

Get an 'A' in Customer Service

A multimedia training program, uniquely designed for the public transportation professional.

This interactive program utilizes classroom discussion, individual and team exercises, video instruction and simulation exercises to teach and demonstrate techniques for providing exemplary customer service, while maintaining the highest level of safety at your public transit system.

The course runs approximately six (6) hours in length.

Instructor's Manual



Prepared for the
Alaska Dept. of Transportation (DOT)
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Section 1:

Let's Begin with You and the Customer

Manual Format: Special instructions or hints for the instructor are in red print.

To assist the instructor further, we have used the following icons throughout the manual to indicate which materials or visual aids will be needed for each section or exercise.



Videos



Classroom Exercises



Flip Chart



PowerPoint® Presentation



Story

Introduction:

1. Introduce yourself to class, and explain that we are all here to “Get an ‘A’ in Customer Service!”
2. Ask the participants to offer their name, what they did prior to transit, and one thing that makes them good with customers (i.e. descriptive adjective, or something they do, etc.) — **must be different from what others in class have said!**
3. Explain structure of the course, including start/stop times and breaks.
4. Explain the format of the workbook:
 - a. Exercises or questions appear in heavy, outlined boxes. Although many people don't like writing out exercises, explain that writing out the information may help you remember helpful hints or different perspectives. However, they don't have to. (Explain **audio learner** vs. **visual learner**.)
 - b. Helpful Hints to remember are in gray/blue boxes
 - c. Space to take notes in the back
5. As always in public transit, for safety purposes, point out the fire exits.



Instructor: Hello, and welcome to our course, “Get an ‘A’ in Customer Service,” also known as, “How to keep your cool, even with the most obnoxious passengers!” As you will see, this is a course was not written for a generic business. It was written from inside the public transit industry. It has been developed for public transit, by public transit professionals, and offers concrete suggestions to deal with common problems that bus operators encounter every day. It also teaches techniques to improve the way you respond to your passengers, and tactics for dealing with difficult situations that are unique to public transportation. Sit back, relax, don't be afraid to call out whatever you're thinking, or even commiserate with us about the annoying incidents we encounter in our field of work. Above all, please, enjoy this and...**don't be afraid to speak your mind. Believe it or not, the more you talk, the faster this will go!**

Tell us your name, and one thing that makes you good at customer service. But don't cheat - you can't say anything that another participant before you has said. I'll start... (Instructor offers the one thing that makes him/her good or bad at customer service.)

** As you write their answers, change or paraphrase their responses on the flipchart so that you can later refer to it during the section on paraphrasing.*



Discussion:

(Discussion defining customers and their importance.)



Instructor: Who are our customers?

Anyone using, attempting to use, or who might potentially use our service; a.k.a. passengers.

Commuters	Persons with physical/mental disabilities
Students/kids	University Students Shoppers
Transit Dependent	Seniors Con's on work-release
Choice riders, because of gas prices/parking/ecological reasons	
Tourists	DUI's Ex-con's, etc.

Instructor: Who or what is our competition?

Taxis/cabs	car pooling	rental cars
private automobiles	relatives and friends*	motorcycles
walking	bicycling	delivery service
hitchhiking	'Choosing not to go'	paratransit service**

* The money spent on the more expensive paratransit service is \$\$ out of their wages and \$\$ that won't be spent on more service. Range of \$1.50—2.50 per bus trip vs. \$15.00—\$25.00 per paratransit trip.

* Illustrate with story about mothers/aunts being driven around by sons/nephews vs. taking the bus.

Instructor: Why are customers so important?

Without customers, **there is no jobs!** With no passengers, you're just driving around a bus load of air. And to the best of our knowledge, there aren't a lot of companies out there paying people to drive a bus full o' nothing.



Class Discussion:

(To demonstrate our dependence upon good customer service in our private lives.)

Notes to instructor: We experience so many instances of 'customer service' during our day, both as customer service providers and as customers, that we don't even think about it anymore. In fact, sometimes we take good customer service for granted – until, of course, we receive *bad* customer service.

Instructor: Customer Service in our personal lives:

Tell me about a customer service encounter you've had in the last 24 hours.

Usually, either you'll get examples of bad customer service or very few examples, which prove that the only time people acknowledge or remember customer service is when it is *bad* or *exceptionally good*. **If no one volunteers any, list your own and include everything. If no one lists a good one, explain that we only remember the bad.**

Instructor: Statistics on how # of people we will tell about customer service:

Neutral 0-1 Positive 1-2 Negative 17!

Even if 99.99% of the time, you are fantastic with your customers, that one time that you lose your cool or blow off a customer can wipe out the other 99.99%.



Discussion:

(To assure participants that we understand their responsibilities and duties, and help them put their customer service duties into perspective with the rest of their job.)

Instructor: Now that we have established that the customer service part of our job is different, let's break down our job and see why.

What are your duties as a bus operator?

Make sure that you fish for a form of the word **SAFE** and **TIMELY** on the first two items, so it ends up being a list of priorities, with safety and on-time performance at the top.

- Provide *safe* transportation
- Maintain timeliness
- Customer Service
- Serve as a representative of your RTA or COA
- Marketing/advertising
- Revenue collection, etc....

Instructor: If you notice, **SAFE** transportation is at the top of list? That is because safety is *always* your first priority. It's of no use to get your customers somewhere on time if you kill them getting there!

Discussion: Why are our customer service responsibilities different than others?

We're not sitting cozily, in a cubical, with pleasant music playing in the background and ten minutes to resolve a problem. We are fact to face with our customers, and have no more than *ten seconds* to solve a problem or give information so that we can get the rest of passengers on the bus and pull out. AND, it's in front of 40 other people! So if they each tell 17 people that you blew it, that 's almost *700 people* who could potentially hear about your poor service, which equals *a lot* of bad publicity—publicity that we can't afford.

4 Steps to Recovery

Instructor: Since we're all human, and humans make mistakes, it's not practical to believe that we're never going to make a mistake. But, what separates a *good* transit system from a *great* transit system is how well we "recover" from the mistakes that, unfortunately, we make—either the operator or the transit system as a whole. There are four steps to recovery:

1. **Accept** that a mistake has been made, either by ourselves or by the agency.
2. **Apologize**, Apologize, Apologize!
3. Take **Action**—correct the mistake.
4. Go **"Above and Beyond"** to make up for the time that our customer was feeling negatively about us or the agency.

Make certain that you don't just stop at correcting the mistake. That alone won't counteract the negative feeling that the customer had about the service.

Only a **+1** can counteract a **-1!**

Section 2:

Video Scenarios - The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly!



Video Clips/Class Discussion:

To demonstrate a typically unsuccessful customer service encounter with many areas for improvement, and how to improve the encounter.

(Start Video)

Video Clip 1: "My Suit is Ruined, and It's YOUR Fault!" (Stop video)

Instructor: What went wrong in this scenario? What went right?

Clip #1

Areas for Improvement

- No greeting
- Rushed passengers
- No apologies for incident
- Told him to 'take his car' (*A PUBLIC TRANSIT SIN!*)
- Didn't proceed with caution through puddle(?)
- Attitude/rude
- Didn't make eye contact w/passenger
- Didn't acknowledge the complaint
- Gave one-word answers
- Confrontational

Clip #1

Strengths

- Kept his eye on bus in mirror
- Kept to schedule

If they aren't getting the answers...

1. Remind them of the events of the video, one bit at a time.
2. Lead them where you want them to go.
3. Don't worry about getting the answers from them in order.



(Start Video)

Video Clip 2: "Not my Job...I'm not the Info Guy." (Stop video)

Instructor: What went wrong in this scenario? What went right? Where are the 'areas for improvement'?

Clip #2

Areas for Improvement

- Didn't answer her/ignored her
- Didn't give full answers (quality *and* quantity lacking)
- Customer had to 'pull' information out of him
- Socialized too much/unprofessional
- Possibly taking an 'unscheduled break'/not doing his job
(* talk about who 'owns' that time)
- Didn't care/brushed her off/impolite
- Didn't attempt to calm her
- Sexual Harassment (?)
- **Wasn't listening to the content and possibly caused a larger problem for entire bus system by allowing disoriented passenger to wander** Mention that the customer was not talking coherently, which is how customers often get when they are upset or anxious. What was she trying to say about her mother?

Clip #2

Strengths

- Gave some information
- Referred her to someone who could help

ELDERLY?

LOST? CONFUSED?

What should that have indicated to the bus operator? Potential dementia? How could this have been dangerous, and whose problem is it now?

The rest of the transit system and possibly the police, who have to deal with the problem since this bus operator didn't.

REMINDE THEM THAT THIS WAS A REAL INCIDENT!



(Start video)

Video Clip 3: "But the Other Driver Helps with my Bags" (Part I)

(Stop video)

Instructor: What went wrong in this scenario? What went right? Where are the operator's 'areas for improvement'?

Clip #3A

Strengths

- Followed company rules/was correct in theory.
- Could recite rules verbatim
- Didn't put himself at risk (physically/career-wise)
- Told her where to find the company rules
- Gave her choices
- Concerned for timeliness
- Didn't touch her personal items
- Tried to ensure bus safety

Clip #3A

Areas for Improvement

- Attitude
- Rude, condescending, disrespectful tone
- No Compassion/no empathy/unhelpful
- Wasted Time/caused more delay arguing
- Aggressive/negative body language
- Didn't show good judgment
- No greeting
- Blamed it on the company & other driver
- Didn't offer the lift (if appropriate)

Discussion:

A Judgment Call'

Instructor: (Student workbook, page 3)

Much of good customer service is based on *judgment*. In other words, you must ask yourself: what is the best and safest choice for this customer and the other customers on the bus?

The best solution or best way to respond may *not* be found in any agency rule book, policy or training. *Not every decision is black and white*. You will have to use your intelligence, your experience, and the tools that we are learning here together today to determine the best choice of action.

Make sure to refer back to the list of job duties from earlier today, which should have now evolved into a list of priorities. Explain that, sometimes, you may decide to break or stray from company policy so that you can give customer service that goes "above and beyond." But, if you believe it is in the best interest of safety, and have made that decision based on well thought-out rationale, more than likely, you might be OK.

Would that first operator get written up? Probably not, because he followed the rules. But, was there *a more diplomatic way* to handle it? With this in mind, let's see how judgment played a role in changing the outcome of this next scenario...

(Start video again)



“But the Other Driver ALWAYS Helps with my Bags” (Part II)

(Stop video)

Instructor: How about on the re-do? What made it better? Are there still any ‘areas for improvement’?

Clip #3B

Strengths

- Was more professional
- Good eye contact/Moved her hat to show empathy
- Obeyed rules, but was diplomatic
- Good body language/less intimidating
- Concerned for timeliness
- Made customers feel better/calmer
- **Explained the rule**, didn't just recite!
(Remind them that adults do not like

arbitrary rules thrust on them like children.)

- Used good judgment, even though it meant breaking rules
- Didn't ‘rag’ on the other driver
- Nodded to show she was listening/ tipped her hat back to show her eyes
- Offered a creative solution (clearing out the accessible seat)
- Offered creative solutions for future rides (bring someone with her)

Talk about importance of the united front.

Also:
Creating the air of uncertainty.
“I'm not sure what happened yesterday; this is what I can do today because it's safe or I have time.”



(Start video)

Video Clip 4: “Late for the THIRD TIME this Week”

(Part I) (Stop video)

Instructor: What went wrong in this scenario? What went right? Where are the operator's ‘areas for improvement’?

(Start video again) *“Late for the THIRD TIME” (Part II)* (Stop video)

Instructor: How about on the ‘re-do’? What made it better?

What were the differences in the two scenarios?

Most important: 1. Empathized, as he was also late, 2. didn't butt heads about who was to blame, 3. didn't just assume that she could take an earlier bus, 4. gave alterna-



Team Exercise: To demonstrate the effects when an operator is *not* actively listening to his/her customers.

“Most Exciting Story”: Half class exits room, other half remains. Those that exit are told that they will be returning to the room to find a partner. Once found, they will tell that partner an emotional story about the most exciting or dramatic event that has happened to them in their lives, as a test to see how well the partner listens and comprehends when someone is emotional. (*Reference the woman in the video with the lost mother with dementia.*) Those that remain are told to listen to the story from their partners, but seem very disinterested and bored, and not to make eye contact. Instructor stops exercise once he sees enough storytellers become frustrated or feel rejected/hurt.

Section 3:

The Best A's You Can Get



Instruction

Instructor: Even if you only remember one out of five of these 'A' tactics, your difficult customer service encounters will turn out 20% better than usual...which is better than 'no improvement'.

THE FIVE A'S OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

'A' for *Accept* that the customer needs service or has a situation that needs to be resolved, despite whether you agree that the customer *needs* the service or is *justified* in his or her complaint.

'A' for *Actively Listen* to and understand his/her request or complaint.

'A' for *Acknowledge* that you have understood the customer's need or request, and are willing to help to the best of your abilities.

'A' for *Assess* the situation to determine how you might best respond to or resolve the request or complaint.

'A' for *Take Action* by either providing the service or resolving the situation there, or by politely and professionally directing the customer to the individual within your transit system who can.

Instructor: Use these A's to help you get through your customer service situations, from the most confrontational or difficult, down to those little requests for assistance or information that are the most irritating or time consuming. If you find yourself in trouble or getting into a situation that you didn't mean to be in with a customer, try going back to the A's: quickly think whether you might have skipped one. Chances are, if it's going badly, you might have missed one of these easy steps...

A' for ACCEPT

Instructor: You must *accept* that there is a request for assistance, a complaint or a situation to be resolved. There will be times when you disagree that there is a situation – you may think that the customer is unjustified in his/her opinion or complaint, or that it's not your job or responsibility to respond.

However, much time can be wasted in refuting the request or complaint. It can also cause needless ill-will against your agency. Small questions or concerns can escalate into large complaints or incidents when an employee doesn't willingly address or *accept* that something is being asked of him or her.



Helpful Tips...



- Do *not* immediately refer a customer to someone else in the agency without trying to respond first.
- As much as you might disagree with a passenger's opinion, you still have to deal with it. **



What is Your Hook?

We all have certain things that hook us. They are prejudices that perhaps aren't very attractive, but exist in our head—even if we don't admit or acknowledge that they exist. They might be the actions, beliefs, words or physical appearances of others that hook us under the collar, and drag us to thinking or acting in a manner that we know we shouldn't—such as not taking a customer seriously or not greeting them in the same manner as we would others.

But, in order to serve the public, it is best to have some type of defense against our hooks. These are techniques or thoughts that we engage when confronted with our hooks, in order to prevent us from 'taking the bait.' And the *worst* defense that we can have is *no* defense. When we pretend that our prejudices don't exist, we have no recourse when they rear their ugly heads.



You may not have to admit your prejudices to the class, but you might consider admitting them to yourself, if you haven't already. What are they?

'A' for ACTIVELY LISTEN

Active listening is more than simply listening to someone speak words. The technique of Active Listening uses skills and takes practice. You must:



- listen to *all* of what is being said,
- process the words, and
- gather information, if necessary, until you understand fully.

You must also let the speaker *know* that you are listening and understanding, through:

- body language,
- recapping or paraphrasing, and
- discussion, if necessary.

Helpful Tips...



- **Focus** on what the customer is saying or requesting. **Remember: When your mouth is open, your ears are closed!**
- **Posturing** - let the customer know by body language that you are listening and are attentive.
- **Make eye contact.** *You cannot just listen, you must "look" like you are listening.*
- **Do not make assumptions!** – When in doubt, ask the customer questions to make certain you understand. **It will also demonstrate that you are listening and understanding.**
- **Recap** or paraphrase what the customer said in different words to demonstrate that you understand.
- **Pause before responding** to collect your thoughts.
- **Don't interrupt!**

Use the Difference in Rate - You can listen faster than anyone can talk, so use this rate difference to your advantage by trying to stay on the right track, and think back over what the speaker has said. Rate difference: speech rate is about 100 to 150 words per minute; thinking, 500.

'A' for ACKNOWLEDGE

It is important to let the customer know that you have heard what they have said, understand it, take him/her seriously, and intend to assist them.

By **acknowledging** the situation and informing him/her of your intent to help, you will alleviate anxiety, de-escalate the tension or hostility, and buy yourself some time to think about how to answer them or resolve the situation.

Acknowledging can be as simple as a nod and a "Yes, I understand the situation or question," a "Let's see how we can fix this," or "You may have some options; give me a moment to think about that."

With a quick acknowledgment, the customer will know that you are taking him/her seriously, and won't be wondering whether or not they will get help or satisfaction.

Helpful Tips...



- **Empathize, don't sympathize** - Upset customers don't want pity, but they *do* want to know that you understand their situation or how they are feeling.
- **React to information, not to the person** - Do not allow your reaction to, or opinion of, the customer influence the way you respond or the seriousness with which you consider the problem. **You do not have to *like* your customers, but you do have to serve them.**

Instructor: And if you have to, *FAKE IT!!*



Class Exercise: To demonstrate tendencies towards judgmental behavior, even when we least expect them.

Instructor should clip photos of individuals of diverse backgrounds from magazines. Class is shown photographs of random people of various cultures and asked to write down the first word that describes these people as customers. They are then asked to honestly contemplate the words that their subconscious' associated with those people and their cultures, to demonstrate how we can formulate an opinion or story on looks alone, and how different the opinions can be from person to person.

'A' for ASSESS

You must now consider how you will respond to what's been said, or how you will resolve the situation. It's important to pause before responding to a request or complaint so that you can best determine how to provide assistance or service.

When you have done a job for a considerable amount of time, it is common to develop a standard repertoire of responses, as you have heard most everything many, many times before. However, each situation is unique, and deserves thought and consideration. And at times, some creative thinking to solve it – not just the 'same-old, same-old' response.

Helpful Tips...



- ***Avoid Hasty Judgments!*** - Wait until all the facts are in before making any judgments.
- ***Be creative!*** - Look for creative ways to resolve a situation or problem. Don't rely on what you have always told them, or how you have always reacted.
- **Consider each situation a challenge, and assume that you have to find a solution to each problem.** In some, you will be able to help the customer yourself by giving just a moment of your time or a little thought. Others will have to be referred to someone else at the RTA or COA. always told them, or how you have always reacted.

Cite examples of creativity from conversations and video analysis.

'A' for Take ACTION

It is crucial that you follow through with each and every request or situation, and to provide some level of assistance.

Taking action can mean providing service at several different levels: giving out information, distributing transfers, offering assistance boarding, or directing a customer to someone within the organization who can serve them further or more appropriately. As we said before, in some situations, you will be able to serve the customer yourself; and others, you will determine, will have to be referred to someone else at your agency. But in either case, you are still **taking action**.

Even if you are not the appropriate person to be providing service, **it is critical that a request or situation never be ignored.**

Note: The operator must also offer the *appropriate* level of assistance. Too much assistance can be either demeaning or discouraging to some customers, particularly some younger or senior customers, or those with disabilities.

Helpful Tips...



- **Never** make a promise you cannot personally guarantee. (**Refer to 'dry cleaning bill' idea from Video 1.**)
- **Don't Guess!** - If you don't know the answer, then don't guess. Ask someone at your disposal, or refer the customer to someone else at your agency who will have the answer.
- Give out the information number for your agency as a *tool*, not an answer or in place of something that you can do yourself, such as give out brief route information or instructions.

(Optional, if time permits)



Class Exercise re: Video Clip:

To practice and demonstrate participants' new skills by simulating customer service scenarios.

Select four volunteers (**who are comfortable, expressive and engaged**) from the group, and divided into two teams of two people.

The class re-reviews the two scenarios from the beginning (***Clips #1: "My Suit is Ruined and It's Your Fault" & Clip 2: "I'm Not the Info Guy"***), and each team simulates a re-do. The teams are told to decide amongst themselves who will do each role, and are given a few moments to prepare.

General Tips for Serving the Public

Instructor: Here are some general guidelines to remember when serving the public in your position as a bus operator:

- **Professional vs. Personal** - It is important to be nice and personable to your passengers. But, there is a difference between *personable* and *personal*. It is tempting to get to know some of your passengers on a personal level, either because you see them so often or because they see you so often that they begin to offer personal information. However, becoming too personal can cause several problems:
 1. It may unconsciously cause you to pay special attention to one passenger more than another, which could appear to be discrimination;
 2. Were you to inadvertently offer bad advice (*i.e. leaving a spouse*) or do a favor that doesn't turn out correctly, it could prompt legal action against your RTA or COA because you took the action while representing them; and
 3. If you become too personally involved, it makes it difficult to stay neutral when a situation does arise. ***Stay professional, not personal!***
- **Don't embarrass the customer or imply that they are not being honest** - Do not argue with or behave in a way that would embarrass the customer. Also, don't imply that the customer is being dishonest. The philosophy of most transit systems is to assume that all customers are being honest and forthright. (Site examples for fare, and explain that when we take ownership in our jobs and our agencies, we can take these transgressions from our passengers too personally.)
- **Find something to agree on** - Start your response by finding something, even the smallest fact, for you and your customer to agree upon. It's often called '**finding the least common denominator.**'
- **'CAN vs. CAN'T'** - Theoretically, customers respond better if you tell them what you *can* do vs. what you *cannot* do. For example, instead of saying "I can't bring you to Riverside Drive; this route doesn't go there," you could say, "This bus can take you to the transfer station where you can get on a Route 3 bus, which will take you to Riverside Drive. Or you can walk three blocks to pick up the Route 3 elsewhere."

Try to find an alternative to: "I can't accept this transfer. It expired."

- **Apologize for inconvenient situations** – Don't be afraid to apologize on behalf of your agency when a customer has been inconvenienced or wronged. Phrases you might use:

- I am sorry about this misunderstanding or situation.
- I am sorry if this was an inconvenience to you.
- I am sorry that you have been made to feel frustrated.
- **If I have done anything to upset you, I apologize.**



- **Smile!** *Even if you think it will kill you, it won't. Just do it.* 😊

Section 4:

Getting an 'A' in Difficult Situations!



Tell the story re: the automated customer service rep who couldn't actively listen, and therefore escalated the customer's anger!

Class Discussion/Video Clip:

"Find the A's"

Instructor: With this next video clip, we're going to practice identifying the five *A's* of a customer service, used during a difficult situation. We'll watch the bus operator in the first half of the clip do very little to diffuse the anger of a customer who probably has a quick temper. And of course, the customer's anger escalates to a nasty incident that could potentially have been dangerous to the bus operator and to the other passengers.

We'll then watch a re-do of a similar scene, and observe how just a few words by the second bus operator changes the outcome immensely.



(Start video)

Video Clip 5: *"Diffuse your Customer's Anger...
...Don't Escalate It!"* (stop video)



Instructor:

1. What were the primary differences between the two scenarios?

- Both offered scenarios in which the customer didn't understand how transit worked. However, the second driver didn't get agitated or assume that the customer was *an idiot*. He explained the passenger's mistake politely.
- The customer didn't have to pull the solution out of the driver—he offered the information up front.
- When the customer didn't have to beg for information, it lowered his anxiety level and anger, because he sensed from all the driver's actions that he was going to help find a solution.
- Driver was proactive instead of reactive.

Talk about the 'human dynamics' of a fight...
One must speak louder and with more aggression to 'out do' the opponent. If one participant does not do so, there is no need for the other to rise in anger.

2. Ask them to demonstrate how the second driver followed the *Five A's*.

Instructor: You can't change your passengers,
but you can arm yourself better by...

'Reducing Stress to Help You Maintain Your Cool'

Instructor: This section will give you some personal tips for *reducing your own stress* so that you can be effective even when dealing with some of the difficult and challenging situations that bus operators can encounter.

Talk - Don't be afraid to share your problems with someone you trust, even other peers of colleagues at your company or organization. Worries and stress have less power to affect you negatively when they are brought out in the open.

Balance - Your work is driving a bus, but that is not all you do. Be sure to maintain a balance of work, fun and relaxation in your life. We also urge you to volunteer some time to a cause or an effort in which you believe, such as a charity or social service group. This can help keep you from being overly self-centered and to expand your world.

'One Day at a Time' - Anyone in a twelve-step program has that slogan etched in their brain. However, it's a useful guideline for everyone. It can be altered to 'one task at a time,' or even 'one customer at a time.' The philosophy behind the slogan is that by focusing on the task at hand, you'll be less likely to worry about what's coming down the road.

'Give In' Occasionally - If you get into disagreements or are consistently presented with difficult situations, occasionally give in to the other person or the other person's point of view. Not only isn't the hassle worth it sometimes, but by letting the other person win, per se, you may change their uncooperative demeanor and take away a stressor in your life.

Self Care - If your body is fit and well cared for, you will have more stamina to deal with the mental stresses of your work and personal lives. And we all need a little reminder in these areas sometimes...

- Get enough rest
- Eat nourishing food, and
- EXERCISE!

Since our bodies bear the brunt of stress, it is important to find ways of releasing that physical tension before it starts causing damage. Stress has a cumulative effect on the body: that is, it builds up over time like a pressure cooker until it is released. If the pressure gets too high, the results might be high blood pressure, heart disease or chronic fatigue. Or it may prevent you from 'Maintaining your Cool' and providing the service your customers should receive.



Exercise - A walk in the park or a strenuous workout in the gym both can decrease your stress. You simply need to find out what works best for you, and what is recommended by your physician. Resolve to do something everyday to reduce your stress level while at the same time, improving your physical well-being. ***But again, whatever you select, be sure to get your physician's approval before beginning your regimen.***

Relaxation - By relaxation, we simply mean slowing down and giving both your body and mind a break. Do you enjoy listening to music, reading a book, or taking a nap? All of these activities will help relieve your stress and help you revive.

Ask for Help! - If, at any time, you feel that you are not able to cope with the stresses of your life or your position, and that you could use some advice or assistance, we strongly urge you to seek assistance from a community counseling center, a local mental health center, or your agency's Employee Assistance Program (EAP), if they have one. Your employer or health plan should be able to help you locate one. They will offer confidential advice for dealing with your particular situation and help you find additional assistance or counseling.



However, if you are not comfortable getting assistance through work, check with a local church, clinic or telephone book. Many counseling centers offer services on a sliding scale that is dependent upon your ability to pay. If you are in trouble, you don't have to be alone. Pick up the phone and ask for help.

Difficult Situations

Anger and verbal abuse:

- Counter with pleasantness or neutrality.
- Stay calm and attentive in order to assist your customer in doing the same – don't allow your customer to escalate the situation.
- Don't interrupt. Interrupting a customer can simply make them more upset. Let them get out what they need to say, as drivers are in vulnerable position and must be careful!
They are in person, seated below customer so that that the customer had the physical advantage, and strapped in without means of escape.
- Pause to collect your thoughts whenever necessary.
- Take slow breaths, even if you feel your chest starting to swell.
- Don't take comments personally.
- ***Find some rational thoughts that the angry customer is offering, and agree with it. It will help if the two of you meet on some level.***



Disagreement between two passengers:

- Don't take sides (unless one passenger is being physically threatened).
- Try to change the topic being argued about.
- Refuse transportation if the argument persists.

Intoxicated passenger:

Instructor: Because of the \$\$ billions spent nationally on anti-drunk-driving campaigns and the push to get people out from behind the wheel and into cabs or onto public buses, bus systems are being asked to take a different approach towards intoxicated passengers. Rather than simply denying service, we are asking that you take extra steps to try to keep them on the bus. **(Start Video Clip 6)**



It is no longer acceptable to simply refuse service to passengers who are intoxicated. Imagine if the passenger had been denied service because he didn't have the proper fare, got in his car, and killed someone!?!

But it doesn't mean that they should have 'free reign' on our buses. Judgment of whether to let a passenger ride should be based on safety—his/hers, yours, and your other passengers.

Here are some ideas for meeting the challenge of transporting intoxicated passengers:

- If the passenger is behaving inappropriately, politely call it to his/her attention
- If you can't get the passenger to stop the inappropriate behavior, either
 - ♦ change the intoxicated passenger's seat (if possible), or
 - ♦ encourage other passengers to change their seats if there is room.
 - ♦ ***If the first two strategies fail, get the passenger removed by police.***

Unhygienic customers:

- If you suspect it is a biohazard waste issue (bodily fluid), and you feel comfortable talking to the customer, then do so as privately as you can. *DO NOT EMBARRASS THE CUSTOMER*, but let them know that if it is a biohazard issue, they cannot ride public transit during those periods of uncleanliness.
- If you cannot speak with the customer, ask your supervisor if he/she could find an appropriate human service agency that might be involved with that particular customer, and ask them for assistance with the issue.
- However, if it is just a issue of body odor *not related to bodily fluids*, try to take the first two steps. If you cannot, or those fail, encourage complaining customers to sit away from the passenger. Smelly passengers should not be restricted from service based solely on odor, unless your agency establishes that as a policy. *(Give participants the biological explanation of why people with body odor do not always know that they have body odor.)*



Passengers with Disabilities or Special Needs

The following are *Tips for Communicating with Individuals with Disabilities*

However, most of these are good tips to remember when dealing with any of your customers, not just those passengers with disabilities.

- Greet your passengers.
- Speak directly to the passenger, not their assistant, interpreter or translator.
- Use body language that says you are willing to help.
- Offer assistance, but respect your passenger if they refuse the help. *ALWAYS ASK FIRST!*
- Use easy-to-understand language.
- Don't overwhelm the person with too much information.
- Keep directions simple.
- Be patient.
- If you don't understand the passenger, don't pretend that you did. Keep asking them to repeat, if needed. They are probably used to it.
- Treat adults as adults.
- Be calm, or at least look calm.
- Again, show empathy, not sympathy.



Unfortunately, there are terms still being used in our industry that are antiquated, outdated and can be insulting or degrading to an individual with a disability. Some of them are:

- **A wheelchair (when referring to the individual, not the device)**
- **Crippled**
- **Handicapped**
- **Patient or client**
- **Kids**



'People First'

When in doubt about terminology, remember the rule: "People First."

A person is not defined by their disability or illness. They are 'people first,' and thus the 'person' should be addressed first. For example:

- **Passenger with a disability**, not disabled passenger.
- **Person with epilepsy**, not an epileptic.
- **Passenger with a visual impairment**, not a blind person.
- **Passenger with a hearing impairment**, not a 'deaf mute.'
- **Person with a cognitive disability**, not a 'mentally retarded person' or worse, a 'mental retard.'

Customer Sensitivity and Assistance

Assisting elderly customer and/or customers with disabilities means nothing more than treating them as you treat any customer, or as you would want to be treated—with courtesy and respect. They expect no more from you than other customers—safe, reliable, efficient, courteous, and quality transportation.

The following describes other steps you can take to assist customers with various specific disabilities. These are general guidelines only and each individual may require different degrees of assistance. Even if you are sure a customer needs or wants your help, respect their independence and individuality and ***ALWAYS ASK FIRST!***

Elderly Customers:

1. Allow enough time for elderly customers to board and disembark safely. Decreased strength and impaired balance can make it difficult for the elderly. Offer your assistance. If the customers do not want help, monitor their movements. Always make sure they are seated before moving your van or bus.
2. Vision problems may make it difficult for elderly customers to judge distances to steps. Ask them if you may be of assistance.
3. Be patient. Some customers may ask questions repeatedly due to memory loss or confusion.
4. Most importantly, do not assume that all elderly customers have a disability.



Customers with Muscular Disorders:

1. Be aware that customers with muscular disorders may move stiffly or have jerky, lurching movements that they cannot control.
2. Customers with muscular disorders may have difficulty communicating, but can usually understand what you are saying. Confirm what the customers say by repeating what you think you heard them say.

Customers with Developmental or Cognitive Disabilities:

1. Customers with developmental disabilities may learn at a slower rate. You may need to remind them of procedures each time you transport them. Announce major inter-sections and major destinations along a route, in addition to any stops.

3. Most often, if they are riding the van or bus, they are not children; they are adults, and should be spoken to as adults.

Customers with Dementia (i.e. Alzheimer's Disease):

1. You may also have to repeat instructions in simpler words if the customer has trouble understanding.
2. Because people with this disease tend to wander, it is important to try to watch the customer once he or she has left the vehicle at the curb, to make certain that he or she makes it to the destination.
3. If you find a need to correct the behavior of a customer with dementia, you may discover that the customer is oblivious to that behavior. Having Dispatch speak with his or her advocate may be more effective.
4. If the customer would like some assistance, use care and let him or her take your arm. Never take the arm of the customer first, unless instructed to do so.

Customers with Hearing Impairments:



1. Speak at a higher or lower level (not necessarily louder)
2. Speak so the customer can see your face and lips, but remember that not all persons with hearing impairments can read lips.
3. If the customer can read lips, speak normally and use short, simple sentences. The customers will not be able to hear you when you call out their stops. Make sure you notify them in some other way.

Customers with Speech Disorders:

1. Be patient, and be very careful not to laugh or make fun of the customer.
2. If you are not sure what the customer said, ask him or her to repeat their statement. Generally, people with speech disorders or impediments would much rather repeat themselves than to be misunderstood.
3. Repeat what you think you heard. Ask the customer to start again where you end or where you have misunderstood.
4. Be careful not to finish the customer's sentences, even if you are sure what they are going to say. Unless you know the customer well and he or she has expressed their willingness to have you do so, you should assume that the customer would prefer to give the information themselves, even if you he or she must struggle some.

Customers with Vision Impairment:

1. Watch for clues such as white cane, service animal, travel aid, cards, etc., but don't assume that all customers with vision impairments will have these devices. Also, don't assume that all service animals indicate a customer with a vision impairment.
2. Use a normal tone of voice.
3. If the customer would like some assistance, use care and let him or her take your arm. Never take the arm of the customer first, unless instructed to do so. If the customer is holding onto a mobility device such as a white cane or a service animal, make certain to offer the assistance on the opposite side.
4. Give descriptive directions. For example, instead of saying "over there," say "the second seat on your right." It is helpful if the person can sit next to the front door, across from you, unless they have indicated otherwise.

2. Hesitate before going up or down steps or curbs, and make certain you vocally indicate the need to “step up” or “step down.”
3. Use the work “Stop.” It only has one meaning—“cease doing what you are doing.”
4. Watch for customer carrying travel aid cards that indicate their route or destination.

Service Animals

Service animals are used to assist persons with disabilities, including those with visual impairments, hearing impairments, mobility impairments, epilepsy, rheumatoid arthritis, and other physical disabilities. Service animals also may be trained to assist persons with mental disabilities. In addition to guide dogs, there are animals trained to retrieve items and perform simple tasks, signal animals for those with hearing impairments, and seizure-response animals that alert their owners to oncoming seizures and to aid the owner during and after the seizure.

The following are tips and issues to remember about service animals:

1. Not all service animals have a harness or lead line.
2. You are only allowed to ask the customer if the animal accompanying him or her is a service animal. If the customer answers affirmatively, you may *not* ask for certifications or proof. You may, however, ask what service the animal provides.
3. The customer is responsible for the control of the animal. You may offer assistance, but always ask first.
4. Do not touch or give the service animal any commands, unless asked to do so by its owner.
5. If necessary, remind other customers that the service animal is working and not to distract it.
6. Service animals should sit or lie on the floor. They should not occupy a passenger seat or obstruct the aisle.
7. Alert Dispatch immediately if the service animal presents a physical or biohazard danger to you or other customers on the vehicle.



Mobility Devices

The first thing to consider about a wheelchair or other mobility device is its great importance and value to its owner. It is as valuable to the user as the body part or function it has replaces. Many mobility device users consider them to be an extension of their own body. Unnecessary leaning on or touching of a mobility device can be compared to leaning on or touching the customer’s person.

When assisting them in moving, you should:



- make your movements smooth and gentle;
- not jerk or jolt, which can be uncomfortable or even painful to the occupant;
- be confident in your ability to do so, and relay that confidence to your customer;
- always tell the occupant before you move or tilt the mobility device so that he or she can prepare themselves;
- be careful not to scratch the device, or bump and scrape its corners or edges.

Instructor: Are there any other passengers with whom you might like some assistance or advice? Any other situations?

Section 5:

Practicing Your New Skills



Final Class Exercise:

To practice and demonstrate your new skills!

Instructor: Our group will split up into teams of three people: The *operator*, the *customer* and the *bystander*. *(We encourage the 'bystander' to role-play as a person who is trying public transit for the first time.)* I will hand out cards with three potential customer service scenarios for each team to simulate. The 'operator' and 'customer' simulate the situation, while the 'bystander' assesses the performance of the operator. **As the bystander, feel free to offer helpful advice on 'areas for improvement,' or reasons why you feel the incident was handled well.**

Final Exam:

Instructor: To demonstrate your new skills to your employer, we will be conducting a final one-question test. A correct answer will certify you in 'customer service for public transit' for the next twelve months. **Also:** as an added bonus, the first participant to render a correct answer will take away the class prize for today's course. Once the question has been posed, you can either have them shout out the answer, or write them in their workbooks.

Q: Out of the actors, who is actually a bus operator in real life!?!

A: The actor who played the 'smelly drunk'.

GRADE: 'A'

Notes:

COMMON THEMES TO USE AND REPEAT THROUGHOUT:

This course will not make you a nice person, if you aren't one! But we can try to teach you the importance of being formidable, and how to fake it, if you have to.

We are the biggest **marketing tool** that the transit system has!

Sometimes our customers do not have the capacity to understand or retain information. We feel as though they are asking us the same question every day just to irritate us. However, in the majority of cases, they cannot retain the answer from one day to the next. Often, it is only our patience and our answer to that same question every day that enables him/her to go to work every day.

Even if we disagree with our customer or feel that his/her opinion or anger is unjustified or irrational, it doesn't mean that he/she doesn't feel that way. Our disagreement with the anger doesn't make the anger go away. In fact, if we disregard it, the anger often gets worse.

Our customers aren't stupid, they just do things that often don't make sense to us.

You can't choose your passengers, nor can you change them—you can only change the way you deal with them! Even if confrontations are their fault, you can't eliminate them from your day just because they are difficult to get along with. And as importantly, even if they do stop taking the bus, move or even die, someone else just like them will be there to take their place! *The faster you accept this, the quicker you can get back to doing your job well.*

Tell the participants if you can relate to a particular problem or issue from either the workbook material or the videos, as it will make them feel better knowing that you have difficulties and make mistakes, as well.

Sometimes customer service must take a 'back seat' to safety and timeliness. Refer back to the **three big priorities—safe transportation, timely transportation and (then) customer service—** to either help make your point or help them with answers.

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