
Frontline Staff Training Tools

Service, Savvy, Communication & Care

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PREVENTING PROBLEMS

Getting Out Ahead of Problems

Being prepared and working smart are some key ways to get out ahead of problems in proactive and preventive ways...

Provide Information. Customers will often do some research on their own to try to solve problems. Make sure they can find the information they need. Frontline staff can display departmental brochures in prominent locations and make sure they are up to date. Staff can also help coordinate information sessions in advance of an event.

Track Questions. Another way frontline staff can assist in preventing problems is to keep track of the questions they are most frequently asked. Turn these into a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) list that can be posted online or in other prominent locations to help answer questions in advance.

By anticipating what customers likely want to know, frontline staffers are providing great customer service!

Put It in Writing. Another simple, helpful tool could be putting more items in writing for visitors, such as having a half-sheet that explains the three simple steps to follow when checking your grades online or other commonly asked questions. Those visual learners and those with poor memories or who are overwhelmed with details will appreciate having something in writing! It's a way to get out ahead of a task before it becomes a problem. Plus, it can help prevent misunderstandings, frustration and more in the future.

Preventive Maintenance

Here is a list of "What ifs?" to consider as a way to prepare for potential problems. Talk about these, in pairs or trios, to cover preventive ways to address these issues before they blow up into full-fledged problems.

- ◇ What if a student comes into your office, speaking loudly and rudely?
- ◇ What if a parent calls and demands to speak with your supervisor after you've tried to answer her questions?
- ◇ What if the meeting space you reserved isn't available at the last minute and you have 12 meeting participants waiting?
- ◇ What if there is a campus power outage?
- ◇ What if someone comes into the office and there is a language barrier that makes it difficult for you to understand one another?

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PREVENTING PROBLEMS

Stopping Problems in Action

The Run-Around

Have you ever received a phone call and the person on the phone starts by saying, “You’re the third person I’ve talked to!”? The problem here is that the customer feels like he is getting the run-around or that he isn’t important.

For whatever reason this happens, frontline staff should do their best to stop the problem. If you are not the right person to answer the question, break the cycle of transferring and take the caller’s name and number. Find out what he needs help with, too. This gives you time to find the answer or correct person to talk to and then get that information back to him, preventing any further aggravation.

Incorrect Information

In addition, you may also hear from students that someone else told her one thing, however, you feel that is incorrect. Frontline staff have the chance to stop a problem before it happens by getting the student the right information. Assure the student that you want to double-check the process and then do just that.

Be sure not to sell out another department or person when correcting information, though. “I can’t believe they told you that over in the XYZ office!” may be your initial reaction, yet there’s no need to throw your colleagues under the bus that way. Instead, focus on getting your visitor the correct information. They’ll appreciate your efforts and think highly of you and your office as a result!

Be Prepared for these Customers

The Repeat Questioner...this person asks the same questions all the time, like, “Can I get a single room because I have a 4.0?” or “Why can’t I have a single room as a freshman?” Being patient will go a long way.

The Crier...this person gets emotional while explaining her problem. Do your best to calm her, and if needed, take her to a private space until she can collect herself. Have tissues on hand just in case!

The “I Want It Now”...this customer can’t understand why his daughter can’t get a class added to her schedule right this very second. Again, patience is a virtue and explaining the process can help.

The Yeller...this person raises her voice, perhaps shouting, to make her point. By staying calm, you can encourage her to calm down as well. Remember the old trick of speaking quietly in front of a group of people so they have to quiet down to be able to hear you? The same applies here.

The Texter...this customer doesn’t want to be disconnected. Ever. Even when he is face to face with you, he continues to text. This can be frustrating and handled in a variety of ways. You can choose to ignore it and continue to serve him, or you can politely say, “When you are finished with your conversation there, let me know and I’ll be happy to help you.”

The Groupie...this customer comes to you to talk about confidential information, but has two friends with her. You have two options here: ask her to speak with you privately in another area of the office, or ask permission to speak freely in front of her friends.

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PREVENTING PROBLEMS

Worksheet: The Power of Positive Phrasing

Take a look at some commonly used phrases on the frontline. How could you turn them around to be more positive?

Brainstorm some other statements that could be made to make the same point as those listed below, just in a more positive frame.

For Example:

You can't take that class.

More Positive Phrasing:

That is a class for seniors, and as a sophomore you still need to take some prerequisite courses. Let's look at the prerequisites and see if one of those fits your schedule.

See what you can do with these phrases:

1. We don't take care of that here.

More Positive Phrasing:

2. That person isn't here.

More Positive Phrasing:

3. To a parent: I can't tell you that information.

More Positive Phrasing:

4. You just have to do it (i.e. pay a fine or fee).

More Positive Phrasing:

5. We're really busy right now.

More Positive Phrasing:

The idea isn't to make excuses. Take the time to educate the customer about policies or procedures. Explain why you can't do something then offer to do something else that may be comparable. Frontline staff members are there to be polite and helpful, even when faced with tough situations.

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PREVENTING PROBLEMS

Case Study

The Power Outage

It's the middle of the afternoon and your office has several visitors in the waiting area. Thunder and lightning are pounding outside when all of a sudden the power goes off. It's quite dark in your office.

One visitor starts getting a bit panicked, saying things like, "Will the lights ever go back on?" and "Maybe I should leave because other parts of campus might have power and I hate being in the dark." As a result of her anxiety, some of the other visitors are getting a bit antsy, too.

One student uses her cell phone to call her roommate in another part of campus, finding out that the power is out there as well. She starts worrying about a big exam she has during a night class, asking you, "Do you think I'll still need to take it? I was planning to study while I wait here, but now I can't see a thing!"

You want to accommodate your visitor's concerns and help them feel more comfortable about this unexpected occurrence. How can you go about that?

Discussion Questions:

- What are some of the immediate things you might do if the power were to go out in your office?
- What proactive measures can you take to make sure you're ready for this type of possibility?
- What should you have on hand to handle a power outage?
- Who else in your office would assist with this type of situation?
- How could you help anxious, concerned visitors feel more comfortable?

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PREVENTING PROBLEMS

Worksheet: An Office Safety Audit

One key way to prevent problems from happening is to take a proactive look around at your office environment. What might compromise visitors' safety? Have a few different people fill out this safety audit so you can look at your office safety from various perspectives. It's bound to be eye-opening!

Please rank on a Safety Scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being least safe and 5 being the safest.

___ **Push/Pull** – Does the office door have a push or pull sign on it? Is it counter-intuitive, causing some visitors to strain or risk getting hit in the face?

Comments:

___ **Tripping Possibilities** – Are there loose rugs or welcome mats that could trip people up? Is there a step up into the office that you're used to, but that could prove harmful to new visitors?

Comments:

___ **Lighting** – Is there adequate lighting in the hallway/stairwell/elevator leading to your office? Are there any burned out bulbs that need attention?

Comments:

___ **Accessibility** – Can students with disabilities easily engage with your office? How might someone on crutches navigate your space?

Comments:

___ **Furniture** – Are any waiting room chairs rickety? Do wood pieces have splinter possibilities?

Comments:

___ **The Office Coffee Maker** – Are there directions on it? Does it splatter?

Comments:

___ **Entrances** – Is the outside entrance to your office well-lit and unobstructed by tall bushes and such?

Comments:

___ **Commuter Safety** – For students who have to walk to a parking lot after visiting your office, is it a safe route after dark?

Comments:

___ **Other Concerns** – List other things you observed during this safety audit that need attention, too.

Comments: