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Slide 1



# Managing Your Responses During Challenging Customer Interactions

Presentation by:  
MHN Training & Development

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### Learning Objectives

- Discuss different types of Customer interactions
- Describe Customer expectations
- Identify difficult types of Customer behaviors typically encountered on the job
- Discuss proactive approaches to dealing with challenging interactions
- Understand the body's reactions to negative interactions and how to identify personal indicators of stress
- Identify strategies and techniques to reduce the impact of difficult Customer interactions

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### Who Are Our “Customers”?

We often have more than one person to serve:

- Customers/Clients
- Supervisors & Co-workers
- Who else?

- What are some of the multiple demands that we receive?

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### The Importance of What We Do

- Main job tasks and functions
- Value to the organization

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### Customer Expectations

- What are some different aspects of Customers' expectations?
  - Before a visit or call
  - During a visit or call
  - After a visit or call
- How do we meet Customer expectations in our roles?

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### Developing Customer Partnerships

- How can we enhance our relationships with our Customers and create rapport?
  - What does an “adversarial relationship” look like with our Customers?
  - What does a “partnership” look like with our Customers?

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### What Our Customers Want

- Empathy
- Responsiveness
- Assurance
- Results
- Information

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### What Our Customers Don't Want

- Condescension
- Rulebook
- Run-around
- Excuses
- Apathy
- Brush-off
- Coldness

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### Customer Interaction Guidelines

- Understand the Customer's point of view
- Be prepared to handle routine concerns or complaints
- Acknowledge the challenges of the Customer's situation
- Avoid taking difficult behavior personally
- Let the Customer know that you are there to provide guidance

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### When Assisting a Customer

- When assisting Customers, what can you control?
- What can you not control?
- *Tell the Customers what you CAN do; not what you cannot do.*

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### Customers Seem Difficult When They...

- Are scared or frightened
- Are tired or frustrated
- Are confused or overwhelmed
- Are defending their ego or self-esteem
- Feel ignored
- Don't speak the language
- Have been treated poorly in the past
- May be under influence of drugs/alcohol
- What else?

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### If an Interaction Begins to Escalate:

- What can you do to make the situation *better*?
- What should you *not do* that could make the situation worse?

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### Calming an Angry or Frustrated Customer

- Remain calm yourself
- Give them your full attention
- Remain courteous, patient and polite
- Let them vent, express their issues and concerns
- Suspend personal judgment and hear their point of view
- Demonstrate good listening skills - paraphrase
- Demonstrate empathy (in tone of voice/pace)

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### Creating an Empathetic Tone for Discussion

- Use a calming voice
- Acknowledge that the situation is upsetting
- Restate their issues and concerns
- Acknowledge that they have a right to feel frustrated or upset – validate their feelings
- Ask open ended questions about their needs and wants
- Offer options and suggestions (if listener is open)
- Outline solutions and what you can do to help

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### Sample Phrases for Reflective Listening

- “So I understand that you feel...”
- “It sounds like you are worried about....”
- “You’re wondering if...”
- “I hear that you are concerned about..”
- “I can tell that you are very upset about...”
- “You seem unsure of what will happen about...”
- “I can see you are feeling stressed about...”

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### Setting Appropriate Boundaries

- Listen empathetically
- Keep in mind what you can and cannot control
- Realize you are not to blame for the Customer's difficulties
- Don't take what they say personally

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### Using Sensitivity When Dealing with Customers

- Acknowledge that everyone holds some type of biases about other people
- Avoid letting your own biases influence how you treat the customer
- Be aware of your verbal and nonverbal communication style
  - Nonverbal communication
    - Body language and gestures
    - Facial expressions
    - Physical distance during the interaction
  - Verbal communication
    - Tone of speaking
    - Volume in speaking
    - Word choice

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### Working Effectively with Diverse Customers

- Do not assume that your listeners understand you (even if they nod “yes”)
- Use simple Standard English
  - Keep your messaging brief and use short bits of information
  - Try to avoid using humor or slang that could be misinterpreted
- Try rephrasing something in one or two ways if you suspect you are not being understood
- Be careful when using hand or arm gestures
- Apply the Two Golden Rules of Customer Service:
  - *Find out what customers want*
  - *Treat them how they want to be treated*

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### Maintain Self-Awareness of the Following

- Biases, prejudices, stereotypes
- Differing and/or shifting cultural/social norms and expectations
- Behaviors and comments that may undermine perceptions of respect and/or cause misunderstandings
- Appropriate personal and professional boundaries

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### How to Appropriately End a Difficult Interaction

- Sometimes Customers will remain emotionally volatile, despite your best efforts
- It is best to end the interaction, for both you and the Customer
- Your Action Plan
  - Inform them of what they are doing (respectfully)
  - Request that they stop the offending behavior immediately
  - If the Customer stops the offending behavior, calmly continue the meeting
  - If the offending behavior continues:
    - Close the meeting; offer to reschedule at a later time/date when the Customer can maintain composure
    - Calmly excuse yourself from the Customer, to another room or area

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### Examples of Boundary Setting Statements

- “I can see that you are upset. We do need to discuss this issue, but I am not prepared to do so when you are angry. We will reschedule at another time that is better for you.”
- “I would like to help you, but you will need to stop yelling at me. If you do not stop yelling, the meeting will end.”
- *What else?*

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### The Power of the Team

- Tap into the expertise and experience of other team members
  - Contact a team member during the course of a difficult interaction
    - Preserve personal safety first
  - Reach out to other team members after a difficult interaction
  - “Real time” support when making a team site visit
    - Assist team member if situation begins escalating
    - Insist on leaving premises if de-escalation techniques do not work

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### Your Personal Customer Interaction Action Plan (Part I)

- Focus
- Goals
- Tasks
- Resources
- Communication Plan
  - Who
  - When
  - Where
  - How

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### Scenarios

- Challenging Client Interactions
- Skills Practice

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### Identify Your “Hot Buttons”

- What type of behavior “pushes your buttons?”
- What does it feel like when someone hits your “hot buttons”?
- What would you like to happen in these situations?

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### Reducing the Impact of a Negative Interaction

- Give yourself a mental or physical “break” when stress reactions occur
- Be aware of thinking patterns that may increase negative feelings and internal stress
- Keep your perspective!
- Manage your stress appropriately before, during, or after work
- What else?

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### When is a “Break” Needed?

- When the Customer’s behavior is out of control
  - The Customer becomes increasingly belligerent or raises their voice
  - The Customer threatens you, in any way
  - What else?
- When you are having difficulty controlling your own behavior
  - You cannot control your frustration or anger
  - You lash out at other Customers or co-workers
  - When you have had a string of “negative” interactions
  - What else?

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### What is a Mental or Physical “Break”?

- Healthy options
  - Take a big breath. Do it again.
  - Walk around the building.
  - Have a healthy “venting” session with co-workers
  - Use relaxation techniques (during break or at home)
  - What else?

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### Defining Stress

- A reaction when pressures placed on us are greater than our resources to manage them
- A condition that impacts our cognitive, behavioral and emotional well being
- A situation that has the potential to diminish our professional and personal relationships

*“Stress is an ignorant state. It believes that everything is an emergency. Everything is not an emergency.”*

**Natalie Goldberg**  
**Author, Lecturer**

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### Acute and Chronic Stressors

- Short-term (Acute) Stressors
  - Transient in nature
  - Situationally induced
  - Can build up if not managed
- Long-term (Chronic) Stressors
  - Impact on health
  - Impact on family relationships
  - Impact on work performance

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### General Adaptation Syndrome

- Stress is the *non-specific response* made by the body to any demand placed upon it
  - Both "positive" and "negative" situations and/or events can elicit the same physiological reaction in our bodies
  - "Positive" events are interpreted differently than "negative" events
    - "I am excited" versus "I am scared"
- The "Fight, Fright, or Flight" response
  - Male versus Female responses
    - "Tend-and-Befriend"
- The three phases:
  - Alarm Reaction
  - Adaptation
  - Exhaustion

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### The Body and Stress

- Under stress, your body will have:
  - Increased pupil dilation
  - Perspiration
  - Increased heart rate and blood pressure
  - Rapid breathing
  - Muscle tenseness
  - Increased mental alertness/focus
  - Decreased/stopped digestion



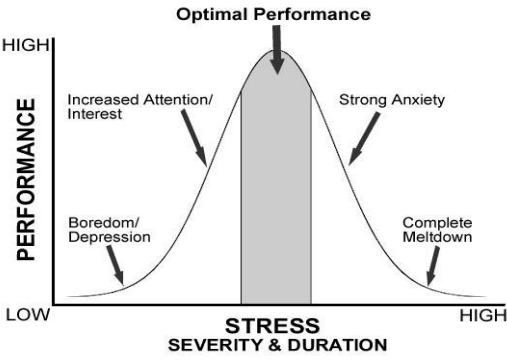
*Negative impacts may occur when dealing with extreme and/or unrelenting amounts of stress.*

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### Stress vs. Performance Grid



*When someone says, "I feel stressed", where do you suspect they may be on this stress-performance grid?*

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### Symptoms of Stress Build-Up

Stress symptoms may manifest themselves in many ways:

- Physical
- Emotional
- Mental/Cognitive
- Behavioral
- Delayed reactions

How does YOUR body react under stress?

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### Assessing Stress Levels

- Be Aware of Effects of Stress
  - Individual/Unique Reactions to Stress
- Use Stress Inventories
- Acknowledge When Stress is Having an Impact
  - Awareness is the first step in stress management
- Notice the Use of Unhealthy Stress Management Strategies

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### How Do You Handle YOUR Stress?

- Unhealthy Stress Management Behaviors
  - Temporarily reduces the feelings of stress
  - Reactive and escapist behaviors that may cause harm or damage if done excessively
  - Does not reduce or change the sources/reactions to stress
- Healthy Stress Management Strategies
  - Actually reduces the impact of stress (for either the short- and long-term effects)
  - Proactive behaviors that improve how you process and experience stress
  - Revitalize you

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### Healthy Stress Management Strategies

- Short Term (in the moment)
  - Deep breathing techniques
  - Muscle relaxation
- Long Term
  - Proactive behaviors
  - Healthy lifestyle habits
  - Positive thinking and cognitive reframing
  - Social support

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### Muscle Relaxation & Deep Breathing

- These strategies return the physical body to a more normal non-stressed state
- By counteracting the “fight or flight” response, calmer responses to the stressor can then be made
- Possible damage due to a continued arousal response can be reduced
- Example techniques
  - Diaphragm breathing
  - Progressive relaxation

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### Proactive Stress Management Behaviors

- Be Assertive About Your Needs
- Get Organized (and stay that way...)
- Vent in Emotionally Healthy Ways
- Use Humor Appropriately

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### Healthy Lifestyle Habits for Stress Reduction

- Enhance your healthy diet
- Stop smoking
- Reduce alcohol consumption
- Increase your amount of exercise
- Protect your sleep
- Pursue leisure activities
- Engage in active relaxation

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### Positive Thinking Patterns Can Reduce Stress

“Cognitive Reframing”

- Challenge the “Shoulds”
- Avoid “All or Nothing” thinking
- Re-frame failures as new opportunities
- Be compassionate with yourself
- Focus on the present
- Embrace optimism

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### Social Support Increases Stress Resilience

- Identify your social support needs
- Identify helpful/non-helpful behavior
- Communicate your needs respectfully and specifically to those in your support network

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### Perceived Stress and Control

- Focus your thoughts, energy and actions on situations and events that you can control
- Reduce your focus, thoughts, energy and actions on situations and events that you cannot control

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### Perceived Stress and Control

- Factors beyond our control:
  - External events
  - Organizational changes
  - Local, state and national economic issues
  - Stock market
  - Fluctuating housing values
  - Changes in government & industry
- Factors within our control:
  - Your self (personal habits, health, etc.)
  - Your responses in relationships and to situations
  - Your spending habits/budgeting/credit cards
  - Your financial planning
  - Your skills and professional development

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### A Customer Service Perspective

- I will not allow the difficult, unpleasant person to make me upset, angry or frustrated.
- I will not allow this person (who I hardly know) to ruin my day, or make me unhappy, because in the scheme of things this person is not important enough to control my life (is anybody, really?).

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### Keeping Your Perspective

- It is nearly impossible to change another person...
- You seldom can change the situation...
- You CAN change your perception and your reactions to the situation or person!

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### Your Personal Stress Management Action Plan (Part II)

- Focus
- Goals
- Tasks
- Resources
- Communication Plan
  - Who
  - When
  - Where
  - How

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### A Quote

“No one can drive us crazy  
unless we give them the keys.”

Doug Horton, author

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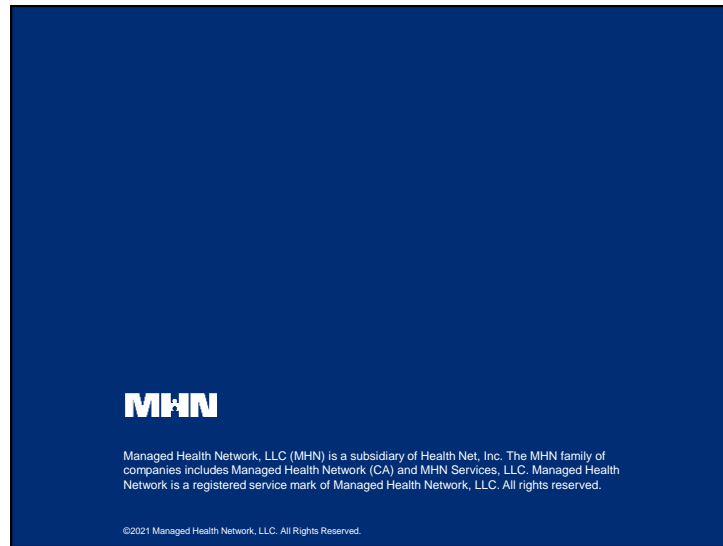
### Resources

- Internal
  - Colleagues
  - Supervisors/Managers
  - Who Else?
- External
  - MHN EAP Services
  - MHN Online [www.mhn.com](http://www.mhn.com)
  - Who/What Else?

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## Handout A. Non-Verbal Clues to a Customer's Feelings

### 1. ANGER

- ✓ Squinting eyes
- ✓ Frowning
- ✓ Tight lips
- ✓ Pacing
- ✓ Turning away
- ✓ Short breaths
- ✓ Tapping pen, pencil, finger
- ✓ Making fists crossed arms

### 2. CONFIDENCE

- ✓ Hands behind back
- ✓ Hands in coat/pants pockets with thumbs out
- ✓ Wide gestures

### 3. COOPERATION

- ✓ Upper body leaning forward
- ✓ Open hands
- ✓ Sitting on edge of chair
- ✓ Nodding
- ✓ Unbuttoning/or removing of jacket
- ✓ Tilted head

### 4. DEFENSIVENESS

- ✓ Arms crossed on chest
- ✓ Crossed legs
- ✓ Pointing index finger

### 5. EVALUATION

- ✓ Hand to face gestures
- ✓ Head tilted
- ✓ Stroking chin
- ✓ Peering over glass
- ✓ Taking glasses off/cleaning
- ✓ Putting hand to bridge of nose

### 6. FRUSTRATION

- ✓ Short breaths
- ✓ "tsk" sounds
- ✓ Sighs
- ✓ Tightly clenched hands
- ✓ Pointing index finger
- ✓ Rubbing hand through hair
- ✓ Rubbing back of neck

### 7. INSECURITY

- ✓ Pinching flesh
- ✓ Chewing pen/pencil
- ✓ Thumb over thumb rubbing
- ✓ Biting fingernails
- ✓ Hand in pockets

### 8. NERVOUSNESS

- ✓ Clearing throat
- ✓ "Whew" sounds
- ✓ Licking lips
- ✓ Fidgeting in chair
- ✓ Hand over mouth while speaking
- ✓ Not looking at other person
- ✓ Tugging at ear
- ✓ Tugging at clothing
- ✓ Wringing of hands

### 9. OPENNESS

- ✓ Open hands
- ✓ Unbuttoned men's jacket

### 10. SUSPICION

- ✓ Arms crossed
- ✓ Sideways glance
- ✓ Rubbing eyes/nose
- ✓ Facing sideways
- ✓ Drawing away

## Handout B. How To Win Over A Difficult Customer

### **STEP 1. Let the Customer Vent**

When customers are upset, they want two things: First they want to express their feelings, and then they want their problem solved. Trying to jump ahead and solve the problem won't work until the customer has vented their feelings. Zip your lip. Stay quiet and don't make matters worse by interrupting the customer. In particular, here are some words and phrases to avoid:

“You don't seem to understand...”  
“You must be confused...”  
“You have to...”  
“You won't ... we never ... we can't”  
“You're wrong...”  
“It's not our policy...”

Do say, “Yes sir/ma'am” ...uh-huh ... yes ... okay...

Don't take it personally. You are often the person the customers contact, so are the recipient of all the anger, frustration, rage, etc. Anger is an emotion that always looks for something or someone to blame. Even though the customer's anger may appear to be directed to you, remember you are the person they are venting to and don't take it personally.

### **STEP 2. Avoid Getting Trapped in a Negative Filter**

The friction between you and a customer is often worsened by how you interpret their behavior. Take a second to remember some of the names you call a difficult customer under your breath, after you hang up. Just in case you've forgotten, here are some examples:

**Jerk, Bozo, rude, stupid, creep, liar, pushy, clueless, moron, turkey, loser, and  
x#%\*&!!**

The instant you have this thought, an invisible negative filter comes down between you and the customer. It is inevitable that you'll have some negative thoughts about your customers, some of the time. The idea is to avoid getting trapped there. Understanding the harmful effects of a negative filter will not necessarily make them go away, but you do have a choice on whether or not to focus on them or not. The way out of a negative filter is to switch to a service filter:

**“What does this customer need and how can I provide it?”**

As soon as you ask yourself this question, your focus has changed from your personal feelings about the customer's behavior to the problems that need to be addressed.

### STEP 3. Express Empathy, You Understand How They Feel

If you give your customers a chance to vent, they will eventually run out of steam; then you can begin to participate more actively in the conversation. Giving a brief and sincere expression of empathy works wonders to calm a difficult customer. Empathy means appreciating and understanding someone else's feelings while not necessarily agreeing with them. By letting customers know that you understand why they are upset, you build a bridge of rapport between you and them.

Empathy is not sympathy. Sympathy occurs when you over identify with the other person's situation. For instance, if a customer says "your company doesn't care about service," a sympathetic response would be "You're right, we care more about the almighty dollar than anything else!" On the other hand, an empathetic response may be "It sounds like this situation has been frustrating for you".

#### **Empathetic Phrases:**

"I can see why you feel that way..."

"I see what you mean..."

"That must be very upsetting..."

"I understand how frustrating this must be..."

"I'm sorry about this..."

#### ***Empathy Means Always Having To Say You're Sorry:***

Some service providers feel uncomfortable apologizing to the customer because they see it as an admission of guilt. Saying "I'm sorry" to a customer does not imply that you or your company did anything wrong; it simply conveys that you are genuinely sorry that the customer has had a bad experience.

The tone of voice goes a long way in helping you convey empathy. If you say all the right words but deliver them in a cold voice, the words will have an insincere ring to them. By using a genuinely warm and caring tone, you enhance the meaning and effectiveness of empathic phrases.

**Indications That The Interaction Is Getting To You:** Catching yourself losing control with a difficult customer is not always easy. Look for these red flags:

✓ Tight neck and shoulders	✓ Cringing at the sound of the customer's voice
✓ Dreading the ringing of the phone	✓ Headaches
✓ Anger	✓ Being short or curt
✓ Raising your voice unnecessarily	✓ Strained tone of voice
✓ Breaking out in hives	✓ Grinding your teeth

Practice becoming aware of these symptoms and when you notice them, use the outline provided here. You will find that practice makes perfect, the more you practice, the better you will become at dealing with difficult customers.

#### **STEP 4. Begin Active Problem Solving**

Begin by asking questions to clarify the problem. As you ask, be sure to listen to everything said and don't jump to conclusions. Because you may think you have been through this problem before, you may think you have the answer and miss details that are specific to this customer's problems.

Gather any additional information you need. Use the *Bridging Technique*. This technique builds a bridge between what the customer is saying and where you want the conversation to go. When you notice the conversation veering off track, wait for the customer to take a breath (they have to eventually) then jump into the conversation with an empathic phrase followed by a question that steers the conversation back on course. Chances are the customer will come back to the point and provide you with the information you need.

Double-check all the facts. Use the *Mirroring Technique* to summarize your understanding of what the customer says and then reflect it back to them. The customer then has the opportunity to verify or correct your understanding of the situation.

#### **STEP 5. Follow-up**

You can score big points on the service scoreboard by following up with your customers, by phone, E-mail, or letter, to check that the solution worked. If the customer is not satisfied, go back and look for another workable solution.

***“When this customer is gone, I want to look back at the way I acted (regardless of how it turned out), and say, with pride, that I acted professionally, and constructively, and did not stoop to the uncivil or inappropriate (aggressive, nasty, etc.) level of the unpleasant customer. I never ever want to feel that I acted badly.”***

## Customer Interaction -Action Plan

Focus	Goal	Tasks	Resources	Communication Plan

## Handout C. Workplace Scenario

*Think about a time in which you had a challenging interaction with someone who was a “Customer”. Outline the events of the situation, and how the other person behaved during the interaction. Also, describe your responses to this person.*

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

✂ WHO is/are “the Customer” in this scenario?

.....

.....

✂ What would be your response to the person(s) who is/are “the Customer” in this situation?

.....

.....

✂ What could you say or do to make sure that the interaction(s) goes well with the person(s)?

.....

.....

✂ What should you NOT say or do during this interaction, to prevent the situation from escalating?

.....

.....

## Handout D. Active Relaxation Techniques.

**Progressive Relaxation.** This technique is often most useful when you tape the instructions beforehand. You can tape these instructions, reading them slowly and leaving a short pause after each one.

- Lie on your back; close your eyes.
- Feel your feet. Sense their weight. Consciously relax them and sink into the bed. Start with your toes and progress to your ankles.
- Feel your knees. Sense their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink into the bed.
- Feel your upper legs and thighs. Feel their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink into the bed.
- Feel your abdomen and chest. Sense your breathing. Consciously will them to relax. Deepen your breathing slightly and feel your abdomen and chest sink into the bed.
- Feel your buttocks. Sense their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink into the bed.
- Feel your hands. Sense their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink into the bed.
- Feel your upper arms. Sense their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink into the bed.
- Feel your shoulders. Sense their weight. Consciously relax them and feel them sink into the bed.
- Feel your neck. Sense its weight. Consciously relax it and feel it sink into the bed.
- Feel your head and skull. Sense its weight. Consciously relax it and feel it sink into the bed.
- Feel your mouth and jaw. Consciously relax them. Pay particular attention to your jaw muscles and unclench them if you need to. Feel your mouth and jaw relax and sink into the bed.
- Feel your eyes. Sense if there is tension in your eyes. Sense if you are forcibly closing your eyelids. Consciously relax your eyelids and feel the tension slide off the eyes.
- Feel your face and cheeks. Consciously relax them and feel the tension slide off into the bed.
- Mentally scan your body. If you find any place that is still tense, then consciously relax that place and let it sink into the bed.

**Toe Tensing.** This one may seem like a bit of a contradiction to the previous one, but by alternately tensing and relaxing your toes, you actually draw tension from the rest of the body.

1. Lie on your back, close your eyes.
2. Sense your toes.
3. Now pull all 10 toes back toward your face. Count to 10 slowly.
4. Now relax your toes.
5. Count to 10 slowly.
6. Now repeat the above cycle 10 times.

**Deep Breathing.** By concentrating on our breathing, deep breathing allows the rest of our body to relax itself. Deep breathing is a great way to relax the body and get everything into synchrony.

1. Lie on your back.
2. Slowly relax your body. You can use the progressive relaxation technique we described above.
3. Begin to inhale slowly through your nose if possible. Fill the lower part of your chest first, then the middle and top part of your chest and lungs. Be sure to do this slowly, over 8–10 seconds.
4. Hold your breath for a second or two.
5. Then quietly and easily relax and let the air out.
6. Wait a few seconds and repeat this cycle.
7. If you find yourself getting dizzy, then you are overdoing it. Slow down.
8. You can also imagine yourself in a peaceful situation such as on a warm, gentle ocean. Imagine that you rise on the gentle swells of the water as you inhale and sink down into the waves as you exhale.
9. You can continue this breathing technique for as long as you like until you fall asleep.

**Guided Imagery.** In this technique, the goal is to visualize yourself in a peaceful setting.

1. Lie on your back with your eyes closed.
2. Imagine yourself in a favorite, peaceful place. The place may be on a sunny beach with the ocean breezes caressing you, swinging in a hammock in the mountains or in your own backyard. Any place that you find peaceful and relaxing is OK.
3. Imagine you are there. See and feel your surroundings, hear the peaceful sounds, smell the flowers or the barbecue, feel the warmth of the sun and any other sensations that you find. Relax and enjoy it.
4. You can return to this place any time you need to. As you use this place more and more you will find it easier to relax as this imagery becomes a de-stress conditioner.
5. Some people find it useful to visualize something boring. This may be a particularly boring teacher or lecturer, co-worker or friend.

**Quiet Ears.** This helps you quiet your mind as well as relax your body.

1. Lie on your back with your eyes closed.
2. Place your hands behind your head. Make sure they are relaxed.
3. Place your thumbs in your ears so that you close the ear canal.
4. You will hear a high-pitched rushing sound. This is normal.
5. Listen to this sound for 10–15 minutes.
6. Then put your arms at your sides, actively relax them and rest.

## Handout E. Daily Stress Test

Read each item and circle whether it is: (0) False/Never; (1) Sometimes True; (2) Often True; (3) Almost Always True; or, (4) Always True.

### Stress from Your Diet

- |   |   |   |   |   |         |
|---|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1. I usually start the day with sweet rolls, pancakes, or sugared cereal  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4       |
| 2. I regularly eat desserts and/or sweet snacks during the day, especially when I'm tired.  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4       |
| 3. I drink cola or other soft drinks often.   | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4       |
| 4. I heavily salt my food.  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4       |
| 5. I eat salty, fried foods, such as potato chips or salted nuts.   | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4       |
| 6. I drink more than two cups of coffee or tea (or other caffeine drinks) a day.  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4       |
| 7. I eat a well-balanced diet of fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains. <i>(Subtract half a point from your total score)</i> |   |   |   |   | - _____ |
| <b>Total for this Category</b>  |   |   |   |   | _____   |

### Stress from Drugs and Alcohol

- |  |   |   |   |   |         |
|--|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1. I smoke 20 or more cigarettes a day.                                    | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4       |
| 2. I take tranquilizers or sleeping pills regularly.                       | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4       |
| 3. I often have a drink at night to relax.                                 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4       |
| 4. I drink more than 1 ounce of alcohol (or 4-5 oz of wine or beer) a day. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4       |
| 5. I do not smoke. <i>(Subtract half a point from your total score)</i>    |   |   |   |   | - _____ |
| <b>Total for this Category</b>   |   |   |   |   | _____   |

### Stress from the Environment

- |  |   |   |   |   |       |
|--|---|---|---|---|-------|
| 1. I live in a city of 300,000 or more.              | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4     |
| 2. I live in a climate that is uncomfortable for me. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4     |
| 3. I have little privacy.                            | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4     |
| 4. I am exposed to other people's cigarette smoke.   | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4     |
| <b>Total for this Category</b>                       |   |   |   |   | _____ |

### Stress from Lack of Exercise

- |  |   |   |   |   |         |
|--|---|---|---|---|---------|
| 1. I do no regular exercise.   | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4       |
| 2. I get some exercise (1 or 2 days a week).   | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4       |
| 3. My way of relaxing is to watch TV each night.                                       | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4       |
| 4. I am overweight (or underweight) by more than 10 pounds.                            | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4       |
| 5. I do regular aerobic exercise. <i>(Subtract half a point from your total score)</i> |   |   |   |   | - _____ |
| <b>Total for this Category</b>   |   |   |   |   | _____   |

**Stress from Lack of Sleep**

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I get less than 7 hours of sleep each night. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. I never relax except when I'm sleeping.      | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

**Total for this Category**

---

**Personal Relations and Social Activities**

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I am in a stressful relationship.                             | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. I never have time to see my friends.                          | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I rarely do something just for fun.                           | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I feel unsatisfied with my personal relationships.            | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. I make time for enjoyable activities with friends and family. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

*(Subtract half a point from your total score)*

---

**Total for this Category**

---

**Job Stress**

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. I feel frustrated at my job.                            | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. I work more than 40 hours per week.                     | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. I sit most of the day.                                  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. I have little control over my job and responsibilities. | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. I feel overworked.                                      | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. I feel bored at my job.                                 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. I have little opportunity for advancement.              | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. I am underpaid for my job.                              | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. I have conflicts with my boss or co-workers.            | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. I work more than one job.                              | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 11. I derive satisfaction from my job.                     |   |   |   |   |   |

*(Subtract half a point from your total score)*

---

**Total for this Category**

---

**Total Score added across All Categories =** 

---

---

**Scoring:**

25 or below: You have a low level of stress in your life.

26 to 54: You have mild stress in your life.

55 and over: You have many sources of stress with which to contend

## Handout F. Is Your Stress Adding Up?

Emotional stress can affect you physically, emotionally, spiritually, mentally and socially. Check the symptoms you've experienced lately.

### PHYSICAL

- ✓ appetite changes
- ✓ headaches
- ✓ tension
- ✓ fatigue
- ✓ insomnia
- ✓ weight change
- ✓ colds
- ✓ muscle aches
- ✓ digestive upsets
- ✓ pounding heart
- ✓ accident prone
- ✓ teeth grinding
- ✓ rashes or skin problems
- ✓ restlessness
- ✓ foot-tapping
- ✓ finger-drumming
- ✓ increased alcohol, drug or tobacco use

### MENTAL

- ✓ forgetful
- ✓ dull senses
- ✓ poor concentration
- ✓ low productivity
- ✓ negative attitude

### EMOTIONAL

- ✓ anxiety
- ✓ frustration
- ✓ the "blues"
- ✓ mood swings
- ✓ bad temper
- ✓ nightmares

- ✓ crying spells
- ✓ irritability
- ✓ "no one cares"
- ✓ depression
- ✓ nervous laugh
- ✓ worrying
- ✓ easily discouraged
- ✓ little joy

### SPIRITUAL

- ✓ emptiness
- ✓ loss of meaning
- ✓ doubt
- ✓ unforgiving
- ✓ martyrdom
- ✓ looking for magic
- ✓ loss of direction
- ✓ needing to "prove" self
- ✓ cynicism
- ✓ apathy

### SOCIAL

- ✓ isolation
- ✓ intolerance
- ✓ loneliness
- ✓ lashing out
- ✓ hiding
- ✓ clamming up
- ✓ lowered sex drive
- ✓ nagging
- ✓ distrust
- ✓ fewer contacts with friends
- ✓ lack of intimacy
- ✓ confusion
- ✓ lethargy
- ✓ whirling mind
- ✓ no new ideas
- ✓ boredom
- ✓ spacing out
- ✓ negative self-talk
- ✓ using people

Source: *Well-being Magazine* Vol. 3, No

## Handout G. Positive Stress Management Strategies

### Look at Your Behavior

#### Use humor appropriately

- Try to find humor in the stressful event or issue.
- Use humor as a “pressure valve” if the stressor is creating frustration or anxiety.
- Use humor to keep perspective on the stressful situation.

#### Get Organized!

- Reduce clutter and mess in your personal and job spaces
- Use devices such as schedules, daytimers, appointment books, smart phones or PDA’s to keep on top of appointments. (Make sure to include your leisure time activities....scheduling in “down time” helps reduce stress!)
- Make daily to-do lists!
- Allow sufficient time to get to appointments.
- *Refrain from becoming overscheduled.*

#### Vent emotionally (safely and appropriately)

- Find a safe place or person(s) to blow off steam.
- Keep venting to the topic of stress.
- Allow yourself a set time to “gripe” or vent about the event or issue (say 10 or 15 minutes).
- Let the stressor go and get on with your life.

### Modify Your Lifestyle

**Healthy diet.** Eat nutritious meals; keep sodium and fat content low (or reasonable) to prevent stress on the heart and circulatory system.

**Stop smoking.** Smoking pollutes the body with over 400 chemicals with each puff taken and adds carcinogens to your lungs. Polluting your lungs adds physical stress to your body and reduces cardio-pulmonary functioning.

**Reduce alcohol consumption.** Moderate consumption (one or two drinks per day, no more) does not harm, and may enhance, circulatory functioning by reducing cholesterol.

**Exercise.** Aerobic and strength training exercises increase the efficiency of your body’s metabolism and helps to ward off the effects of stress. Additionally, your body may become more efficient in self-healing.

**Sleep.** The average adult needs 8 hours of sleep per night. If you rob yourself of an hour or two of sleep each night, you build up a significant “sleep debt” that puts physical stress on your body. Depriving yourself of sleep regularly decreases your body’s effectiveness and efficiency and does not provide enough time for your body to rest, restore, and rebuild.

**Pursue leisure activities.** Find an activity that helps you mentally and/or physically remove yourself from stressors. Gardening, fishing, reading, or jogging is all good ways to create time for yourself and de-stress.

**Engage in active relaxation.** Active relaxation requires that you engage in activities in which you mentally focus on reducing the physical symptoms of stress.

### **Create Social Support**

**Identify your needs.** To help your support network help you during times of stress, it is valuable to identify how they can help you. Would you like a “sounding board”, someone to listen and let you vent? Would you like your support people to help you find solutions to stressful events and situations in your life?

**Communicate your needs to your allies.** Think of a way that clearly tells your supporting friends or family the ways that they can help you during times of stress. Try to be patient and courteous during this process, because they will be learning with you! These discussions are most beneficial when they occur before a stressful situation hits.

Use “I” statements and describe the behavior you need (or don’t need) from your support person. For example: “I feel like my feelings are being negated when you tell me to ‘get over’ myself. Please do not do this”.

**Use Your EAP.** When the stress of life and the job becomes overwhelming, reach out for help.

### **Identify What’s Important**

**Values/Goals.** When your actions align with your values and goals, then stress is reduced.

**Talents & Abilities.** Identify your talents and abilities (many tools exist online for free or a nominal charge). Then determine how you would like to use these talents and abilities in your hobbies, at work, or in your everyday life. Our lives feel happier and less stressful when we do what we are good at doing and what we like to do.

Stress Management Action Plan

Focus	Goal	Tasks	Resources	Communication Plan