

Deal with customers across a language divide

Overview

Customer service is frequently delivered across a language divide. In a multi-cultural society many customers may have a different first language from those delivering customer service to them. This language divide can present a real challenge to those who deliver customer service. This standard is about preparing to deliver customer service across a language divide and seeing through that delivery. The standard covers the steps that are needed to deal with customers with different language preferences without having full access to your customer's first language.

You should choose this standard if you frequently deal across a language divide. Remember, customers can be both external and internal to your organisation.

When you have completed this standard you will have demonstrated your understanding of and your ability to:

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Performance criteria

You must be able to:

Prepare to deal with customers with a different first language

1. Identify the language or languages other than your own that you are most likely to come across when dealing with customers
2. Learn a greeting, an expression of thanks and a farewell phrase in the language you expect to encounter
3. Identify a source of assistance with a language you expect to encounter when delivering customer service
4. Agree with colleagues informal signing options that may be used for key aspects of your services or products when dealing with somebody with a different first language
5. Log useful words and phrases to support your dealings with a customer with a different first language
6. Learn an appropriate phrase to explain to your customer in their first language that you do not speak that language fluently
7. Deal with customers who speak a different first language from your own
8. Identify your customer's first language and indicate to them that you are aware of this
9. Establish the expectations of your customer regarding whether they expect to deal in your first language or theirs
10. Speak clearly and slowly if using a language which is not the first language for either you or your customer
11. Maintain a consistent tone and volume when dealing with somebody across a language divide
12. Listen closely to your customer to identify any words they may be using in a way that differs from the way you would generally use the same words
13. Check your understanding of specific words with your customer using questions for clarification
14. Seek appropriate assistance from colleagues if you are unable to complete a customer transaction because of language barriers
15. Reword a question or explanation if your customer clearly does not understand your original wording
16. Use a few words of your customer's first language to create a rapport

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Knowledge and understanding

You need to know and understand:

1. The languages that you are most likely to encounter among groups of your customers
2. How to greet, thank and say farewell to customers in their first languages
3. The importance of dealing with customers in their first language if possible
4. How to explain to a customer that you cannot hold an extended conversation in their first language
5. The importance of tone, pace and volume when dealing with customers across a language divide
6. Possible sources of assistance to use when a language barrier demands additional language skills

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Developed by	People 1st
Version Number	2
Date Approved	February 2016
Indicative Review Date	March 2021
Validity	Current
Status	Tailored
Originating Organisation	Institute of Customer Service
Original URN	Unit B5
Relevant Occupations	Bar Staff; Receptionist; Team Member; Waiter/Waitress; Housekeeper; Room Attendant (housekeeping)
Suite	Hospitality Generics
Keywords	deal, customers, language divide, communication, communication difficulties