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Thank you for taking the time to read this, and I hope you enjoy the rest of your Seafood Guide.

Lee Cooper  
Seafish and the Seafood Training Academy.

# Segment 3 - A guide to dealing with customers

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most important parts of your job is dealing with customers. This can include day to day customer care such as promoting the image of the business and creating a friendly atmosphere as well as dealing with the unexpected – a lost child or an old person who is suddenly taken ill. And, of course, it includes dealing with the occasional complaint.

## AIMS OF THE SEGMENT

After studying this segment you will be able to:

- welcome customers politely;
- attend to customers needs;
- provide accurate information or refer customers to an alternative information source;
- promote establishment facilities at all appropriate times;
- acknowledge politely, customers comments and pass on where appropriate;
- bid farewell to customers in a polite and pleasant manner;
- deal in a polite and pleasant manner with customers at all times.

### **In addition you will know:**

- why it is important that information given to customers is accurate and disclosable;
- why customer comments should be passed on to the appropriate person.

## HOW IMPORTANT ARE YOU?

Your role is vital to the success of the business. You know for yourself that you tend to go back to those shops where you receive friendly, efficient service and avoid those where you don't.

It's **you** the customers see and talk to, it's **you** they expect to serve them efficiently and politely and it's **you** they will come to when something is wrong. In addition, your boss is relying upon you to promote his/her business and keep sales high. You will realise that dealing with customers is a major part of your job.



The thing to remember is that everyone is an individual and whilst they are in your shop they expect to be treated as such. Make sure you give them your full attention, eye contact is important – look at the customer not at the floor – in short, try to make each person feel important.

If you are to react well to your customers well, you need to '**read the signs**'. People give away a lot about what they are thinking in the way they look and behave. There are obvious signs, like looking at their watch or squinting at the price list, and some that are less obvious.

Try to get into the habit of looking out for these signs and reacting accordingly.

Also, **pay attention to the overall situation in the shop**; is it busy, is there a long queue? Again adjust your behaviour accordingly. Try to develop '**queue awareness**'.

One of the first rules of good customer service is knowing how to deal with different kinds of people. The trick is to be able to recognise the differences and react accordingly.

### Some examples:

- the person who likes a joke;
- the person who wants to chat;
- the one who is in a hurry;

- the one who cannot take a joke and is looking for quick efficient service.

If a customer dashes into the shop asking to be served immediately when you have several customers waiting, you must ask yourself what would happen if you allowed this person to jump the queue. Would you lose the less patient of your customers and upset the rest if you did serve this person? It's highly likely. Why not pass the problem to your waiting customers by asking them if they minded this intrusion after asking why the person was in such a hurry.

Remember, if a friend walks into the shop/restaurant, simply acknowledge your friend and carry on serving the customer who you are serving at that time, giving them your full attention.

**Whatever the type of customer, the golden rules must be:**

- **always treat the customer with respect;**
- **make eye contact;**
- **listen carefully to what they are saying;**
- **do your best to try to make sure that when they leave they are satisfied with the service they have received.**

## **DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT**

The Disability Discrimination Act lays a responsibility upon employers to provide an equal service to both able and disabled customers. It is therefore an employees' duty to ensure that any arrangements put in place by the business are carried out.

It is important that staff are trained to recognise disability in a customer quickly and deal with it in a sympathetic manner.

Business policy will be determined by its type (take-away/restaurant), its layout and its size.

A take-away for instance could comply with legislation to provide a service for wheelchair bound people, or those unable to climb steps, by placing a prominent notice by the door or in the window. This could indicate that by pressing a bell, for example, a member of staff will attend to them. Such a notice would be made more prominent if it carried the wheelchair symbol.

A café or restaurant would be expected to provide, where possible, wheelchair access and space to fit a wheelchair at a table. A customer with impaired hearing or serious speech impediment, once the disability is recognised, could be supplied with a pen and paper to write down their order. Also, large print menus for those with impaired sight or even Braille display evidence of customer care. Providing disabled toilet facilities is now a must wherever these can be provided without major reconstruction in existing premises, but are a requirement in new premises.

**It is important that staff treat disabled persons with sensitivity.**

## ATTENDING TO CUSTOMERS NEEDS

A good counter assistant or café/restaurant waitress will try to memorise the range of food available. They should be ready to suggest options, with a description of the dish and its contents if called to do so, or if customers seem unsure what it is they wish to purchase.

If customers request their food cooked in a particular way you should always try to comply with the request, if it is company policy, and within your remit to do so, or pass the request to your superior. Being courteous to customers costs nothing even if you believe they are being rude to you. If a customer complains that you have for instance given him haddock when he ordered cod, apologise, take it away check the meal and even if he is wrong replace it. It is not worth losing a customer by arguing who is right and who is wrong. The same would apply if a customer complains that the food or part of the meal is not as hot as it should be, take the whole meal away and change it. In a restaurant taking a meal away and microwaving it is bad policy and always rebounds on the business. **Remember, the customer is always right.**

If you make a mistake when completing an order such as breaking a fish or, hiding an overdone one by covering it with chips, discard the item and replace with a fresh one, don't try covering up the mistake. Practices such as this may save money in the short term, but will lose you customers in the long run.

An opportunity to increase the value of the sale, by pleasantly suggesting additional items such as peas, gravy, sauces, etc, should never be missed. Even if only one in ten such suggestions results in a sale you will be significantly adding to business profitability. You will also be showing your employer that you are awake and eager to promote the business. It is important that accurate information is provided to your customers, whether this is verbally or written, as it could have implications under the **Trade Descriptions Act**, if this information is found to be inaccurate or if the customer suffers from a food allergy. Customers will also be dissatisfied if they receive incorrect information.

After taking the order the role between takeaway counter assistant and café/restaurant waiter/waitress changes. Although prompt and efficient service is always important, it is accepted that the takeaway needs to maintain a reasonably steady throughput. Therefore, communication between staff and the frier becomes paramount. If there is more than one person serving, it is important to keep each other informed regarding the number of meals comprised in each order. This will prevent a situation arising where two orders are partially completed because you are both waiting for fish, chips or other product.

In order to cut customer waiting time to a minimum, it is vital that their requirements are passed quickly to the frier. If two assistants find there is not enough food to complete their individual orders, they should share completion of one order rather than they both stand twiddling their thumbs. You will find that on completion of the order, fresh food is available and normal service can be resumed.

Table service is more than simply carrying plates to the table. A waiter/waitress will:

- ensure that customers are happy with their seating arrangements;
- deal sympathetically with families and parties;
- provide menus in a helpful and attentive manner;
- allow reasonable time for the customer to choose their meals;
- listen carefully and write down the order;
- remember to ask if they require any extras as suggested previously to takeaway assistants.

Always take your orders from the same starting position at the table. When you bring the food you will be able to offer the meals to the people that ordered them. When serving families deliver meals to children first to give parents time to settle them. On completing the service invite the customers to enjoy their meals.

It is good practice to return to the table part way through the meal and enquire if everything is to the customer's satisfaction. If a customer expresses dissatisfaction you should ensure that the complaint is rectified to the customer's satisfaction.

Where meals consist of a number of courses, do not remove plates from the table until all, especially children, have finished eating.

When customers leave, remember to thank them for their custom, acknowledge politely any comments and pass on where appropriate. Deal quickly with the removal of the plates etc, clean and reset the table.

If customers sit at a table that has not been cleared and reset, although there are other vacant tables that are set for customers, they obviously prefer the location of the one they have chosen. Rather than asking them to move, apologise, clear, clean and reset the table as soon as possible.

If two new customers ask for a table but all tables are occupied although some of them have spare seats, it is not acceptable to ask them to sit at separate tables. Customers already seated may not wish to share their table. However it may be your restaurant's practice to ask customers already seated if they would mind sharing their table. You should never put pressure on customers to share a table. Best practice would be to assess how long it will be before a table would be available and convey this information to your prospective customers. If you have a waiting area you could offer them a complimentary pot of tea or coffee while they wait if this is within company policy, but it will be their decision whether to stay or leave.

### **Taking payment: takeaway**

It is not our aim to cover detailed procedures for operating the till in your particular shop. Clearly this would not be practical as different shops have different tills and use different handling procedures. What we will try to do is help you to understand some of the basic principles involved, so that you can more effectively learn how to put these principles into practice.

In some takeaways the counter assistant is responsible for completing the whole sale, which includes:

- taking the order;
- making up the order;
- taking the money and giving the change.

In other businesses, one person takes the order and payment whilst another colleague makes up the order. There are numerous other variations.

If you are responsible for the till it is reasonable to assume you will take the order and provide the change. Therefore, understanding opening, operating and closing down procedures is vital to the viability of the business.

The mechanics of operating your particular till will be taught by either the owner, or manager of the business.

#### **Opening checks:**

You should check to make sure the float is correct, i.e., the total amount of cash is as it should be and you have the right amount of each coin and note and they are in the right compartments. You should check the till roll, if a red line is showing then it is time to replace it. Make sure you know where the spare till rolls are kept just in case it does run out during serving.

#### **Operating the till:**



Always look the customer in the eye, listen carefully to their order, enter items into the till and get the total. **Take the money, always check the bank notes** to make sure they are genuine. You can use a special ultra violet light or look for the metallic strip and watermark.

**Always leave bank notes outside the till until you have given the customer their change** – that way there can be no mistakes as to whether it was a five pound, ten pound or twenty pound note.

Always quote the total charge and count the correct change into the customers' hand when closing the sale, using the highest denomination of coins/notes.

**From time to time check the coins in the till** to make sure you have enough change. If you seem to be running short, use a quiet moment to get some more change or ask someone to get it for you. When placing change into the till make sure you take out the corresponding amount in notes.



Make sure that there are not too many notes building up in the till – it is an open invitation to thieves. **Check with your boss on security procedures in your shop.**

### **Closing the till:**

As at all other times, security and accuracy should be foremost in your mind when closing the till at the end of the trading. You may well find that you share some of these responsibilities with other members of staff or with your boss.

Tasks include:

- getting a read out of the total sales for that period;
- counting the money and working out the takings;
- checking the cash in the till agrees with the sales total;
- securing the till ready for closing.

### **Taking payments: café/restaurant**

As with the takeaway it is not our aim to cover detailed procedures for operating the till in your particular café/restaurant. As a person waiting on tables it would normally mean passing the order to the kitchen, delivering the meal and presenting the bill at the end of the meal. Allow a reasonable amount of time for the customer to examine the bill before approaching the table to collect either the cash or in some cases the credit or debit card. If there is a query regarding the

bill you should be polite and act in accordance with the business's laid down procedures. If the customer is satisfied with the bill you will proceed to the payment point and allow the cashier to process the transaction. You will then return to the table and either count out the change or ask the customer to sign the credit slip. Close the transaction by thanking the customer for making the visit and hoping to see them on future occasions.

Now have a go at completing the following exercises.

### **EXERCISES**

Explain how you would deal with a "chatty" person without offending them when you have long queue of customers to serve?

Apart from what they say, what "signs" might tell you that a customer is a hurry?

How could you tell if a £10 note was a forgery?

What action would you take if a customer tried to use a credit card before the "issue date" printed on the card?

<b>Candidate's signature and date</b>

Congratulations! You have now completed the Segment 3. Time for a break before tackling the last segment?