

Manager's Corner

Customer Service and Communication

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NUTRITION



OPERATIONS



ADMINISTRATION



COMMUNICATIONS/
MARKETING

Institute of Child Nutrition

The University of Mississippi

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PURPOSE

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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Professional Standards

COMMUNICATIONS AND MARKETING – 4100

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

4130 – Customer service

Empower school nutrition staff to provide excellent customer service.

4140 – Communication skills

Develop communication skills.

Introduction

Manager's Corner: Customer Service and Communication is designed to empower managers to use in training their staff. Each lesson is roughly 15 minutes. This lesson plan contains:

- Learning objective
- Statement explaining the importance of the topic
- List of materials
- Instructions on how to present the information
- Questions to ask staff
- An activity to strengthen or refresh the knowledge of the staff

Lesson Overview

Instructions for lesson:

- Review the lesson objective and background information.
- Review why it is important.
- Ask staff the questions.
- Facilitate the activity outlined.
- Provide time for staff to ask questions.

Objective: Discuss customer service and communication and explain how they work together in the school nutrition program.

Background information: Customer service is the support you offer your customers. Excellent customer service gives your customers a pleasant and enjoyable experience. When your customers experience excellent customer service, they will become loyal and promote your business.

There are three characteristics of communication: two-way process, open, and effective.

- Communication is a two-way process. It involves both the sending and the receiving of information.
- Open communication is a clear exchange of information without fear to express one's thoughts and beliefs. The foundation of open communication is trust. It helps staff better understand problems or situations that may occur and can improve decision-making and problem solving.
- Effective communication involves effective listening and speaking skills. This type of communication involves stating your ideas clearly and logically.

There are several ways communication helps provide excellent customer service.

- Work as a team: The school nutrition staff must work as a team and maintain open lines of communication.
- Listen and share information: Listening to what your customers say is a way to determine their needs and expectations. Listen to the students talk to their friends in line, and when they interact with you. If there is a suggestion or a concern, report it to the manager.

- **Be friendly and honest:** When the students begin coming into the cafeteria for their meal, put a smile on your face. There may be a student who is having a bad day. Use this opportunity to give a positive thought of encouragement to the student. Be honest with your customers. When a student presents a problem, and you do not know the answer, tell them that you will get back to them with an answer as soon as possible. Do not forget! Try to have the answer the next time you meet. Keep an open line of communication.
- **Identify ways to improve:** Every program has room for improvement. At the next meeting, have the team discuss ways their customer service can improve. There may be a reoccurring problem that is common in all of the schools. Brainstorm ways that problems can be handled and come up with a solution. The next time the problem occurs, test the solution. Report back to the manager who will then report to the director.

Why it is important: The school nutrition (SN) program is a business, and customer service is critical for a business to succeed. The goal of school nutrition customer service is to create a customer-friendly and welcoming environment where the customer regularly selects and enjoys healthful meals. The SN program offers two products to its customers: customer service and nutritious meals.

Questions for Staff

- **What is customer service?**

Answer: Customer service is the support you offer your customers. Excellent customer service gives your customers a pleasant and enjoyable experience with you. When your customers experience excellent customer service, they will become loyal and promote your business. It is also an opportunity to market your program and generate more participation and higher revenues.

- **How can the school nutrition team provide excellent customer service?**

Answer: There are many ways the school nutrition team can provide excellent customer service. Some of these include:

- **Work as a team:** The school nutrition staff must work as a team and maintain open lines of communication.
- **Listen and share:** Listening to what your customers say is a way to determine their needs and expectations. Listen to the students talk to their friends in

line, and when they interact with you. If there is a suggestion or a concern, report it to the manager.

- **Be friendly and honest:** When the students begin coming into the cafeteria for their meal, put a smile on your face. There may be a student who is having a bad day. Use this opportunity to give a positive thought of encouragement to the student. Be honest with your customers. When a student presents a problem, and you do not know the answer, tell them that you will get back to them with an answer as soon as possible. Do not forget! Try to have the answer the next time you meet. Keep an open line of communication.
- **Identify ways to improve:** Every program has room for improvement. At the next meeting, have the team discuss ways their customer service can improve. There may be a reoccurring problem that is common in all of the schools. Brainstorm ways that problems can be handled and come up with a solution. The next time the problem occurs, test the solution. Report back to the manager, who will then report to the director.
- **What is communication, and how does communication and customer service work in the school nutrition program?**

Answer: There are three characteristics of communication: two-way process, open, and effective.

- Communication is a two-way process. It involves both the sending and the receiving of information.
- Open communication is a clear exchange of information without fear to express one's thoughts and beliefs. The foundation of open communication is trust. It helps staff better understand problems or situations that may occur and can improve decision-making and problem solving.
- Effective communication involves effective listening and speaking skills. This type of communication involves stating your ideas clearly and logically.

You may use one or all of these communications when interacting with the students. In order to provide excellent customer service, you must use excellent communication skills.

Please note: The answers provided are only examples and are not an inclusive list of possible responses.

Activity: Picture This Communication

Activity materials included in this document:

- **Picture This Communication**

Materials provided by the school nutrition operation:

- Copies of handouts
- Pens/Pencils

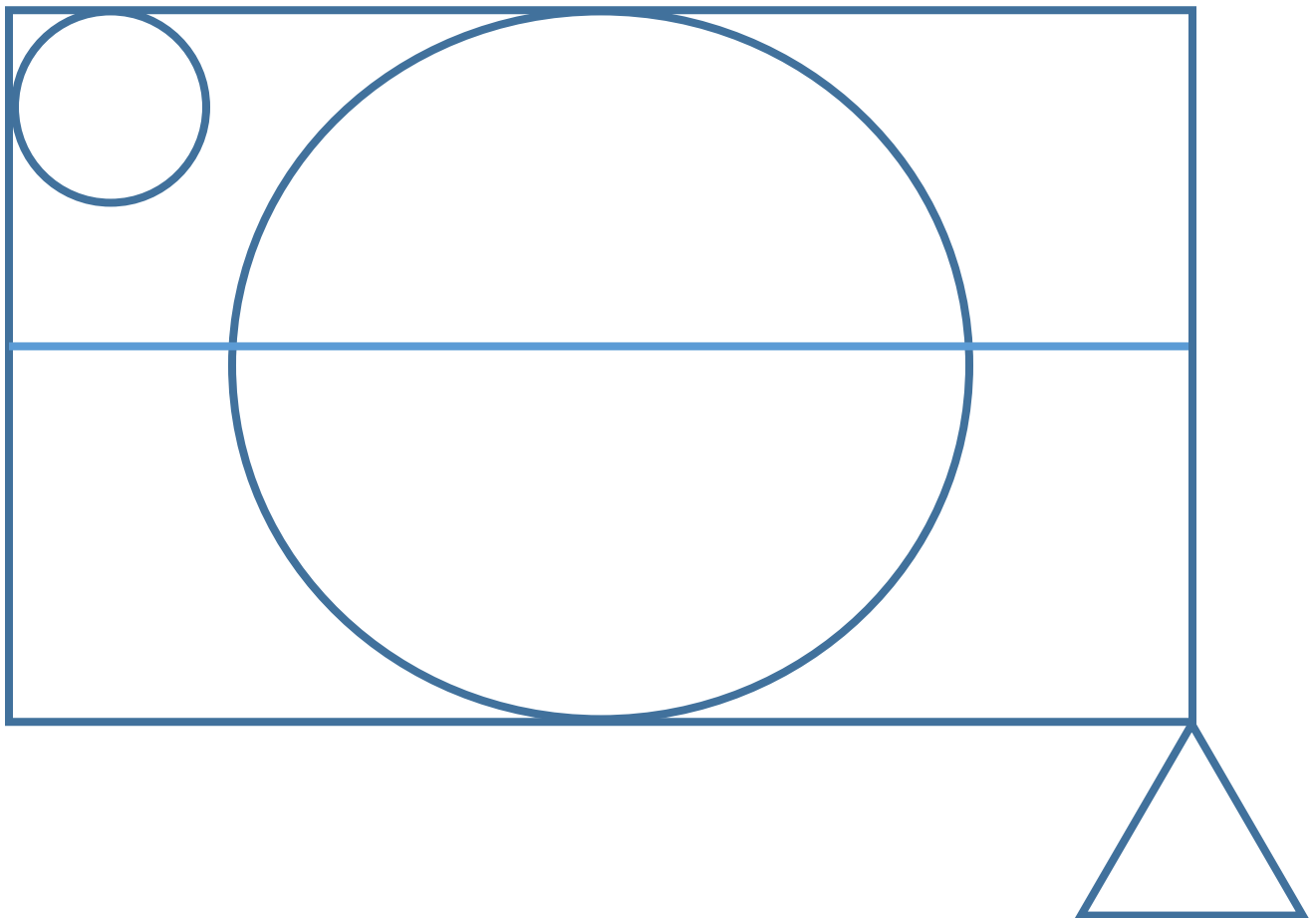
Activity Instructions:

- Print the handouts, but do not distribute until the complete instructions are shared with participants. Note: Only the participants that will serve as the “speaker” in their group, will get to actually see the handout.
- Distribute writing utensils.
- You have 3 minutes to complete this activity in one of two ways.
 1. Have the instructor to describe the picture and the participants try to draw the picture being described without peeking at the other participants' work.
 2. Have the participants pair up with one person as the speaker and the other person as the listener. The listener will try to draw the picture being described without peeking at the other participants' work.
- Discuss with staff about what they learned through the activity and how they can improve communication as a team.

Whichever way you decide to do this, the speaker may describe the picture however they want, and the listener may ask questions for clarification.

Picture This Communication

Instructions: The speaker must describe the picture on the handout. The listener must try and draw the picture being described without peeking. Speakers, you may describe the picture however you want. Listeners, you may ask questions for clarification. You have 3 minutes to complete the activity.



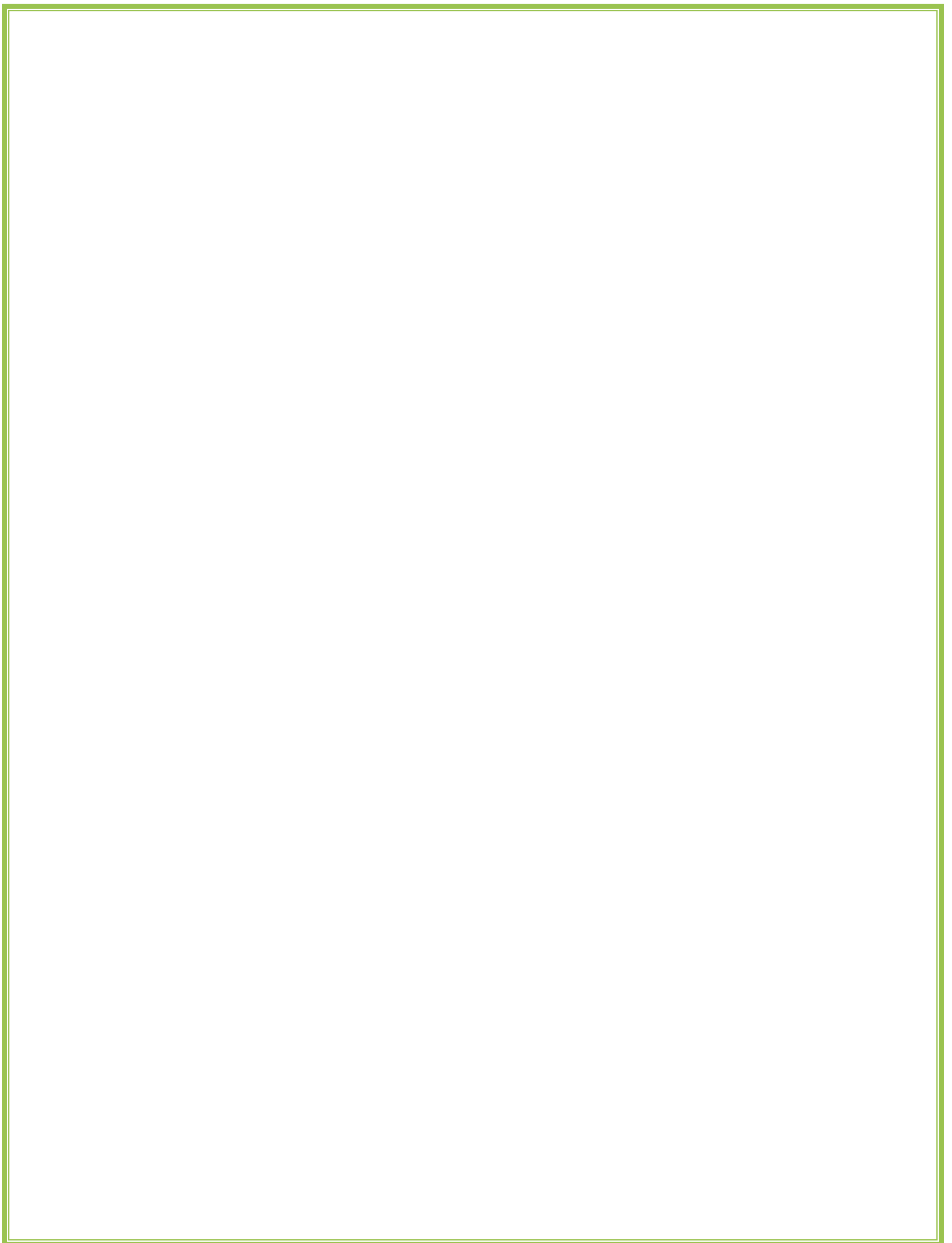
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