

WORKPLACE SAFETY, SECURITY, AND WELLNESS

Larry "Nick" Nicholson

Open the door to safety; awareness is the key!

Unknown author

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SNAPSHOT

This chapter provides guidance, resources, and tools to help supervisors create a safe, secure, and healthy workplace. Chapter objectives are to

- Increase awareness of the importance of supervisory attention to workplace safety and security
- Highlight key components of both workplace safety and security programs and your role in implementing those programs
- Demonstrate the value of investing in employee health and wellness to improve productivity.

The chapter will help you answer these questions:


- Which federal agency is responsible for enforcing workplace safety and health regulations?
- What impact does a workplace injury or death have on the organization?
- What are the elements of a safety plan?
- What programs should be put in place to prevent injuries to employees?
- How do accidents happen?
- What security measures should be implemented when dealing with potential violence in the workplace?
- How can you promote a healthy workforce?

You are a new supervisor of a public works crew in the county. Earlier in the day, you sent the crew out to dig up and repair an old water pipe that had broken during a recent winter storm. Not long after the crew's arrival, you hear your crew chief over the county fire radio call for help to rescue a man who is trapped in a hole.

As you listen, you can only imagine the worst and begin to wonder how to handle the situation and what you might have done to prevent the incident.

Work-related injuries and illnesses are costly, starting with the direct costs of workers' compensation to pay employee salaries for lost time due to job-related

Author Nick Nicholson appreciatively recognizes the contribution of Walt McBride, who wrote the version of the chapter included in the previous edition.



injuries or illnesses. In addition, organizations incur costs for replacement workers, lost productivity, scheduling delays, damaged property or equipment, and negative community relations. And, there is the emotional toll on you and your work group when a colleague is seriously injured on the job.

Every workplace incident has multiple effects on you, your team, and the entire organization. These events include

- Injured employees may face physical pain, recovery and rehabilitation, emotional upset, and lost work time.
- A claim will be made against the organization's workers' compensation insurance, which could increase future premiums.
- Depending on the scope of the incident, local, state, or federal investigations may be conducted to find out what happened and how it could have been prevented.
- Corrective and possibly disciplinary actions may be required to deal with the findings of any investigations.
- Longer-term corrections and improvements must be explored and implemented to eliminate future risks.
- You and the work team need to recover, regain your equilibrium, and learn from the accident or incident to make sure something similar doesn't happen.

WORKPLACE STATISTICS

Approximately 820,900 injury and illness cases were reported among state and local government workers in 2011, resulting in a rate of 5.7 cases per 100 full-time workers—significantly higher than the rate among private industry workers (3.5 cases per 100 workers), and unchanged from the rate reported among these public sector workers in 2010.

Nearly 4 in 5 injuries and illnesses reported in the public sector occurred among local government workers in 2011, resulting in an injury and illness rate of 6.1 cases per 100 full-time workers—significantly higher than the 4.6 cases per 100 full-time workers in state government.

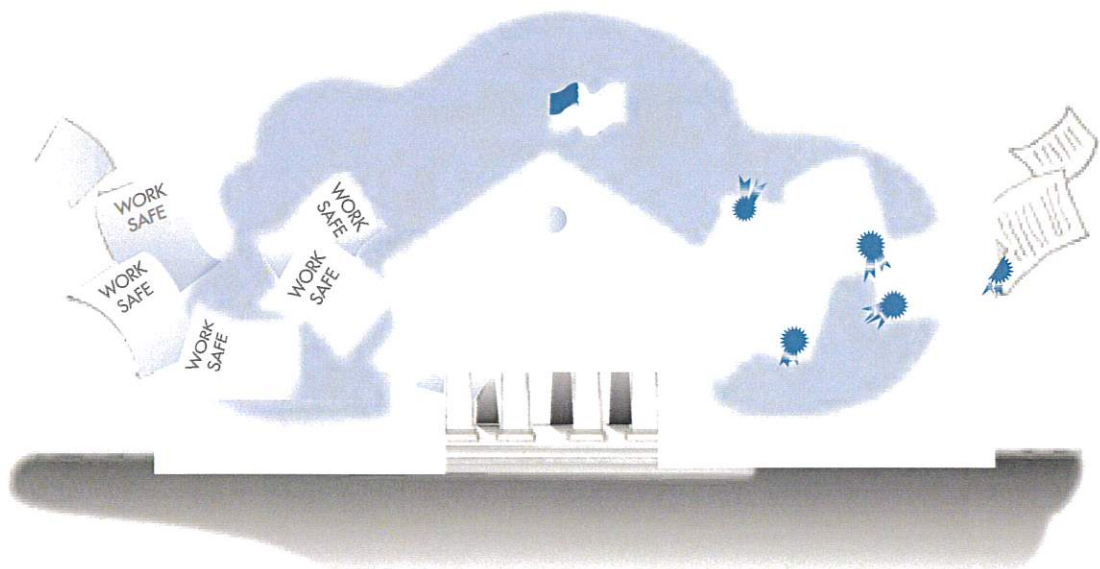
Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, "Workplace Injuries and Illnesses-2011" News Release, October 25, 2012, USDL-12-2121, <http://www.bls.gov/iif/oshsum.htm>.

ORGANIZATIONS RESPONSIBLE FOR WORKPLACE SAFETY

The *Occupational Safety and Health Administration* (OSHA) was created in 1970 by the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970. OSHA's mission is to assure safe and healthy working conditions for working men and women by enforcing standards and providing training, outreach, education, and assistance. OSHA is part of the U.S. Department of Labor. (www.osha.gov)

The *National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health* (NIOSH) conducts research and makes recommendations on how to prevent work-related injuries and illnesses. NIOSH is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIOSH is recognized as a leader in preventing work-related illness, injury, disability, and death. It gathers information, conducts in-depth research, and disseminates that knowledge through its products and services. (www.cdc.gov/niosh)

The *National Safety Council* (NSC) was created in 1913 to promote safety in U.S. industry. It is a nonprofit, member-supported organization that focuses on traffic safety issues, workplace accidents, and home and community safety. (www.nsc.org)



Keeping your workplace safe

Understanding the statistics is one thing; doing something about them is tougher. Most local governments have a safety program in place. As a supervisor, you are responsible for knowing the details of the plan, applying it to your work unit, ensuring that your employees know what's expected from a safety perspective when they're on the work site. You must also monitor compliance on a regular basis to ensure continuous adherence to safety rules and policies.

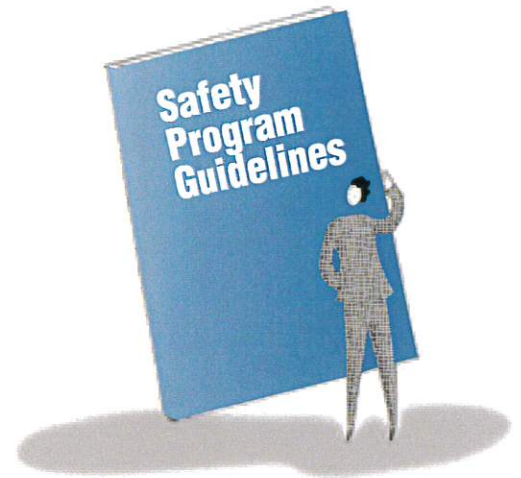
Good safety habits begin with a leadership commitment to safety. If you expect your employees to comply with established safety guidelines, you must constantly demonstrate not only that you believe in workplace safety but also that you live it. Your commitment to workplace safety will motivate your employees to develop a similar attitude and commitment.

Elements of an effective workplace safety program include

- Clear and easy-to-reference safety guidelines and policies
- Joint management and employee involvement in developing the plan, refining it to meet new challenges, and implementing it consistently
- Clear and well-understood duties for all areas of the safety program
- Consistent accountability among all employees for achieving workplace safety goals
- A review of operations at least annually to evaluate the plan's effectiveness, identify any deficiencies, and revise the plan or related policies to ensure future success.

Even with management commitment to and employee involvement in making the workplace safe, you are responsible for day-to-day safety within your work area. You can start with these two actions:

1. **Conduct a workplace safety analysis.** A workplace analysis will help you identify the types of hazards that exist and the conditions in which employees work. For a more thorough analysis, bring a supervisor in from another work area to provide a fresh set of eyes on potential hazards.



2. **Develop a corrective action plan.** Once you complete the baseline analysis, develop a corrective action plan to address the specific areas requiring attention. Common safety risks likely to need attention include:

- Failure to wear safety equipment properly
- Improperly marked hazardous work areas
- Improperly marked and stored hazardous substances
- Improperly marked trip hazards
- Inadequate training on how to perform job tasks safely or how to handle hazardous equipment and substances.

You should encourage your employees to contribute to the safety analysis; they should not have to fear reprisal. Reporting potentially hazardous situations is everyone's responsibility. A well-publicized and easily accessed reporting system should be in place to facilitate employee feedback on safety risks.

When you receive a report about a potential safety risk, you should investigate the problem immediately and determine what corrective actions are required. Failure to address reported safety risks can lead to accidents and leave you open to civil litigation in the event of employee injuries.

Preventing accidents

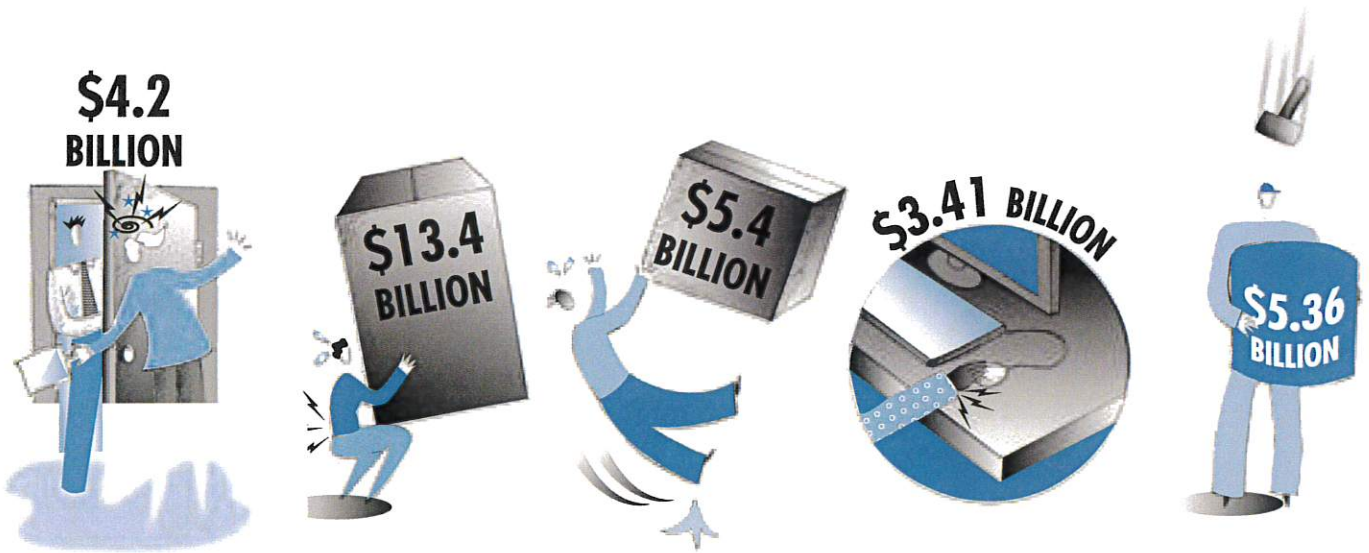
Accidents don't just happen: they have causes. Understanding the causes can help prevent many accidents. Four major causes of workplace accidents are

TOP FIVE WORKER INJURIES AND ASSOCIATED ANNUAL COSTS

- Injuries related to lifting, pushing, pulling, holding, carrying, or throwing: \$13.4 billion
- Injuries from slipping or tripping without falling: \$5.4 billion
- Injuries when struck by an object such as a tool falling on a worker: \$5.36 billion
- Injuries when struck against an object, such as a worker walking into a door: \$4.2 billion
- Injuries related to repetitive motion: \$3.4 billion

2010 Liberty Mutual Workplace Safety Index, Liberty Mutual Institute for Safety, www.libertymutual.com/researchinstitute

- **People** When people are properly trained and motivated, accidents are less likely to occur. Your employees must have the know-how, commitment, and willingness to work safely.
- **Equipment** Everything from a hammer to a truck is a potential accident cause. When employees use faulty equipment or adapt equipment to tasks for which it is not designed, accidents happen.
- **Materials** Items that are sharp, heavy, or toxic, for example, all require special handling to minimize accidents.
- **Work environment** Buildings that employees work in, the air they breathe, and the arrangement of work spaces all may contribute to accidents. The design of the work environment, known as ergonomics, has an important impact on employee safety and productivity. Improperly designed workstations can cause back injuries and repetitive motion strain. With so many employees spending significant time working at their computers, you need to pay particular attention to techniques for helping workers avoid office-related injuries.



Regular training and coaching on workplace safety will help ensure that accidents don't happen in your work unit. Your human resources (HR) department most likely will provide organization-wide training on workplace safety. You should regularly supplement formal training with coaching on safe ways to get the job done. OSHA provides a range of resources on workplace safety including training guides that will broaden your knowledge (e.g., Training Requirements in OSHA Standards and Training [OSHA Publication 2254], www.osha.gov/pls/publications/publication.html).

Keeping your workplace secure

Workplace security today means more than locking doors, securing fences, and protecting government property. It requires attention to and preparation for potential terrorist attacks and other violent acts.

In general, workplaces can be at risk for theft, unlawful entry, disputes between co-workers and outside acquaintances or even family, and forcible occupation. As the supervisor, you are responsible for ensuring that your team is alert, aware, and prepared. Security, like safety, is everyone's responsibility. Locking doors and windows is a simple but essential daily responsibility to eliminate targets of opportunity.

The following questions provide a framework for security planning in your workplace.

Does your local government have a security plan with assigned responsibilities?

You should be familiar with any organization-wide plans and policies and then translate those plans to your work unit. That might include designating someone on your team as a security coordinator to work with you to monitor security issues and keep you informed about any concerns. Individual team members should be assigned specific duties and behaviors such as locking all doors and windows at the end of the day or walking in pairs in the evening after a council meeting. In addition, you should have a department or division security plan that defines what to do and who to call if a problem occurs.



Is your workplace a potential security target?

For example, a security risk could arise from an announcement of staff reductions and planned demonstrations by city employees in protest. Pay attention to actions or changes within your unit that might make it a target.

What is the prevailing attitude toward security?

Your team should take workplace security seriously and be aware of guidelines and responsibilities designed to protect both individuals and property. You set the tone by making security a team responsibility.

How are security policies enforced?

Any policies or security requirements—whether organization-wide or within your department and work unit—should be broadly communicated and enforced. That may include establishing consequences for those who regularly disregard security policies.


Is everyone in your department aware of the government's current emergency preparedness plan and their roles in implementing it?

While emergency response in your jurisdiction goes beyond day-to-day security in your unit, it is important that your team knows its roles in case of a natural disaster both outside and within the work unit. Your emergency preparedness plan will also be the guiding document in the event of a major security breach requiring broad response.

The General Services Administration (GSA) has developed security guidelines for the 9,000 buildings it oversees.¹ The guidelines offer good advice for protecting other government workplaces:

- Install key-card access systems at main entrances and on other appropriate doors.
- Issue access-control badges with recent photographs to all employees and authorized contractors.
- Keep master and extra keys locked in a security office.
- Create a back-up communication system, like two-way radios, in case of phone failure.



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- Arrange office space so unescorted visitors can be noticed easily.
 - Establish and enforce strict access-control procedures without exceptions.
 - Keep offices neat and orderly to identify strange objects or unauthorized people more easily.
 - Keep closets, service openings, and telephone and electrical closets locked at all times.
 - Protect crucial communications equipment and utility areas with an alarm system.
 - Advise employees to pay attention to personal security such as avoiding being alone in stairwells and other isolated areas and not working late alone or on a routine basis.
 - Keep publicly accessible restroom doors locked, and set up a key-control system.

Create your own quick access to contact information for your team rather than rely on the HR department in an emergency. This confidential employee information file should contain


- Home address and telephone number
- Family members; names, ages, and descriptions
- School schedules, addresses, and phone numbers
- Close relatives in the area with names, addresses, and phone numbers
- Local emergency phone services and hospital phone numbers
- Any code words or passwords agreed upon.

Preventing workplace violence

Although the incidence of workplace violence is small, the consequences of even one violent action can be significant. While it is virtually impossible to predict the potential for violence, experts have identified warning signs based on previous incidents. As a supervisor, you should be alert to changes in employee behavior that could be a warning sign of personal stress or disruption.

Examples of behavioral changes include

- A perception of being picked on

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- Significant change in hygiene or appearance
 - Belligerence or insubordination from a previously cooperative employee
 - Inappropriate communications to co-workers, managers, or customers
 - Conflicts with leaders, supervisors, and colleagues
 - Social withdrawal and isolation from colleagues
 - Low interest in work and poor job performance.

These warning signs are only examples and not indicators of a dangerous employee. When changes in behavior affect employee performance, you should intervene quickly to deal with the performance problem. If the performance discussion points to personal issues, you can refer the employee to your organization's employee assistance program (EAP). Your responsibility is to seek assistance for employees in need and protect others in the workplace.


An effective violence prevention program consists of, at a minimum, written policies and procedures and ongoing training for supervisors and employees.

Workplace health and wellness

Investing in employee health and wellness can pay significant dividends for the organization and individuals. A workplace wellness program can

- Reduce absenteeism and improve productivity, saving the organization both money and downtime
- Help control health premiums by creating a healthier employee profile
- Reduce on-the-job injuries because healthy employees are generally lower accident risks
- Improve morale and retention by communicating how valuable employees are to the organization
- Eliminate "presenteeism" in which employees are at work but not productive due to stress, depression, injury, or illness.

Your organization's health insurance provider may offer employee wellness programs. When an organization sponsors wellness programs, it sends a clear message



to employees that management cares about their well-being. Typical wellness activities include

- Classes on health-related topics such as smoking cessation, weight control, back care, nutrition, and stress management
- Subsidized memberships at health clubs
- Policies that promote healthy behavior
- Environmental improvements to deal with potential health risks.

In addition to organizational programs, you can influence how your team approaches wellness by

- Serving as a role model for a healthy lifestyle
- Supporting employee participation in wellness programs even when those activities may require some adjustments in work schedules
- Creating a healthy environment in your work group, including congratulating employees on their wellness efforts, Identifying programs for your team that promote healthy living, and being a champion for a healthy workforce.

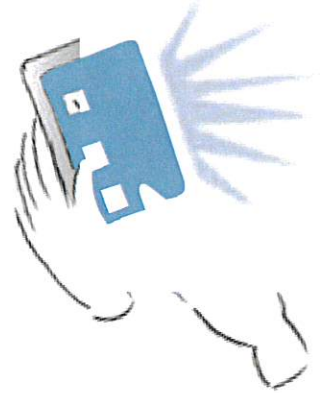
An effective health and wellness program can improve you and your employees' quality of life, and can also enhance workplace success because employees are motivated and able to accomplish their daily tasks.

Summary

Workplace safety, security, and wellness will help you excel as a supervisor and ensure your employees achieve agreed-upon goals. Employees are less likely to worry about safety and security if they know and understand their responsibilities and are confident that the organization cares about achieving a safer environment in which to work. Your employees will look to you for guidance in matters of health and safety and expect you to protect them from potentially hazardous situations. Being aware of this important role and being prepared to support your work team will contribute to a positive and productive work environment.

CHECKLIST

- Remember that safety is everyone's responsibility and your attitude toward safety sets an example for your team.
- Take advantage of resources provided by expert organizations to increase your knowledge and skill as a safety, security, and wellness leader.
- Be familiar with all organizational policies, procedures, and resources related to safety, security, and wellness.
- Involve your employees in ensuring sustained attention to safety and security in the work unit.
- Support employee participation in wellness programs and recognize accomplishments.
- Be a model for safe work performance and healthy living.



Endnote

- 1 Public Buildings Security, U.S. Government Services Administration, www.gsa.gov.

Supervisory situation 15-1

A major renovation is planned for the second floor of the municipal building. Before the renovation can begin, the interior must be demolished, including removing old furniture, carpet, and walls. The chief administrative officer (CAO) wants to save money by having city workers do the initial removal work. He knows that the crew hasn't performed this kind of work in the past and has asked you to prepare a safety plan to include training on areas not previously addressed.

1. What resources would you use to find out what training would be required for this assignment?
2. What information do you think should be included in a safety plan?
3. What safety concerns about this project, if any, would you bring to the CAO's attention?

Supervisory situation 15-2

You've been Jack's supervisor for three years and, until recently, have found him to be a hard worker who is dedicated to the organization and the community. Previously prompt and reliable, he has recently been arriving late almost daily. When you asked him about his tardiness, he told you to mind your own business. At the time you thought it best not to confront him about his statement. Instead you decided to gather more information about what might be going on before intervening further.

1. How would you go about gathering more information about Jack's change in attitude without violating his privacy?
2. What might be some of the likely causes for Jack's change in behavior?
3. What resources do you have to seek help for Jack if his behavior continues?
4. What is your likely next step?

Supervisory situation 15-3

You recently went to your health care provider for a checkup. While you are generally in good shape, your provider urged you to focus on developing a healthier lifestyle. You return to work the next day and realize that many of the managers, supervisors, and employees you work with may be in the same situation as you. You decide to focus more on wellness in your unit as a goal during the next year to improve your lifestyle and help others in the process.

1. What steps will you take to begin to achieve your goal?
2. How will you go about engaging your employees in this goal?
3. What resources might you look to both inside and outside the organization to help you achieve your goal of a healthier lifestyle for you and your employees?





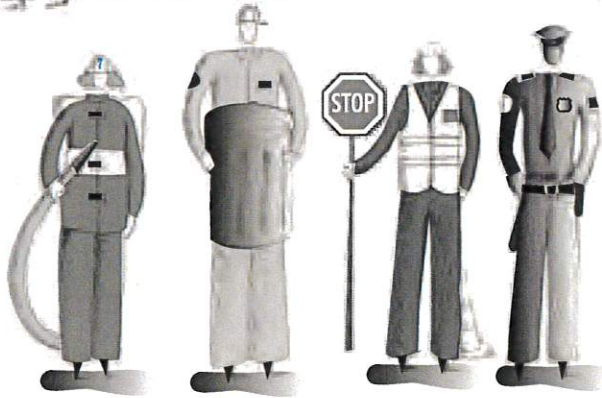
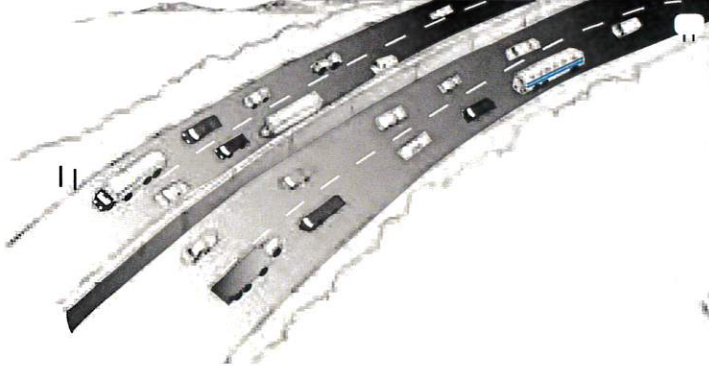
**CAN-DO
CUSTOMER
SERVICE**



**FIRE
PREVENTION
SEMINAR
TONIGHT
7-8PM**



**ROADWORK
9-2 TO 9-8
EXPECT DELAYS**



QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

James R. Lewis

A customer is the most important visitor on our premises. He is not an interruption in our work. He is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider in our business. He is part of it. We are not doing him a favor by serving him. He is doing us a favor by giving us an opportunity to do so.

**Mohandas Gandhi, political and ideological leader
of the Indian Independence Movement**

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SNAPSHOT

This chapter focuses on a supervisor's role in making sure all customers get the best possible service from their local government, and the chapter defines the various types of local government customers. Chapter objectives are to

- Establish the connection between exceptional customer service and positive perceptions of local government
- Provide guidance on what customers expect from their local government
- Identify factors that are essential to providing exceptional customer service
- Offer approaches to establishing service standards and measuring customer satisfaction.


The chapter will help you answer these questions:

- Who are your primary customers?
- What do citizens really want from their local government?
- How can you ensure that your employees provide professional, courteous, and responsive service to every customer?
- How does the workplace environment affect customer service?
- What is continuous improvement, and how does it relate to customer service?
- How do you deal with tough service situations and difficult customers?

Citizens have higher expectations for their public agencies today than in the past. The media routinely publish reports on government shortcomings and on increased demands from the public despite shrinking resources. Citizens have easy access to information on the Internet and the ability to provide instant feedback. Competition for goods and services has made branding, product quality, and customer service essential.

In today's highly connected world, people can easily research and choose where they want to live, shop, dine, or do business. As a result, local governments must

Author Jim Lewis appreciatively recognizes the contributions of Sherri K. Lawless, who wrote the version of the chapter included in the previous edition.



work to make sure the community is attractive and that there is a sense of community pride and identity. Most importantly, a local government must commit to providing the best possible customer service.

Quality customer service is often defined as meeting or exceeding customer expectations. In other words, when you are providing quality customer service, there is a noticeable difference between what customers expect to receive and what they actually receive. This view of quality customer service leads to three important questions:

- Who are your customers?
- What are their expectations?
- How can your work unit meet or exceed those expectations?

Good service isn't good enough. People expect a level of service that is so good it is worth telling others about—service that is *exceptional*. This should be your goal.

Internal and external customers

Customers are people who pay to receive goods or services. Refuse collection, clean water, functional streets and traffic controls, maintained parks, and emergency response are all goods and services. Taxes, fees, and assessments are forms of payment. Citizens are considered local government customers because they pay for the services that their government delivers.

However, citizens are not your only customers. Visitors and business owners are customers, too. So are other government employees who depend on you for information or work products. In fact, almost everyone you come into contact with is a customer.

Your customers are either external or internal. External customers include citizens, visitors, business owners, developers, and civic leaders. Internal customers include co-workers, your supervisor, executives, and elected officials. Your employees are also your customers. They are particularly important customers because your work, and ultimately your success, is accomplished with and through them. For some departments, such as finance, human resources, information technology, and building maintenance, all of the local government's employees are internal customers.

At times it may seem more important to provide quality customer service to external customers, even at the expense of an internal customer. But internal and external customers are often connected. For example, a co-worker's request may be associated with a citizen or citizen's group that he or she is attempting to assist. When you don't respond to a co-worker promptly, you may be providing poor service to an external customer.

Everyone you come into contact with, inside or outside your organization, is your customer and deserves prompt attention, courtesy, and professionalism.

Citizen expectations

Citizens who live in the community and pay taxes usually have strong opinions about government services and high expectations for services. They may frequently be your most outspoken and demanding customers. At a minimum, citizens expect

- Good value for the taxes and fees they pay
- Prompt, efficient, effective, and courteous service from government employees
- Easy access to services and information about government operations through a variety of resources including the Internet and social media.

It might seem that local government is a monopoly, and that citizens have no choice but to use its services. But citizens and other customers do have choices. If citizens think that their tax dollars are not being well spent, they can move to another town, city, or county.

Business owners can choose to move to another community if they don't feel government services are up to par.

Citizens may also turn to private sector alternatives for some fee-based services, which can impact agency revenues. And with each election, citizens vote to retain or replace elected officials, which could result in new leadership. A new administration may have different ideas about how a well-run local government should do business or be organized.

Directly or through their elected representatives, citizens and other stakeholders make choices



SUPERVISORY TIP: PAY ATTENTION TO DETAILS

Focusing on the details of quality service every day can have a significant impact on citizens' attitudes toward their local government. For example, your customers expect their refuse to be picked up regularly on the scheduled day. They may also expect that their containers will be returned to the curb in front of their residence with the lids on or closed. If the refuse is not picked up according to schedule, if containers are not returned to the expected location, or if the lids are not put back on, your customers will not be happy. If they call your office and don't receive prompt and courteous responses, they'll be even more disappointed. They may even complain at a public meeting or post comments online which can erode confidence in the agency. Ensuring that your employees focus on the details of their service commitments *every day and for every customer* will have positive results for individual employees, your unit, the government, and the entire community.

at many levels. By providing quality customer service, you help to ensure that your local government and your work unit will be the citizens' choice and that the citizens will be proud of and committed to their community.

Customer service starts with you

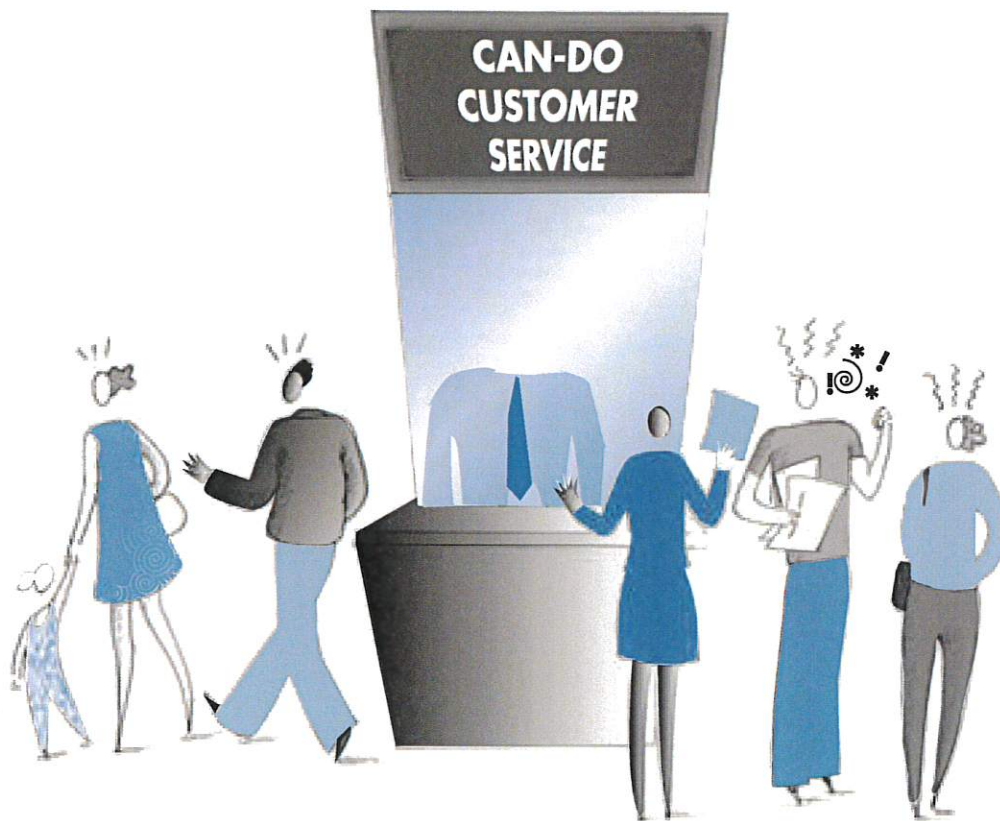
All local government employees are ambassadors who represent their government to its citizens. Every day, you and your employees take actions—both on the job and off—that affect the way people feel about your government. Many people in your community may never meet the mayor or the chief administrative officer, but they will form an impression of local government through their contact with you and other frontline employees. To citizens and visitors alike, the traffic officer who responds to an accident, the clerk who collects tax payments, the inspector who enforces fire safety regulations, the supervisor who approves a business license, and the receptionist who provides directions to the right office are the local government.


Your job is to ensure that the impressions you and your employees make are positive—which leads to public support for what you and your government are trying to accomplish. Public support may lead to political support and adequate resources to get the job done.

Providing exceptional customer service

Exceptional customer service revolves around the golden rule: treat others the way you want to be treated yourself. As a supervisor, it is critical that you set the example by treating all internal and external customers with courtesy, respect, and professionalism. There are also a number of factors that are essential to providing high-quality customer service.

Accessibility Providing exceptional customer service means that you are accessible and responsive. That means being available for customers to make appointments





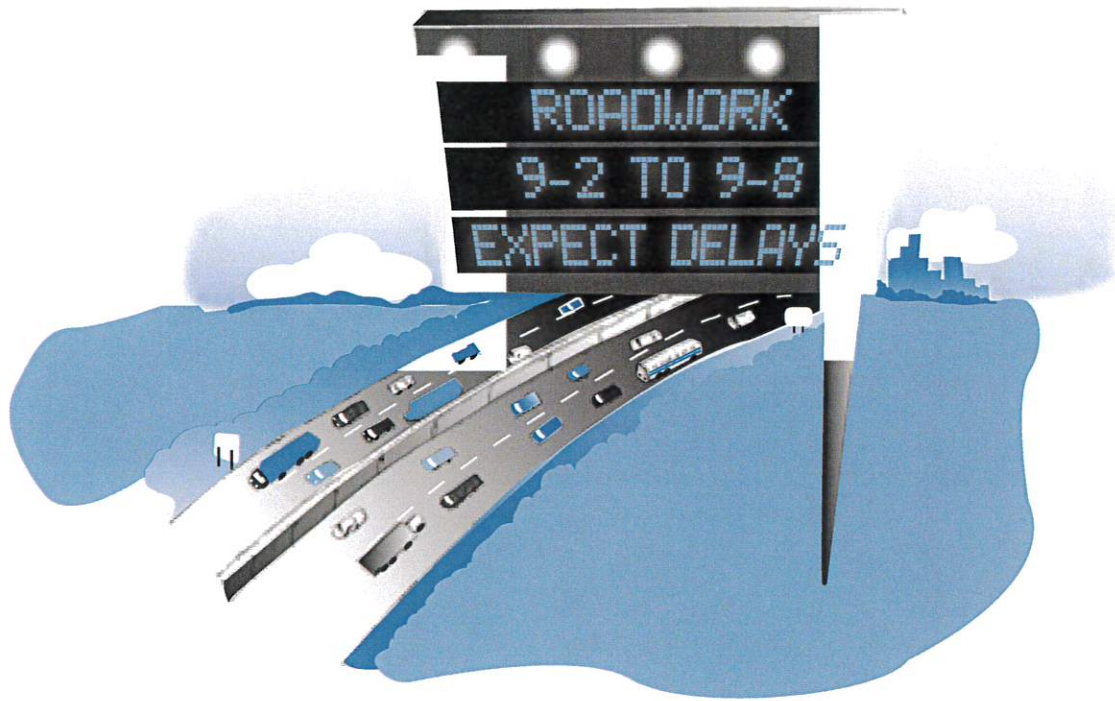
with you, share ideas, and ask questions. It also means being visible in the community at events and meetings. You can also take advantage of e-mail, blogs, interactive websites, and social media to respond quickly to citizen inquiries and to stay connected to their concerns. Your local government may provide portable computers, tablets, or smart phones to facilitate prompt and efficient customer connections. If these resources are available, be sure that you are familiar with their use and keep them with you at all times to respond to customer needs.

Professional work environment As a supervisor, you should make sure your immediate workplace is professional, clean, and welcoming to customers. Desks and workspaces should be organized, and trash, papers, or boxes should not litter common areas. Neatness is also important in a service vehicle. Other tools for creating a welcoming work environment include clear signage that makes it easy for customers to find their way to appropriate service areas, a directory or map at the street level of your building, and names or numbers on your office doors.

Make sure that equipment is functional, up-to-date, and easily accessible for use when needed. If employees are taking breaks, make sure they don't take those breaks in public spaces. Emphasizing the importance of a professional work environment at all times helps keep staff focused on providing exceptional customer service.

Courtesy Common courtesy is a measure of professionalism and good service. When customers visit your workplace, greet them as soon they arrive. If you or your staff cannot assist them immediately, let customers know how long it will be before someone will be available to assist them—and be truthful; a fifteen-minute wait time should not be described as five minutes. Most people don't mind waiting as long as they are greeted promptly and are given an honest estimate of the wait time. If your team fails to greet customers warmly, treats them as if they are interruptions, or keeps them waiting far beyond what they were told, you have the recipe for customer dissatisfaction.

When you talk with a customer you have not met before, identify yourself and your department. You may want to prepare a simple script, if you don't already have one, for employees to use when they greet a customer. In addition, you should establish a policy about how quickly phones will be answered or when answers can be expected by e-mail or online posting.



Courtesy also involves being considerate by keeping customers informed about government actions that will affect them. That includes scheduling, notifications, and announcements about work actions. For example, building inspectors are unlikely to receive a friendly welcome if they knock on a door unannounced. When a water line must be repaired or extended or when streets must be closed for repairs, announcements in newspapers, on the radio, or on your government's website or social media pages should inform residents in advance. In addition, large easy-to-read signs should be posted on and near any streets that will be closed.


Organizational culture The culture you create and promote in your work unit can have a positive impact on customer service. Happy employees smile, and smiles promote good service. Celebrate accomplishments and recognize your staff frequently.

Promote an open and safe atmosphere for entrepreneurialism and sharing of ideas. Embrace training and personal and professional development. Constructively learn from your mistakes. As the positive culture builds, you may decide to share your unit's values with your customers. Posting a mission and value statement in a public place can strengthen pride among employees and let your customers know what is important to your team.

Team appearance You and your team represent the local government. Appearance is an important part of first impressions. Citizens and visitors will judge the attitude and abilities of local government employees by the way they dress and how well they are groomed. This doesn't mean that designer clothes and an expensive haircut are required; it does mean that being neat and clean are essential. When employees appear to lack pride in their personal appearance, they may be viewed as lacking pride in their work. For example, dirty or torn uniforms on a work crew may say that these employees do not care about themselves or others. First impressions feed expectations. You and your team should always dress appropriately. Make sure your clothes, uniform, and body language convey that you are committed to your agency's mission and that you are qualified and committed to providing exceptional customer service.



Interpersonal communications and engagement An essential part of providing customer service is being able to communicate clearly, correctly, and politely. Communication involves not only how you speak but also your expressions and body language. In today's connected environment where information moves rapidly, it is critical to engage citizens in meaningful conversation and collaboration through meetings, events, workshops, and online discussions. Your customers want to tell you what is on their minds. If you don't listen, they will find someone who will. Engagement results in new ideas, feedback, and builds relationships.

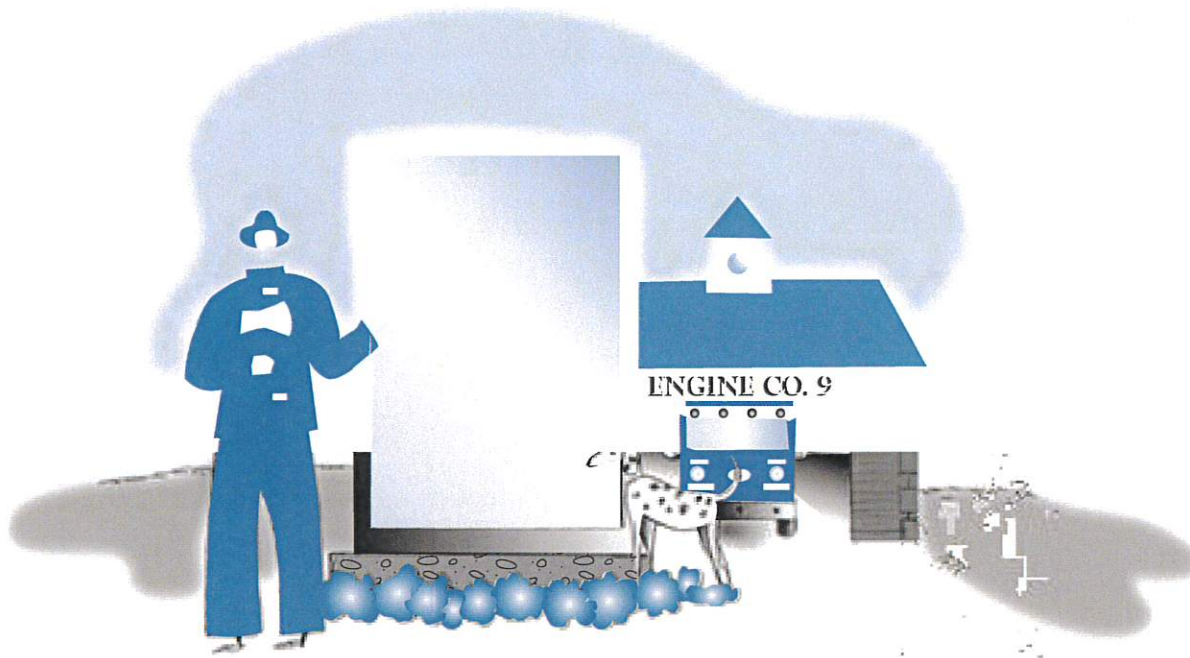


Listening skills Taking the time to understand customer needs, expectations, problems, or complaints is essential to exceptional customer service. That requires taking as much care when listening as you do when speaking. When someone is talking, do not interrupt. Let the person finish what he or she is saying. Give the speaker your full attention. If you don't pay attention, you will not completely understand the message coming to you. Ask questions and if you're not sure that you are following what is being said, repeat the information and ask the speaker if you've understood correctly.

Empathy Sometimes you may deal with customers who are angry or frustrated. Worse, they may have expectations that are unreasonable or wrong. Nevertheless, demonstrating that you hear their concerns, care about their issues, and are sorry they are frustrated can go a long way, even if you won't be able to deliver the answer they want.

Credibility and competence Your customers will often have lots of questions. What's being built over there? When will you repair my street? Why does my water bill seem so high? To ensure high-quality service, you and your staff need to be aware of what is going on throughout the organization and know where to find answers. Take the time to follow what other departments are doing and to understand the agency's priorities and operations. In your own field, make sure you are up-to-date on best practices and your department's finances, operations, and challenges. Being able to answer a customer's questions confidently is good service and builds credibility for the organization. If you don't know the answer, don't guess. It is best to say "I don't know, but I will find out" and get back to the customer promptly.

Use of technology Technology makes it easy to interact with your customers and provide service to them. Make sure your agency website is up-to-date and easy to navigate. In most local governments today, customers can conduct business through the website and share feedback and ideas. In addition to a website, social media provides a resource for sharing information and soliciting comments and feedback. For example, you can use Twitter, Facebook, or blast e-mail to send out notices about upcoming community meetings, remind people about a street closure, or alert drivers to a traffic emergency. Of course, you should follow established policies and use caution when interacting with customers using social media, but it can be a valuable resource to find out what customers are thinking.



Ownership Being bounced around a call center or talking to multiple people without finding anyone who can help is frustrating and is the antithesis of quality customer service. When contacted by a co-worker, citizen, or other customer with an issue, owning that issue, even if it may not be one that is under your scope of service, leads to exceptional customer service. For example, if you are a public works superintendent and a citizen asks you a question about a police matter, don't simply tell him or her to call the police department. Listen to the person's question, get the contact information, call the police department, and ask the appropriate employee there to follow up. Let your co-worker know you'll call back at the end of the day to confirm that the information was provided or the problem solved. By touching base at the end of the day, you are modeling a shared commitment to customer service rather than checking up on your colleague. Not only are you serving as an agent of the entire agency by responding to the citizen, but you may learn something that will help you serve your customers more effectively in the future.

PROFESSIONALISM AND SERVICE: QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF


As a check on your professionalism and service ethic and that of your work unit, periodically ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I dressed appropriately for the tasks I am expected to perform today?
- Does my work unit have a dress code? If not, should it?
- Do I communicate pride in my work and in my government?
- Do I understand my agency's mission and priorities, and can I articulate them to others?
- Do I have the expertise and resources to perform my work to the level expected of me? If not, where can I get what is needed?
- Does my team share a commitment to customer service?
- Are we following through on the commitments we have made to others?
- Is our work area clean and well organized? Is my desk or individual work area neat?
- When someone approaches me, do I always acknowledge that person's presence, either by speaking or nodding? Do I do this even when I am involved in some other important task and cannot talk to the person immediately?
- Is the culture in our workplace fun, challenging, and service-oriented? Are team members engaged and happy to be at work? If not, what can I do to change the culture?

Dealing with tough situations

Despite all of your efforts to deliver exceptional customer service, you undoubtedly will experience situations in which a customer will create a challenge. For example, if a customer calls to ask if he or she can pay a parking fine after your office closes, offer alternatives instead of simply saying no. For instance, give the hours that the office is open and explain that the customer can also pay online, by mail, or by using the after-hours drop box. You are more likely to get a positive response by saying what you *can* do or what the policy allows rather than focusing on what you *can't* do. Make each encounter positive.

If you must refuse a request outright, it's important to say no in a way that the customer understands and accepts and to explain *why* the request can't be accommodated. Be clear and direct while remaining positive and courteous. Suppose, for example, a resident wants permission to build within five yards of the property line, and you know that the minimum zoning setback is ten yards. Instead of simply say-



ing, “No, you can’t do it,” you might say, “Five yards from your property line? Let’s take a look at the code and see what it says.” At this point, you and the customer should review the regulations together to find the specific requirement for a ten-yard setback. Even more important than confirming the setback requirements, you should focus on why the code is written the way that it is, and what options the customer has for pursuing the request, such as seeking a variance. For example, you might explain that building too close to the property line could interfere with buried utility lines, future utility improvements, or your neighbor’s property use. It might also create inconveniences for the customer in the future.

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS

Despite efforts to deliver the best customer service possible, sometimes there will still be a difficult customer who is unhappy with the answer or service being provided. Here are a few tips for dealing with difficult customers:

Recognize the issue Restate the concern to the customer to demonstrate that you clearly hear the problem and understand the suggested resolution.

Empathize Sometimes a frustrated customer just wants someone to listen. Communicate that you understand the problem, and you are sorry it has caused frustration.

Own the situation Clearly tell the customer that you will do all you can to resolve the issue. Assure the customer that you won’t pass the problem on to someone else.

Gather information Get the facts regarding the issue and review them carefully. Share these facts with the customer and use them as a basis for explaining why the suggested resolution may or may not work.

Achieve clarity Be clear in your explanation and make sure the customer understands the facts as you see them and what options exist for resolution.

Stay calm and friendly Maintain a warm, friendly, helpful demeanor, particularly if the customer becomes angry or upset. If appropriate, sometimes a little humor can disarm or reduce pressure in tense situations. Just make sure the humor is appropriate, and that the customer is in a place to appreciate it.

Close the loop Once you have arrived at a resolution, share it with the customer and explain how action will proceed. If the solution involves staff from other departments, alert the customer to that possibility as well.

Going through this process helps the customer understand why the request cannot be granted and demonstrates that you have done all you can to provide information and alternatives. In addition, it helps the customer see that your decision is based on legally adopted code, not your preference or choice.

Measuring customer service

Local governments use service standards to define customer service. To be useful, however, service standards must be reconciled with customer expectations. For example, one service standard for residential solid-waste pickup might be no more than 5 percent of residences will be missed on any pickup day. While a 95 percent success rate may seem like good performance, a citizen whose trash is missed on a given day may not agree. To most customers, any missed pickups are unacceptable.


Assessing the standards

It is important to stay on top of the service standards your work unit uses. If setting service standards is your responsibility, make sure that there is a match between the standards and customer satisfaction levels. If it is not your responsibility to set service standards, you should monitor how well your employees achieve the standards and whether or not the standards are reasonable.

Be sure to report back to your supervisor when service standards are unreasonable or do not meet customer expectations, or when adhering to standards leads to inefficient operations.

To find out how citizens are rating local service delivery, some local governments use comprehensive customer satisfaction surveys. You will probably need the support and cooperation of your department or your entire organization to undertake a comprehensive survey, but you may be able to create brief questionnaires periodically to find out how citizens feel about the quality of your unit's work. A simple checklist that can be easily distributed or made available on a countertop where citizens conduct their business with you can provide valuable feedback. Citizens





will see that you care about what they think, and you will gain valuable information about the level of service quality you provide. This kind of information can be especially useful in budget preparation and for developing short- and long-range work schedules and plans.

Some local governments engage private firms that send out “mystery shoppers” to rate the quality of service they receive. Still other local governments have comprehensive continuous improvement programs in place. To find out more about the formal programs your government has in place, ask your supervisor or department head. Many methods are effective for gathering customer feedback, and it is important to choose the ones that work best for your unit.

Feedback that isn’t positive is useful information. Complaints are especially important because they are signals that something is wrong. Some organizations consider complaints “gifts” because they provide useful information about how to provide better service and can improve the government’s reputation among citizens.

As a supervisor, it is your job to monitor how work is being done and to look for ways to improve service within available resources. You and your employees must keep in mind that everything matters to your customers—from an upright trash can to the correct amount due on a bill to a polite phone conversation.

Striving for continuous improvement

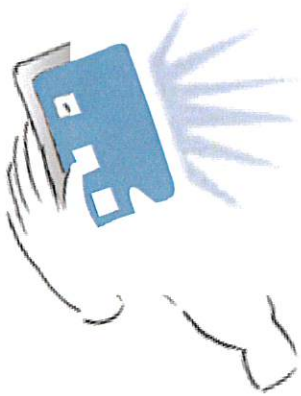
Regularly monitoring service delivery and analyzing current service standards to meet customer expectations is an important part of your supervisory job. Do your service standards truly reflect what customers want?

Constantly looking for better and more cost-effective ways of getting the job done is continuous improvement. It has two main principles:

- Finding better, faster, smarter, and cheaper ways of doing the work is everyone’s job.
- The effort to improve customer service is a continuous process: you can always do better, so the process never ends.

In addition to constantly looking for ways to improve, your department should try to anticipate problems and prevent them. For example, the fire department helps people learn how to prevent fires and to recognize fire hazards. The building inspector’s office advises people on how to construct a safe, solid home or office building.

The recreation department encourages physical fitness. The police department gives tips on ways to prevent burglaries. Is there a preventive or educational service your department or work unit provides now, or that it could provide in the future?




CHECKLIST

- Remember that everyone you come into contact with, inside and outside the organization, is a customer.
- Make it your goal to exceed customer expectations.
- Think of every interaction with a customer as an opportunity to create a new supporter for your agency who will tell others about the good service she received.
- Whenever possible, match service standards to customer expectations.
- Practice good listening, and be aware of what you say without words.
- Make each encounter positive.
- Foster a feeling of pride in your work unit.
- Create a clean, orderly, and positive work environment.
- Use complaints as learning opportunities.
- Always keep in mind that you and your employees are the government: treat every customer with respect, concern, honesty, and courtesy.
- Engage the community through events, meetings, workshops, and technology.

Supervisory situation 16-1

As the supervisor of the billing division of the county water department, Dave is constantly in contact with citizen customers. He supervises three billing clerks. These employees also have frequent customer contact, either on the telephone or with walk-in customers. Dave's staff frequently deals with angry or frustrated customers who are upset about their water bills. Dave knows that the stress of the job can take a toll on his staff. At the same time, he firmly stands by the principle that the customer is always right. Dave has noticed that his employees don't always follow this principle.



For example, last week a citizen entered the billing office about twenty minutes before closing and was visibly upset while waiting in line. Finally, when it was her turn, the customer fumed at Maria, one of the billing clerks: “My name is Linda Smith, and I do not understand why my bill has doubled for this period. You’ve obviously made a stupid mistake. Somebody had better have a good explanation for this.” Maria looked up at the clock, then replied, “Well, if it’s such a big problem, why did you wait until so late in the day to come in? I’ll take a look at your bill, but I can’t promise to resolve the problem today. We close in five minutes.”

The customer looked at her watch and snapped, “I’ve been waiting in line for more than fifteen minutes. Can I help it if you people are so slow? I want an answer today. I don’t have the time to come back because of your mistake.”

“Okay,” Maria said. “Let me take a look.” Maria quickly reviewed Ms. Smith’s bill, added some figures on her calculator, and replied, “Looks like you’ve got a real problem controlling how much water you use. This bill adds up okay to me.”

At that point, Ms. Smith grabbed the bill and quickly turned to walk out. “I’ve had enough of this. I’ll be back tomorrow to talk to your manager,” she called over her shoulder as she headed for the door.

Maria shrugged her shoulders. “It takes all kinds. What a day this has been.”

1. Did Maria do right in dealing with this customer? What could she have done differently or better to avoid having the customer leave the office angry?
2. What customer service skills, if any, is Maria lacking?
3. What approaches can Dave suggest to his staff to help them deal effectively with customers like Ms. Smith?
4. How do you think Dave can help his staff adopt “the customer is always right” principle even when the customer isn’t right?

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Anderson-davis, Inc.: www.andersondavis.com

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission: www.eeoc.gov/laws/

U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Compliance Assistance Policy: www.dol.gov/compliance/index.htm

Chapter 15: Workplace Safety, Security, and Wellness

Healthy Companies International, free *Healthy Leader* newsletter: <http://healthycompanies.ORG/the-Healthy-Leader-newsletter>

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, GA: www.CDC.gov/niosh

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What started for Barbara Flynn Buehler as a three-week temporary assignment to write a management course evolved into a seven-year position with the city of Peoria, Illinois, as the organization's sole training coordinator. Buehler was responsible for the training and certification of more than 800 employees. She designed, wrote, and presented all training courses, both technical and general, for the employees of Peoria. In addition, Buehler was responsible for the setup, promotion, and maintenance of the city's learning management system. Currently Buehler holds the position of instructional designer at Training-Trax (www.training-trax.com). Buehler holds a bachelor's degree in history from the University of Northern Colorado and a master's degree in education from the University of Colorado. She recently served as president of the Board of Directors for the Heart of Illinois chapter of the American Society for Training & Development.

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(chesterfield.gov/content.aspx?id = 3525)

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**Effective Supervisory Practices:
Better Results Through Teamwork
Fifth Edition**

Text type
Interstate, ITC Slimbach

Printing and binding
United Book Press

Design
Charles Mountain
ICMA, Washington, D.C.

Illustration
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