

Chapter 1

YOUR ROLE IN INTERACTING WITH THE PUBLIC, OR “HEY, I DIDN’T SIGN UP FOR THIS!”

This chapter is designed to:

-  Review customer service in the business world vs. animal sheltering and protection
-  Define *Customer Smart* and the importance of using *Customer Smart Tools*
-  Tackle our first two *Customer Smart Tools*
 - Tool #1: Know your customers
 - Tool #2: Remember how important you are
-  Identify shelter customers and who needs to be *Customer Smart* with them



Do this! If you are new to animal services, it may be difficult for you to check “True” or “False” to the three statements below. However, if you have “been around” for a while, it should be easy. Mark the appropriate boxes.

1. When I took this job, I said to myself, “Gee, I would like to provide good customer service every day. I think I’ll take a job at the local animal shelter.”
 True False
2. On this job, I have had only positive interactions with the public.
 True False
3. I have never had an interaction with the public where I became defensive, angry, and aggravated or said things that I shouldn’t have said.
 True False



If you checked true for all these statements, close this workbook and tell us your secrets to success. If you are like most of us and checked false to any of the statements, you are ready to take a look at how to deal more effectively with the public. As we go through the workbook, it is important to remember that although we have negative interactions, we also have many very positive interactions: A family adopts a graying eight-year-old German Shepherd mix; a man thanks you for

picking up his wandering dog and pays his fees and makes a donation with a smile; a woman sends cookies to the staff for their efforts in resolving a neighborhood cat problem.

Customer Service in the Business World vs. Animal Sheltering and Protection



Let's define the business world as places like retail stores, markets, and hair salons. They are places where people sell a commodity or service that they want the public to buy. They have a pair of shoes; you want a pair of shoes; you give money in exchange for the shoes; you take the shoes home and wear them the next day. A definition of good customer service in the business world is when a customer is treated efficiently, positively, and courteously. Stores and salons certainly get their share of difficult customers, and they try to please them so that they will return and spend more money. However, they do not work in a highly charged emotional context with people and

animals. Animals are not commodities, but they may be to our customers. "I've come to buy a dog." "I can't believe you'd rather kill that dog than give it to me." "I've come to bail my dog out of jail." We are different from the business world because the customer service we deliver is influenced by:

1. Emotions about animals.
2. The differing values that customers, volunteers and staff may have about animals and animal behavior.
3. The challenge of being service oriented while putting or trying to put the animals first.

Customer Smart Defined

Because circumstances in animal sheltering and protection are different from other businesses, we will be talking about a unique approach—being *Customer Smart*.

Customer Smart = Developing and using a set of interpersonal skills and tools to 1) Initiate positive interactions; 2) Maintain positive interactions; and 3) Redirect negative interactions into manageable ones.

Why Customer Smart?

Although we can agree that in our work the customer is sometimes, but not always, right, it is important to remember what happens if we fail to be Customer Smart. We need to be aware of how much negative impact an angry, unhappy, frustrated, or dissatisfied customer can generate for you and the shelter staff. The following statistics¹ are startling.

¹ Michael LeBoeuf, *How to Win Customers and Keep Them for Life*, and a survey conducted by Technical Assistance Research Programs, Inc., Washington, D.C. Adapted, Jan Elster & Associates 2003

- Of our customers, 68 percent do not come back because they have been treated indifferently.
- Of the customers who register as unhappy, between 54 percent and 70 percent will leave happy if you show an interest in their problems and help them find solutions. Note that helping with solutions does not mean that the customer's interests wins over an animal's needs or a shelter's policies. These figures jump to a staggering 95 percent happy if a customer feels that his or her problem was resolved quickly.
- The average customer who has a negative experience with an organization tells nine or 10 other customers about it.

Yikes! Not a good outcome for the animals.

This is not to suggest that we should suffer verbal abuse or say “yes” to avoid conflict and keep a customer happy. However, it is important that we understand just how much we affect each customer. How a customer receives and interprets a message from the way we talk, respond, present information, or deny or refuse something depends –

50 % = **What** we say 50 % = **How** we say it

We may be stuck with what we have to say in a given situation, but we have an opportunity to be *Customer Smart* in how we deliver the message.

What Exactly Are Customer Smart Tools?

We will first cover the basics and then add some fairly sophisticated power tools. Here are the *Customer Smart* tools we will be addressing in this workbook:

Tool #1: Know Your Customers

Tool #2: Remember How Important You Are

Tool #3: Shelf Filters and Control Snap Judgments

Tool #4: Understand that Value Systems Shape Customer Service Outcomes

Tool #5: Meet a Customer's Basic Needs

Tool #6: Use 13 Verbal Aikido Moves

Move # 1 Remember Why Customers Get Upset

Move # 2 Raise Customer Esteem

Move # 3 Don't Instigate or Elevate Anger

Move # 4 Calm The Situation

Move # 5 Avoid Words That Flip the Switch

Move # 6 Be Assertive, Not Aggressive

Move # 7 Survive Saying “No”

Move # 8 Stabilize Quickly after a Bad, Difficult or Odd Interaction



- Move # 9 Help Co-workers During Difficult Interactions
- Move #10 Give and Get Respect
- Move #11 Fortify Team Work
- Move #12 Trash Triangulation
- Move #13 Go to the Coach!

Tool #1: Know Your Customers



Do this! Let's start by getting to know some of the people who are our customers. On a scale of 1-5, circle how important you think each of these individuals is as a shelter customer.

1. An Adopter

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	kind of important	moderately important	quite important	very important

2. A microchip salesman

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	kind of important	moderately important	quite important	very important

3. Someone making a \$5 donation

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	kind of important	moderately important	quite important	very important

4. Reporter doing a news article

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	kind of important	moderately important	quite important	very important

5. Someone calling in with a complaint

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	kind of important	moderately important	quite important	very important

6. Someone redeeming a stray dog

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	kind of important	moderately important	quite important	very important

7. Someone buying a dog license

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	kind of important	moderately important	quite important	very important

8. A homeless person who needs dog food

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	kind of important	moderately important	quite important	very important

9. A man who wants you to remove a skunk from beneath his house

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	kind of important	moderately important	quite important	very important

10. A high school student looking for information for a project

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	kind of important	moderately important	quite important	very important

11. A volunteer who is trying to change his schedule but cannot find the Volunteer Coordinator

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	kind of important	moderately important	quite important	very important

12. A co-worker who asks you to help give a dog a shot

1	2	3	4	5
Not important	kind of important	moderately important	quite important	very important



If you rated each of these individuals as five—very important—you hit the jackpot. Each one of these people can have an interaction with you that will leave them annoyed and unhappy or positively engaged and happy. These are the people who tell nine other people that the shelter is good, bad, or indifferent, which in turn affects the animals' welfare and the shelter's effectiveness. So, one easy-to-remember definition of an animal shelter customer is anyone that staff or volunteers interact with at the shelter, on the telephone, or in the community.

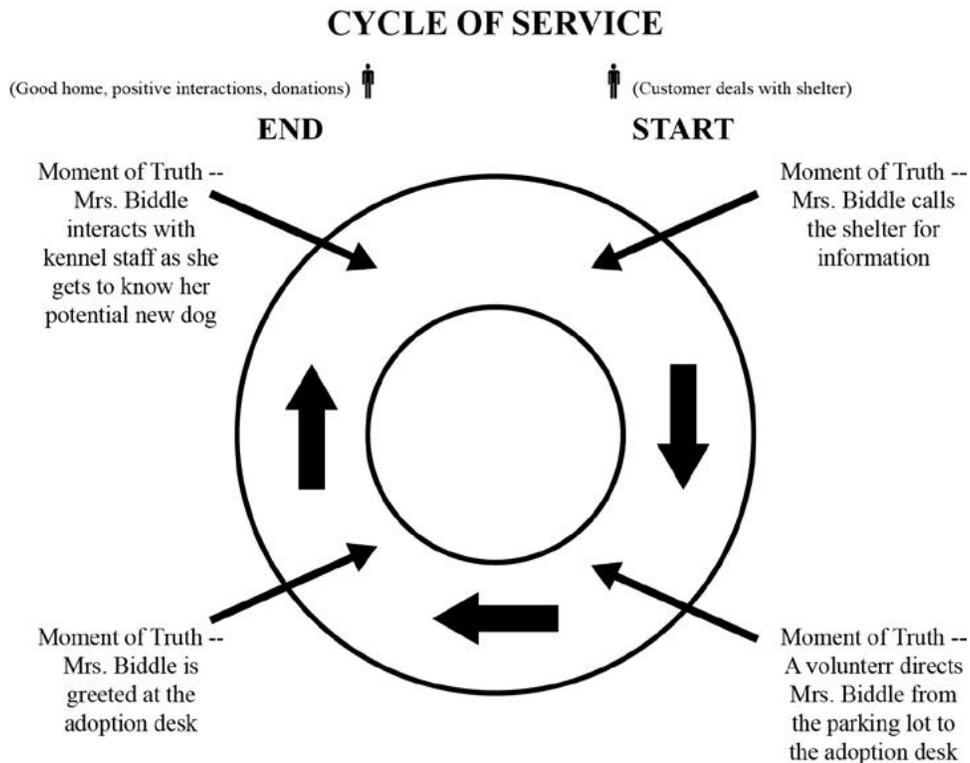


Do this! Your organization is unique to any other shelter or rescue in its location, customers and procedures. Think of 2 or 3 “customers” who are important given your organization’s respective needs, and list them on the line below.

**Tool #2: Remember How Important You Are:
Which Employees & Volunteers Are Responsible for Customer Service?**

In his book *At America's Service*, Karl Albrecht talks about the Cycle of Service and “moments of truth” in customer service. A moment of truth is any episode in which a customer comes into contact with the shelter (front desk, kennel, field, phone, website...) and gets an impression of the quality of its service. Therefore, any moment of truth (i.e., interaction) you have with a customer affects their impression of you, your co-workers, and the agency.

Mrs. Biddle’s first moment of truth with your organization may occur when she calls to find out your hours. If she has to press eight buttons and gets cut off, or if a receptionist gives an abrupt response, she will get a certain impression. If she easily gets the information from a recording or talks to a helpful person, she will get another impression. A day later, when Mrs. Biddle comes to the shelter to adopt a dog, she may run into a volunteer in the parking lot who directs her to the adoption desk. His guidance is her second moment of truth, and if he was courteous and helpful, she will probably remain open to her third moment of truth, which will be at the adoption desk. How well that moment of truth goes at the adoption desk will affect Mrs. Biddle’s fourth moment of truth with the kennel staff when she is getting to know her potential new dog. If kennel staff members are rude or not helpful, it could ruin the first three positive moments of truth. There can be many moments of truth every time a customer deals with the shelter. Each moment of truth with a shelter employee affects the next with a different shelter employee. It works like this:



Moments of Truth and Consequences: An Exercise



Do this! Centerville Humane Society wants to improve its approach to customer service. Let's help them out. Jot down a sentence that pinpoints a consequence of the positive or negative moment of truth that each of these staff members or volunteers creates with his or her actions.

1. Moment of Truth: The harried veterinarian abruptly refuses to look at the slightly swollen incision on a cat she spayed last week. She has already checked out this cat twice; the swelling is normal and she feels the cat's guardian is neurotic.

One consequence of this moment of truth could be that



2. Moment of Truth: On an especially hot day, a volunteer advises customers standing in line for a vaccination clinic that there is a water fountain just down the hall and that she will hold their places in the queue.

One consequence of this moment of truth could be that

3. Moment of Truth: On a busy morning a Spay/Neuter Clinic staff member makes a mistake on scheduling a private dog spay. She reschedules the surgery but does not apologize to the customer.

One consequence of this moment of truth could be that

4. Moment of Truth: An Animal Care Technician rolls her eyes and says "How can you give up such a nice dog?" when a woman comes in to surrender a boisterous yellow lab.

One consequence of this moment of truth could be that

5. Moment of Truth: Recognizing that the complainant is elderly and upset about her neighbor's unsterilized outdoor cats and how they scare her little dog, the Humane Investigator sits down with her, has a glass of iced tea and explains the strategies he plans to use to get the cats sterilized or surrendered to the shelter.



One consequence of this moment of truth could be that

6. Moment of Truth: The Shelter Retail Store Clerk personally fits the dogs of each prospective buyer of a SENSE-ation Harness to see that the customer buys the right size.

One consequence of this moment of truth could be that

7. Moment of Truth: The Thrift Store Sales Clerk yells at the donor who once again brings clothes to the shop after he has already been told that the store does not handle used clothes.

One consequence of this moment of truth could be that

8. Moment of Truth: A caller who cannot get through the main shelter line calls the emergency number for information that is clearly not related to an emergency. The Hotline/Helpine Supervisor provides the needed extension numbers and then explains that the hotline is not a shortcut to other departments.

One consequence of this moment of truth could be that

9. Moment of Truth: After receiving a licensing renewal notice for a dog that died, the caller berates a Licensing Clerk for lack of empathy. The Clerk makes it clear that it is the pet owner's responsibility to let the department know that a dog has died and that his remarks are callous themselves.

One consequence of this moment of truth could be that

10. Moment of Truth: A vendor repeatedly phones the organization seeking to speak with the Operations Director about disinfectants. The annoyed Administrative Assistant tells the vendor not to call again and to wait for a return call.

One consequence of this moment of truth could be that

Summary



You probably didn't have much difficulty figuring out that no matter what our job description, when people know we represent the shelter or rescue in any way, we are establishing moments of truth that affect our peers, the shelter, and ultimately the animals. Since we can easily create positive or negative impressions, we need to be aware of our impact. We are all part of creating a shelter/rescue culture that is *Customer Smart*.

Customer service in animal sheltering, rescue and protection is different than customer service elsewhere. Everyone we encounter is a customer, and since we are dealing with emotions and the lives of animals, it behooves us to be *Customer Smart*. Being *Customer Smart* will ensure that we can effectively care for our customers, the animals, and ourselves during any kind of interaction.