

Verbal and Nonverbal Communications

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Communication Modes

All the tools and efforts of the customer service workers come down to how effectively we communicate with the customers we serve, both verbally and nonverbally. With verbal communications, we can make our *meaning* understood. Are we being clear with our word choice? Are we speaking at a proper pace and volume? Does our voice sound friendly and calm?

With nonverbal communications we can make our *attitude* understood. Are we standing in a self-assured yet non-threatening way? Are we maintaining a comfortable amount of eye contact? Are we engaging with our gestures? Do we project warmth and concern?

Verbal Communication Techniques

Not everyone has the voice of a broadcast reporter, but we can use some tactics to help hold the attention of our listener. We should speak with short words. Our customers may be highly educated, but still when it comes to their particular product or needs, you are the expert and should gently help them understand something that may be challenging to them.

Some customers may be hard of hearing, and it can be hard to tell, especially on the telephone. If they tilt their head or ask you to repeat yourself often, they may not be hearing you well, and you can try speaking a little louder. If they back away a step, or move their head back, you may be speaking too loud. They may also prefer to speak in quieter tones if they are nervous or feel they are losing their privacy when other customers nearby hear the conversation.

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Another important aspect of verbal communication is our talking speed. A good speed is about 120-150 words a minute. That comes to about two words a second. This may sound fast, but it really isn't. If you count to 30 seconds using the *one-one-thousand, two-one-thousand, three-one-thousand* method, you will be speaking about four syllables (or two words) a second. Try it, and that will be the pace of a slower talking speed suitable for when explaining important or challenging information to a customer.

A good general rule is to mimic the customer's volume and talking speed. That may give you a solid cue to the customer's preference and what works best. It's just a matter of being sensitive to a customer's reaction, and gauging your own volume and speed accordingly.

Nonverbal Communication Techniques

Much of our communication process is not so much in *what* we say, but in *how* we say it. For effective nonverbal communications, you want to convey that you are self-confident, capable, and in control of the situation. You don't want to convey that you are aggressive, superior, or domineering.

You can help express yourself best by using effective nonverbal and physical techniques. Present a calm relaxed face, especially if your customer seems agitated, confused, or angry. Smile warmly and try to put some friendliness in your eyes. Maintain intermittent eye contact. This varies by cultures: some people may hold longer eye contact to demonstrate openness and sincerity. Other cultures don't hold eye contact at all, and may see an attempt to do so as a threatening gesture. Adjust your own approach for what seems to best keep your customer engaged and comfortable.

Stand erect, but don't tower over your customers or lean into their personal space. Use gentle and open-handed gestures, rather than gestures that may be abrupt or aggressively close handed.

There is also paralanguage which you can use to engage your customer. This means the sounds you make, rather than spoken words, such as *uh-huh, ahh, and huh?* These sounds encourage your customers, and assure them that you're listening and engaged. This is especially important if you are talking on the telephone, and they are unable to see by your face that they have your attention. The nonverbal tone of your voice can be very expressive.

The most important aspect of both verbal and nonverbal communication is to work towards a mutual understanding, make your customer feel at ease, and ultimately ensure your interaction has a productive and satisfying end.

Summary:

- Verbal and nonverbal tactics play an important role in effective customer communication.
- Verbal communication makes our meaning understood. Nonverbal communication makes our attitude understood.
- We should use short words for best understanding, and adjust our speaking volume to a level that seems effective for each customer and circumstance.
- A good speaking speed is 120-150 words per minute—a little slower than our normal speaking speed might be—especially when communicating important or difficult information.
- If we mimic our customers' speaking volume and speed, this may help to judge the most effective approach to take with them.
- Nonverbal communication such as body language relays much information about our attitude to a customer.
- We should stand with a confident yet non-threatening posture, smile with a calm face, maintain appropriate eye contact, use open gestures, and make paralanguage sounds to encourage customers while they're speaking.