exact experience as a caller.
- ▶ However, *you can still identify with the feeling behind the experience*, and respond accordingly.
- ▶ This is empathy.
- ▶ When you're under the weather, how do you want people to treat you?
- ▶ When you're angry, what would make you feel validated?
- ▶ When you're stressed, whose soothing tone calms you down?
- ▶ When you're happy, don't you wish your joy were contagious?

When calls go well, what is the end result?



- ▶ The end result for callers is simple.
- ▶ They'll leave the call without a doubt that their request or issue is in good hands.
- ▶ Our customers will feel valued and validated.
- ▶ We'll retain current customers and build new relationships.
- ▶ As we said before, you won't be able to make everyone happy all the time. Your phone manner may be the very picture of professionalism and kind, courteous service, and someone may still hang up with a chip on their shoulder.
- ▶ But, *as long as you can say that you did your best and followed the principles in this training, then you're doing your job.*



What can you say... Some examples

Apologize	Act	Thank
<p>“I’m so sorry to hear that.” “I apologize for the issues you have been having.” “I’m sorry that happened and I would like to help you get this resolved.”</p>	<p>“I’m here to help.” “I’ll do my best to help you.” “I’d be happy to look into that for you.” “Let’s get this taken care of for you.” “I’d be happy to have someone reach out to you.” “I’d love to help you with that.” “I can fix that.”</p>	<p>“Thank you for your feedback.” “Thank you so much for your patience.” “Thank you for letting us know about this issue.” “We appreciate you bringing this to our attention. Your concerns are important to us.” “Thanks for waiting this out.”</p>
Make the customer feel valued	Put yourself in their shoes	Slow down and paraphrase
<p>“I see you have been with us for X years. That’s a long time.” “I appreciate your patience.” “Thank you for remaining so positive.” “Your business means a lot to us.” “I’m sorry you’ve had to deal with this.” “I want to thank you for taking the time to speak with me today.”</p>	<p>“I would feel _____ too in that situation.” “That would frustrate me, too.” “I would be asking the same questions as you are.” “You’re right.” “I would come to the same conclusion.”</p>	<p>“If I’m understanding you correctly...” “So what you are saying is...” “What you are saying is...” “Let me know if I’m getting this right...”</p>

Remember that it’s not only the words; but how we say them. It must be genuine to avoid sounding robotic.

Soft Skills and Empathy Recap!



- ▶ **Be Friendly and Courteous**, and always maintain a professional demeanor.
- ▶ **Actively Listen** to everything the caller is saying and how they are saying it.
- ▶ **Stay Calm**, especially when the caller becomes frustrated or angry. If you maintain a calm approach, eventually, the caller's frustration level will subside, and he or she will match your tone.
- ▶ **Tone of Voice is hugely important!** It reflects your willingness to assist each caller. And remember: *the way you conduct yourself has a direct impact on our customers.*
- ▶ **Smooth Transitions** are short phrases that will help you when you're feeling stuck. A transitional phrase is always better than a long stretch of dead air.



Role Play and Exercises!