

Focus on the Customer

**A Course for
Directors and Managers
Participant's Workbook**



Focus on the Customer for Directors and Managers

Participant's Workbook

Time: 6 hour

Executive Director

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Key Area: 4 (Communications and Marketing)

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The University of Mississippi

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Improve the operation of child nutrition programs through research, education and training, and information dissemination.

VISION

Lead the nation in providing research, education, and resources to promote excellence in child nutrition programs.

MISSION

Provide relevant research-based information and services that advance the continuous improvement of child nutrition programs.

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Functional Areas and Competencies for School Nutrition Directors

Functional Area 6: Marketing and Communication

Competency 6.2: Develops a customer service infrastructure to promote the school nutrition program.

Knowledge Statements

- Knows techniques for providing high-quality customer service.
- Knows the importance of customer feedback on menu planning.
- Knows fundamentals of creating a pleasant, appealing, and safe dining experience.
- Knows methods to collect and use data on customer acceptability of school meals.

Competency 6.3: Establishes a communication infrastructure with stakeholders to promote the school nutrition program.

Knowledge Statements

- Knows the importance of networking within the community to build support for the school nutrition program.
- Knows appropriate channels for effectively communicating with school nutrition program stakeholders.

Source: *Institute of Child Nutrition. (2009). Competencies, knowledge, and skills for district-level school nutrition professionals in the 21st century. University, MS: Author.*

Functional Areas and Competencies for School Nutrition Managers

Functional Area 4: Marketing, Communication, and Customer Service

Competency 4.2: Develops and implements best practices for providing and maintaining a quality dining experience.

Knowledge Statements

- Knows how to establish a customer-friendly and responsive environment in the school nutrition program.
- Knows the importance of creating a student-friendly environment with healthy food, clean serving lines, and helpful employees to improve participation in the school nutrition program.p

Competency 4.3: Implements customer service techniques to promote satisfaction.

Knowledge Statements

- Knows customer expectations for the school nutrition program at the school level site.
- Knows the importance of providing excellent customer service.

Source: *Institute of Child Nutrition. (2018). Competencies, knowledge, and skills for school nutrition managers. University, MS: Author.*

Professional Standards

Communications and Marketing – 4000

Employee will be able to develop plans that include involvement with school and community members, empower school nutrition leaders, and address excellent customer service.

Source: United States Department of Agriculture. (2015). *Professional standards for school nutrition professionals*. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/professional-standards>.

Key Area: 4 Communications and Marketing

Training Objectives

At the end of the training, participants will be able to accomplish the following objectives:

Lesson 1: Know the Customer

- Define customer.
- Identify examples of customers' needs, wants, and expectations.

Lesson 2: Customer Service Is the Key

- Define customer service.
- Identify the school nutrition team and their role in providing customer service.
- Identify effective communication and active listening techniques.
- Identify key factors in achieving customer satisfaction.

Lesson 3: Responsibility for Customer Service

- Discuss the role of the school nutrition director.
- Discuss the role of the school nutrition manager.
- Discuss reasons for sharing responsibility for customer service.

Lesson 4: Achieving Quality Customer Service

- Explain the purpose and importance of assessing the effectiveness of customer service.
- Identify tools to use in assessing the effectiveness of customer service.
- List specific factors to measure in order to evaluate customer service

Lesson 5: Training Your Staff

- Create a five-minute staff training based on quality customer service.

Lesson 6: Evaluating Your Customer Service Program

- Create a customer service action plan.

Key Terms

Attitude anchors

Simple things that help make us happy and upbeat, and restore our positive attitude when difficult or challenging situations arise

Competition

Internal and external factors that influence customers to purchase a product or service

Consistency

The state or condition of always happening or behaving in the same way

Culture

The customary beliefs, social norms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group

Customers

These are people we serve or have the potential to serve. The primary customers of all school nutrition programs are the students. They are the individuals the program was designed to serve.

Customer expectations

Products and services that customers think they will receive

Customer experience

The perception and contact the customer has with the product or service

Customer feedback

Information coming directly from customers about the satisfaction or dissatisfaction they feel with a product or service

Customer-focused

Keep the students' needs in mind. This occurs when the entire school nutrition team is trained and committed to delivering outstanding customer experience.

Customer satisfaction

Meeting the needs, wants, and expectations of the customer

Customer service

Encompasses all aspects of the products sold. It is a combination of product, price, presentation, support, information, and delivery. It is what has value to the customer.

Customer service factors

Key elements used to provide exceptional customer service

Customer service measurement

The process of asking opinions of customers to determine their level of satisfaction and to secure suggestions, ideas, and recommendations for closing the gap between the service provided and expectations

Customer service survey

A tool developed and designed to determine the level of customer satisfaction with the school nutrition program

Diversity

The differences that exist among people

Formal measurement

Tools such as surveys, focus groups, guided discussions, and interviews that are used to measure customer satisfaction with the school nutrition program

Informal measurement

Tools or strategies such as food testing, customer cards, informal chats with students, and plate waste checks that are used to measure customer satisfaction with the school nutrition program

Plan

A written description of mission, vision, goals, strategies, and actions, including a schedule and resources to implement the actions to build a customer-focused SNP

Quality

The degree of excellence of the product

Reliability

A sense of trustworthiness that creates security and confidence in the ability to perform well on a consistent basis

Strategies

A plan of action designed to achieve a major or overall aim

School nutrition team (SNT)

All employees of the school nutrition department

School nutrition program

A school food and nutrition program that offers healthful and appealing meals to all internal and external customer

Stakeholder

An individual or group of individuals with a common interest in the students, the school, and the school nutrition environment

Training Introduction

Welcome to *Focus on the Customer for Directors and Managers*, and thank you for coming. Repeat-customers help to improve the school nutrition program. You want to provide excellent customer service, and you want your customers to feel good about your services. To keep your customers coming back, you must keep in mind what you can do to provide high quality service.

Have you ever stopped to think about aspects of your daily life that make or keep you happy, upbeat, and positive? Attitude anchors are simple things that help make us feel happy and upbeat, and restore our positive attitude when difficult or challenging situations arise. These things do not have to be anything elaborate. Think about the small things that enable you to go to your job each day. You have a smile, a positive outlook, and the desire to provide your staff and customers with the best experience possible. For example, some individuals enjoy listening to a favorite podcast on the way to or from work, reading positive quotes, reflecting on uplifting affirmations, having a cup of coffee first thing in the morning, meditating, or chatting with family and friends. If you have not given it much thought, take a few seconds to do so.

ACTIVITY: Attitude Anchors

Materials: Sticky notes, writing utensils

Time: Approximately 15 minutes (time will vary based on group size)

Instructions: Answer the prompts on a sticky note. When finished, crumple the sticky notes paper into a ball. Then throw your paper ball into the air. Once everyone has thrown their prompts, grab a ball that is not yours. When it is time to give introductions, provide your name, expertise/affiliation, and read the anonymous responses for the prompts.

1. An attitude anchor that helps you maintain a positive attitude
2. An attitude anchor that helps you repair a positive attitude

Lesson 1: Know the Customer

Offering healthy meals that meet the school-day nutrition needs of customers and following program guidelines are only basic aspects of your role. Your customers' dining experience is one that meets their needs, wants, and expectations.

Objective: Define customer.

Who Are Your Customers?

Customers are any of the people you serve or have the potential to serve. They come in many different ages, sizes, races, genders, and cultural backgrounds. Although we serve a broad customer base, it is important to keep in mind that the primary customers of all school nutrition programs are students. They are the individuals the program was originally designed to serve.

After World War II, our country's leaders recognized the need for healthy, well-nourished young people to defend our nation. In 1946, the National School Lunch Act was passed to "safeguard the health and well-being of the nation's children" by making nutritious meals available to all children in schools. (Public Law, 79-396, Stat.281, 1946) Over the next twenty years, a positive relationship between good nutrition and proper child development led to the passage of the Child Nutrition Act. This law expanded Federal support for national school meal programs and emphasized the importance of developing healthy eating habits.

From a business perspective, students are not only the founding customer of your school nutrition programs; they are also the majority customer. Think about it; students comprise the majority of every school's population. As a result, their continuous participation (i.e., customer loyalty) is needed to finance and sustain the programs.

Objective: Identify examples of customers' needs, wants, and expectations.

ACTIVITY: Customers' Needs and Wants

Materials: Customers' Needs and Wants worksheet, writing utensils for each participant

Time: 5 minutes for group discussion, 10 minutes for each group to report out

Instructions: The worksheet provides a few examples of customers' needs and wants. Once you are in small groups, brainstorm other examples of needs and wants you believe students have.

Customers' Needs and Wants

Instructions: As a group, brainstorm examples of needs and wants you believe your customers have. There are a few examples of customers' needs and wants provided for you.

Needs (requirements for survival)

- Healthy food offerings/food that meets meal pattern requirements
- Safe food
- Age-appropriate food
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Wants (appeal to senses or a desire)

- Consistent quality
- An attractive serving line and dining area
- Food that looks and tastes good
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

One important thing to keep in mind is that your primary customers, students, may not always know what they need. However, most of them have a good idea of what they want. Either way, fulfilling their needs and aiming to satisfy their wants are both important aspects of achieving customer satisfaction and, ultimately, customer loyalty.

Customer Expectations

Customer expectations are what they believe will or should happen. In the past, customer expectations were relatively simple and included things such as fair prices and friendly service. In today's society, customers' expectations of all industries are becoming increasingly complex. For example, many customers expect competitive prices, a wider range of choices, convenience, speed, personalized interactions, and innovation.

There may be demographic differences such as gender; culture; family income, size; race/ethnicity; and religion. Physical differences may also exist. Physical differences could include challenges that impair the customer's ability to eat or move around the dining area with ease.

Students, as customers, want and expect many of the same things we do when dining out. You should aim to provide them with the same level of service you expect when you are dining in your favorite foodservice establishments.

Differences That Impact Needs, Wants, and Expectations

Another important factor we should keep in mind while we are on the topic, and that is diversity. Similarities, such as the same age, grade, and developmental stage, exist among your customers that can lead to generalizations regarding what they need, want, and expect.

There may be demographic differences such as gender; culture; family income, size, and composition; race/ethnicity; and religion. Physical differences may also exist. Physical differences could include challenges that impair the customer's ability to eat or move around the dining area with ease.

All of the factors we mentioned can influence the way customers view the world around them, how they interact with others, how they expect others to behave, as well as what they want, need, and expect. If none of these differences are considered, your school nutrition programs can inadvertently create barriers to accessing school meals for certain students. More

importantly, recognizing that these differences exist will aid you in developing a customer-focused school nutrition program. We must remember every customer is a unique individual.

Wrap Up

You should now be able to:

- Define customer.
- Identify examples of customers' needs, wants, and expectations.

At the end of each lesson, you will complete a reflection activity. Some of the information recorded will serve as reminders of what you learned in the course. Take the next few minutes to record what you have learned in this lesson.

Lesson 2: Customer Service Is the Key

Envision this scene: it is lunchtime, and the kindergarten children are coming through the line. You notice one child who is shy and timid and does not tell you what they want. The child gets through the line and goes to the dining room to find a place to sit when another child bumps into them. The child drops their tray, and food goes everywhere. The child is crying and does not know what to do. You go to the child and calm them down. Then, you get someone to come clean up the mess, and you take the child back to the serving line and prepare them another tray. The child stops crying and gives you a big hug. The next day when the child comes through the line, they are smiling, talking, and speaking so you can hear what they want to eat. You have just witnessed something more than an act of kindness—you witnessed the impact of excellent customer service. Not only has the young child been impacted, but so have you.

Objective: Define customer service.

Although customer service is a term we hear frequently, we do not typically think much about its meaning. Customer service is about more than a friendly smile. It involves everything about the product we sell. Customer service is a combination of the product, price, presentation, support, information, and delivery. It is what has value to the customer. However, more times than not, we base our opinion on our interactions. When you purchase a product or service, you base part of your judgment about that product on your personal experience with the customer.

Objective: Identify the school nutrition team and their role in providing customer service.

Your staff is a vital component of the customer service experience. Their interaction with the customer can be the determining factor of whether a customer returns or chooses not to return. Your staff needs to understand their duties and responsibilities. Customer service skills need to be practiced, and feedback needs to be provided so skills can continue to be honed. You need to provide feedback, both positive and, at times, constructively negative and recognize customer service training that may need to be reviewed and discussed every day.

It is your responsibility as a director or manager to ensure customer service is achieved. To accomplish customer satisfaction, the entire school nutrition team plays a critical role in providing quality customer service.

Both good and bad customer service exists everywhere in the business environment, even in your programs. We want to think every employee possesses excellent customer service skills but know that is not realistic.

ACTIVITY: Customer Service Role Play

Materials: Role Play: Customer Service Role Play handout, **Customer Service Role Play** worksheet, writing utensils

Time: 15 minutes

Instructions: Three volunteers will be asked to come to the front of the room and act out the scenario. Answer the questions on the **Customer Service Role Play** worksheet in the Participant's Workbook.

Role Play: Customer Service Scenario

Interaction between school nutrition (SN) line server and a high school student.

Narrator: It is the last lunch period of the day, and there is one line server on the main entrée line. The most popular menu item, Hot & Spicy Chicken Sandwich, has run out. Several students have already complained because they were unable to get what they wanted.

The SN line server has had to do their work and that of an absent employee all morning. It has been very tiring, the employee is hungry, and there was no time to take a break before lunch service. The employee is not looking forward to end-of-the-day cleanup because she will be doing both jobs. Resentment and anger are building, lunch service has been slow, and every student wanted the entrée she was serving. Now, one final student is coming up to her line, but there are no more Hot & Spicy Chicken Sandwiches.

Before entering the lunch line, the student sits in the café and rushes to finish homework they did not realize was due today. This homework assignment is important because it means the difference between a C and a D in the course. If the student gets a D, they cannot participate in the marching band, and their parents will be upset. It seems every teacher has given excessive amounts of homework, pop quizzes, or called on the student. It has been a long morning, and it is going to be an even longer afternoon. There are three classes remaining, as well as band practice after school. The student knows it will be at least 6:00 pm until they make it home for another meal.

The student picks up a lunch tray and begins moving to the Hot & Spicy Chicken Sandwich line. Let us see what takes place.

Role Play: Customer Service Scenario (continued)

Line Server: (with a negative attitude) “Hey, before you even ask, I just ran out of chicken sandwiches. I have no idea if there are more in the kitchen. You should get in another line.”

Student: (frustrated) “But I have been standing here for a long time. What do you mean you don’t have any more chicken? What else is there? It looks like all those lines are closing. You always run out of food last lunch.”

Line Server: (unsympathetic and speaking louder) “I told you we are out of chicken sandwiches! You need to get in another line!”

Student: (angry and speaking louder) “I want the chicken! Why can’t you make enough food?”

Line Server: (bossy, angry tone) “Look, I told you I don’t have any more chicken. If you want something to eat, you’ll need to go to another line.”

Student: (angrier and louder) “And I told you I want the chicken!” (Slams the tray down and storms out of the café)

Line Server: (turns and comments to colleagues) “Well, don’t look at me; it’s not my fault there weren’t any more chicken sandwiches on my line.”

Customer Service Role Play

Based on the scenario you just observed, answer the following questions.

1. What did the line server do incorrectly?

2. How would you coach the line server on providing positive customer service?

Objective: Identify effective communication and active listening techniques.

A director and manager must be able to communicate effectively in order to build employees' competence. Having built this competence, school nutrition professionals should be able to communicate effectively with their customers. When communication is effective, employees have the information they need to do their work well.

A skilled communicator:

- Takes time to make good decisions about what information to give, to whom to give the information, and the best time to give the information
- Tells the truth, clarifies misconceptions, and works to ease feelings
- Listens with both the head and the heart
- Listens to understand, not to judge or to defend
- Speaks to share information needed by others
- Knows that the best outcomes are the result of clear, honest, and focused exchange of ideas and information

Think about your communication skills with your customers. Consider what happens if you do not communicate effectively about new items on the menu or running out of a popular food item on the line. Lack of communication would affect the trust of your customers and impact whether they will return.

Active Listening

Listening is one of the most important communication skills you can have. There are five key active listening techniques you can use to become a better listener. These techniques include:

- Pay attention
- Show you are listening
- Provide feedback
- Do not judge
- Respond appropriately

When you are speaking to someone about simple tasks, answering questions, or giving directions, you listen to gain information and to be able to give the most helpful answer. However, when conversations turn to topics that are important and carry meaning for the

speaker, listener, or both, a wise director or manager takes time to listen more seriously and effectively.

Objective: Identify key factors in achieving customer satisfaction.

Four Key Factors of Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is meeting the needs, wants, and expectations of the customer. There is a multitude of factors to consider when striving to achieve customer satisfaction. However, we are going to cover four key factors that are relevant to your school nutrition programs.

- Quality
- Consistency
- Reliability
- Competition

Quality and Consistency

Quality is the degree of excellence of the product. We are often competing with the perceived quality of food students receive in restaurants. For example, think about a pizza that is prepared 90 minutes ahead of the lunch period. The cheese will be brown, and the crust dried out. The student who wants fresh, hot stringy cheese is going to be dissatisfied with the quality of the pizza in comparison to their favorite pizza restaurant.

The saying, "If you would not eat it, why would you serve it?" is a critical aspect of quality. If the product does not meet your expectations, it most definitely will not meet the quality expectations of your customer. If the food we plan, prepare, and present to the customers does not meet the customers' quality expectations, you are likely to lose them as repeat customers.

Consistency is the state or condition of always happening or behaving in the same way and is another important customer satisfaction concern. Consistency helps build a relationship of trust in the product or service provided. Let us consider the quality of the pizza. If this same pizza is presented the same way the next time it is on the menu, customers are going to stop coming to you for that meal. Your customers no longer trust that you can provide them with a consistent, quality product.

Reliability and Competition

When you break a customer's trust, you have lost credibility with the customer. Reliability is the quality of being trustworthy or performing consistently well. It focuses on the sense of security and confidence we expect when aiming to achieve customer satisfaction. Your customers want to know that they can count on you to meet their wants, needs, and expectations. For example, they want hot food hot and cold food cold. They expect food that is tasty, nutritious, and filling. They want quality food items that are consistent in flavor, presentation, and cost.

When the customer decides to find other sources for meals because you are not meeting their expectations, you have fully opened the door to the competition. Your school nutrition team needs to understand it is your responsibility to focus on customer satisfaction.

Every business needs to be aware of what competition might be influencing their customers. There is a variety of competition; you may face it from both internal and external sources in your programs.

Internal competitors

- Clubs, teachers, or principals that schedule outside food at lunchtime
- Student peer pressure
- Field trips
- Food fundraisers

External competitors

- Parents who bring in outside food
- Older students who can leave campus for lunch
- Late starts (students do not eat breakfast and may not eat lunch because they just ate at home)
- Early dismissal days (when no lunch is served)
- Coffee shops
- Restaurants
- Sack lunches
- Food deliveries
- Convenience stores
- Food trucks

ACTIVITY: Achieving Customer Satisfaction

Materials: **Achieving Customer Satisfaction** worksheet, writing utensils for each participant

Time: 10 minutes

Instructions: Think about your school nutrition program and answer the four questions related to quality and consistency.

Wrap Up

You should now be able to:

- Define customer service.
- Identify the school nutrition team and their role in providing customer service.
- Identify effective communication and active listening techniques.
- Identify key factors in achieving customer satisfaction.

Lesson 3: Responsibility for Customer Service

Objective: Discuss the role of the school nutrition director.

Role of the Director

Students are the primary customers in the school nutrition program. Today's students are typically a very diverse group. Meeting the needs of your customers can present a challenge for the school nutrition program. It is a challenge that requires teamwork by the entire school nutrition staff. The school nutrition program director is the team leader and sets the tone for how the staff responds to the customer. The director must strategically integrate all aspects of the food service experience into training for the staff. As the leader of the school nutrition team, if the director sets high standards, the rest of the team will reach up to them. However, if a leader sets low standards, the staff will reach down to them.

The school nutrition staff may not realize how much they can influence customer relations. They also may not know what actions they can take to develop positive customer relations. Customer service is the foundation for everything school nutrition professionals do. The school nutrition program's mission, vision, policies, and procedures should relate to the customer and the experience they have while eating in your cafeteria.

For school nutrition directors to achieve the goals of a school nutrition program, they must meet the expectations of today's student customer. The school nutrition environment should be more than just a place that provides students with access to reimbursable meals. The school nutrition director and the entire nutrition team must create a relationship between the customer, healthy eating, nutrition education, and an understanding of how appealing food contributes to the dietary choices of students.

To ensure the continued relationship, the director needs to ask customers what they think about the food quality, food presentation, customer service, and the experience they are receiving. This evaluation component of customer service/experience provides ideas and suggestions for improvement and helps identify solutions for solving problems.

Objective: Discuss the role of the school nutrition manager.

Role of the Manager

Customer experience is vital in a school nutrition program. The role of the school nutrition manager is to train staff and maintain a positive customer experience. The customer's experience determines if they will return and their influence on other customers. A customer's experience does not begin at the serving line; it starts when they first enter the cafeteria. As managers, taking time to make sure that the cafeteria is clean and inviting helps to build the customer experience. Training staff to smile or say good morning makes a difference for the customer.

Evaluating your customer's experience can help to give an idea of what changes need to be made. Taking the time to talk to the students or look at the serving line at their height provides insight into what they see. Surveys are an easy way to evaluate your school nutrition program. Getting feedback ensures that you can make changes where needed to improve the overall customer experience.

Objective: Discuss the reasons for sharing responsibility for customer service.

Shared Responsibility

The key to keeping customers happy is making sure the school nutrition professionals and other stakeholders are excellent customer service representatives. A good customer service representative will not only keep your customers happy; they can also help generate new customers. The school nutrition customer service representative must have the right attributes and be trained to excel in customer service.

Think about the customer service team in your school or district and whether everyone on the team is a customer-friendly representative.

ACTIVITY: Shared Responsibility

Materials: Sticky notes, writing utensils

Time: 15 minutes

Instructions: Write why it is important to share the responsibilities for customer service on a sticky note. Share what you wrote with another participant.

Changes Over Time

Many events and circumstances that occur as time passes can impact who customers are, as well as what they need, want, and expect. Examples of these events may include technological advancements, the evolution of family structure, health developments, and shifts in food culture.

Wrap Up

You should now be able to:

- Discuss the role of the school nutrition director.
- Discuss the role of the school nutrition manager.
- Discuss reasons for sharing responsibility for customer service.

Lesson 4: Assessing Your Customer Service Program

To set the tone for this lesson, follow along with the scenario provided in your participants workbook.

Al, the janitor at the elementary school, went into the grocery store in a small town and asked permission to use the phone. Granted permission by the storeowner, he dialed the school number. The principal answered the phone, and Al began the conversation, "I hear you need a janitor at the school." The principal replied, "No, we already have a janitor who does a fine job. He is not only good; he is very good. He knows his job, and everyone at the school likes him." With that, Al said, "Thank you," and hung up. The storeowner was very confused. He had not meant to eavesdrop, but could not avoid hearing the conversation. He said to Al, "I thought you were the janitor at the elementary school." And Al replied, "I am. I'm just checking up on myself."

Assessing or measuring your customer service is all about the need for regular checkups to find out how customers rate the school nutrition program. The only way the school nutrition team can know how the people you serve rate customer service is to ask them.

The following six questions about measuring customer service and customer satisfaction are important to answer when planning a successful customer satisfaction program.

1. Why should we ask customers for their opinions, ideas, and recommendations to improve customer service?
2. Why is it necessary to use different tools and strategies for measuring or rating customer service?
3. What are some ways the school nutrition team can measure or rate customer satisfaction each day?
4. Why is it necessary to conduct a customer service survey at least once each school year?
5. What are some factors in evaluating your program that measure customer satisfaction and customer service?
6. What are some ways to involve customers in measuring or rating various aspects of the school nutrition program?

Objective: Explain the purpose and importance of assessing the effectiveness of customer service.

Asking Customers for Feedback

- Customers let you know how they rate the products and services.
- Customers evaluate quality in terms of their own experiences and perceptions.
- Perceptions are a reality to the customers and influence how often they choose school meals.
- Customers' opinion about the school nutrition environment influences their decision to eat or not to eat.
- Customers provide a basis for building a customer-focused program.

Using the information gathered from the customer's feedback will help to close the gap between their expectations and what they are receiving.

Your customers rate your service in some way every day:

- Taste and appearance of food
- Choice and variety offered
- Appearance and comfort of the dining area
- Speed of service
- Friendliness and accuracy of the school nutrition team
- Appearance of the trash return area

Customer service measurements or ratings are conducted to gather information about how well the school nutrition program is meeting the expectations of customers and the goals of the program. These ratings include looking at factors in both the school nutrition environment and the environment outside the school that affect customers' eating habits.

Purpose of Measuring Customer Service

The purpose of any customer service measurement is to gather information to use in making changes and improvements to the school nutrition program. Today's school nutrition customers have grown up with access to fast food and vending machines. They want convenience, and they want it immediately. The goal of customer service in school nutrition is for your customers to select and eat healthy meals that meet their school-day nutritional needs. The school nutrition

team can better achieve that goal by asking students questions about what they need, want, and expect.

The following questions are designed to provide the school nutrition team with a better understanding of school-age students' needs and expectations:

- Are expectations of service, quality, and convenience being met by the school nutrition programs?
- What factors influence student participation in school nutrition programs?
- How do students define quality?
- What standards must we meet to deliver the quality the customer expects?
- What are the opinions about school meals of those who do not participate in the school nutrition program?

Objective: Identify tools to use in assessing the effectiveness of customer service.

There are many ways to measure customer service and customer satisfaction, some formal and some informal. Think for a minute about the type of ratings or measurements used in your program, both formal and informal.

Examples of Measurement Tools and Strategies

Formal measurement or ratings include:

- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Guided discussions
- Interviews
- Case studies

Informal measurements or ratings include:

- Food testing
- Customer cards
- Quality scorecards
- Temperature checks
- Informal chats with students during meals
- Checking plate waste

ACTIVITY: Formal and Informal Measurement Tools and Strategies**Material:** None**Time:** 10 minutes

Instructions: Brainstorm with your group and identify at least three formal measurements and three informal measurements. These measurements can be used to assess customer service and customer satisfaction with your programs. Select a reporter in each group to record your ideas. Allow groups to work about three minutes for discussion.

Observing, Asking, and Listening

Formal tools such as surveys and plate waste studies are excellent for measuring customer satisfaction. Informal strategies can also be beneficial in gathering information about the effectiveness of customer service. One strategy known as Observing, Asking, and Listening can be used to decide how to make changes needed to meet customer satisfaction.

Use this technique when making direct contact with students:

1. Observe the customers' actions and attitudes from the time they enter the dining area until they leave the return dish area.
2. Ask the customers in a friendly way about their choice and their eating practices.
3. Listen carefully to how the customers answer questions.

Annual formal measurements are essential strategies that can be used to build a customer-focused program of customer service. Using a written survey is one of the most effective ways of measuring customer satisfaction. Surveys allow the school nutrition customer service team to reach a large number of students or to reach a random sample of students.

Objective: List specific factors to measure in order to evaluate customer service.

Evaluating Customer Service

Factors for measuring when evaluating customer service?

- Food quality
- Menu offerings
- Dining ambiance
- Staff appearance and courtesy
- Time
- Price
- Variety of food offering
- Nutrition
- Meal service
- Cleanliness of serving line

ACTIVITY: Evaluating Your Customer Service

Materials: Evaluating Your Customer Service worksheet, writing utensils

Time: 10 minutes

Instructions: Use one to five words to describe your customer's needs, wants, expectations, and experiences based on the three categories: service, food, and atmosphere.

Evaluating Your Customer Service

Instructions: Use one to five words to describe your customer's needs, wants, expectations, and experiences based on the three categories: service, food, and atmosphere. Take 10 minutes to work individually.

- **Needs:** Everyone has some common things they require or need to live. These items are called needs. Examples of some basic needs include food, water, and shelter.
- **Wants:** One person's *wants* may be another person's *needs*. Wants are things that appeal to a person's senses or a desire.
- **Expectations:** Customer satisfaction reflects the expectations and experiences the customer has with a product or service. Consumer expectations reflect both past and present product evaluation and user experiences. Think about any major purchases you have made recently.
- **Experiences:** Customer experience, also known as CX, is your customers' perception of their experience with your business or brand. CX is the result of every interaction a customer has with your business, from navigating the website to talking to customer service to receiving the product/service they bought from you.

Evaluating Your Customer Service	Service	Food	Atmosphere
Needs			
Wants			
Expectations			
Experiences			

It is important to remember that customers rate the school nutrition program daily. However, they seldom express their opinions unless asked. Although customer satisfaction does not guarantee loyalty to the school nutrition program, customer dissatisfaction does ensure that you will lose customers. Customer satisfaction is not the result of one factor but multiple factors. The only way to know your program is meeting the customer's expectations is to ask—not once, but often.

Wrap Up

You should now be able to:

- Explain the purpose and importance of assessing the effectiveness of customer service.
- Identify tools to use in assessing the effectiveness of customer service.
- List specific factors to measure in order to evaluate customer service.

Lesson 5: Training Your Staff

The skills of your staff play an integral role in achieving quality customer service. Step back and observe what and how your staff interacts with customers. It can be an eye-opening experience. No matter how tasty and attractively packaged the food or how cool the decorations are in your cafeteria, quality customer service comes back to how the customer is treated. This role builds on the level of interaction staff may have with customers.

Objective: Create a five-minute staff training based on quality customer service.

Think about how you train your staff for customer service. Training does not have to be elaborate or complicated. For example, looking at your serving line at a student's level of vision is a simple type of training.

ACTIVITY: Create a Staff Training

Materials: Create a Staff Training worksheet

Time: 35 minutes

Instructions: Take about 15 minutes to discuss your ideas and develop a 5-minute training to train your staff. After creating your training, each group will take 5-minutes to teach their training to the class. Your training should include an objective, content, and activity with instructions.

Create a Staff Training

Instructions: Take about 15 minutes to discuss ideas and develop a 5-minute training to train your staff. After creating your training, each group will take 5-minutes to teach their training to the class. Your training should include an objective, content, and activity with instructions. Feel free to use one of the examples of objectives listed below.

Examples:

Objective: Evaluate your serving line at a student's level of vision.

Objective: Identify personal customer service techniques.

Objective: Describe the customers' needs in your customer service plan.

Objective:

Content:

Wrap Up

You should now be able to create a five-minute staff training based on quality customer service.

Lesson 6: Achieving Quality Customer Service

In this lesson, you will be applying the concepts learned during this training. Using these concepts, you will create a customer service action plan. This action plan will help you to implement updates needed for your customer service program.

In lesson one, we discussed who the customer of school nutrition programs is. It is important to keep in mind that students are the primary customers of all school nutrition programs. We also identified examples of customers' needs, wants, and expectations. It is important to identify customers' needs, wants, and expectations because they have a significant impact on the customer's dining experience. Furthermore, there may be similarities among your customers, such as the same age, grade, and developmental stage, but remember every customer is a unique individual.

In lesson two, we discussed customer service and why it is important to the child nutrition program. We also identified the school nutrition team and the importance of communication in customer service. Keep in mind it is the responsibility of the director or manager to ensure customer service is achieved. Remember that the entire school nutrition team plays a critical role in providing quality customer service. Be sure to include the school nutrition team in planning, monitoring, and implementing processes of the customer service program.

In lesson three, we discussed the role of the director and manager and their shared responsibility for the customer service program. It is critical for school nutrition professionals and other school nutrition customer service representatives to have the right attributes and be trained to excel in customer service. The reason why customer service is important is because a customer who has a positive experience is more likely to become a repeat and loyal customer. Therefore, the school nutrition environment becomes more than just a place that provides students access to reimbursable meals, it is an environment where the customer is valued and appreciated.

In lesson four, we discussed the methods for assessing your customer service program. Gaining feedback from your customers is the only way the school nutrition team can know how the people you serve rate your customer service. The goal of customer service in school nutrition is for your customer to select and eat healthy meals that meet their school-day nutritional needs. Be sure to utilize the Assessing Your Customer Service worksheet to help determine the action steps needed to improve your customer service program.

In lesson five, you developed a 5-minute staff training based on quality customer service. Keep in mind training does not have to be elaborate or complicated. Ultimately, the skills of your staff play an integral role in achieving quality customer service.

Objective: Create a customer service action plan.

ACTIVITY: Customer Service Action Plan

Materials: Customer Service Action Plan Sample handout, Developing SMART Goals and an Action Plan handout, Customer Service Action Plan worksheet, writing utensils

Time: 50 minutes

Instructions Using the information you have learned, create a **Customer Service Action Plan**. The components of the action plan include expected outcomes, a plan to describe what you will do to achieve the expected outcomes, identify who will be responsible for completing the task, and the target date set to complete the task as well the actual completion date. If the plan cannot be completed, utilize the notes section to provide a justification. List the resources used to complete the task. A sample action plan has been provided for you. Use the **Developing SMART Goals and an Action Plan** handout and the **Customer Service Action Plan Sample** handout to complete the **Customer Service Action Plan** worksheet. SMART stands for, Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound.

Developing SMART Goals and an Action Plan

There are numerous benefits of using SMART goals, all of which ultimately result in personal and/or program improvement. Let's look at the characteristics of a SMART goal.

- Develop improvement goals that are “SMART” (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-bound).
 - Specific – Goals should be simplistically written and clearly define what you are going to do.
 - Measurable – Goals can be quantified to a determined amount of a specified unit; an indicator of progress.
 - Achievable – Goals state what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources but may stretch the team.
 - Relevant – Goals must be ones that you are willing and able to work on and must be based on current or forecasted needs.
 - Time-bound – Goals should be linked to a time frame that creates a practical sense of urgency.
- When creating an action plan, consider the following steps:
 - Outline the actions or steps that need to occur.
 - Identify the person(s) who will be responsible for implementing the steps.
 - List indicators of completion or progress.
 - Set a target date for achieving each step.
 - Specify the resources that will be required, such as staff, money, or materials.
- Another approach to formulating action plans is to focus on these questions:
 - What does the data tell us?
 - What does it not tell us?
 - What else would we need to know?
 - What are we doing well?
 - What needs for the SN program improvement might arise from this data?
- An action planning template and a sample action plan can be found on the next page.

Customer Service Action Plan Sample

Topic: Service

Expected Outcomes (measurable and specific):					
Add an additional serving line in the cafeteria to help decrease wait time by 10 minutes before August 1, 20xx.					
Plan (What will you do to achieve the expected outcome?)	Person Responsible	Can this plan be completed?		Target Date	Date Completed
		Yes	No		
Measure cafeteria space for additional serving line.	Child Nutrition Manager	X		April 24, 20xx	April 1, 20xx
Order additional serving line from vendor.	Child Nutrition Director	X		June 15, 20xx	May 31, 20xx
Install additional serving line.	Vendor	X		July 25, 20xx	July 28, 20xx
Resources Vendor serving line catalog Money School nutrition staff needed to staff additional serving line					
Notes Additional serving line installation was delayed because of inclement weather.					

Customer Service Action Plan

Topic: Service

Expected Outcomes (measurable and specific):					
Plan (What will you do to achieve the expected outcome?)	Person Responsible	Can this plan be completed?		Target Date	Date Completed
		Yes	No		
Resources					
Notes					

Customer Service Action Plan

Topic: Food

Expected Outcomes (measurable and specific):					
Plan (What will you do to achieve the expected outcome?)	Person Responsible	Can this plan be completed?		Target Date	Date Completed
		Yes	No		
Resources					
Notes					

Customer Service Action Plan

Topic: Atmosphere

Expected Outcomes (measurable and specific):					
Plan (What will you do to achieve the expected outcome?)	Person Responsible	Can this plan be completed?		Target Date	Date Completed
		Yes	No		
Resources					
Notes					

Wrap Up

SAY: You should now be able to create a customer service action plan.

TRAINING WRAP UP

ACTIVITY: Growing and Branching Out

Materials: One sheet of chart paper (with a “tree trunk” and “branches” drawn on it), marker(s), writing utensils, sticky note

Time: 10 minutes

Instructions: Use one or two sheet(s) from the sticky note pad to list an area in which you want to grow or how they will branch out. Take a minute to list their ideas. Afterward, come up one by one and add your “leaves” to the tree’s branches and share how they would like to grow or branch out based on what you learned.

In addition to providing customers with healthy meals, we set the tone for a positive customer-focused environment. It is your job as a school nutrition team to ensure customers enjoy their time in the cafeteria. This training on customer service has provided you with roots, or a foundation, that will enable you to grow in a very important way. Today, you learned some basic information that will improve your confidence and competence in navigating customer service.

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