

Building rapport with your customers

If you're working in a customer service environment you will know that your customers have different personalities and therefore different needs.

As a customer service advisor or Manager you will also have your own personality type and feel more comfortable speaking to specific types of customers.

But of course, good customer service is about adapting your style to match the style of your customer, not expecting the customer to adapt their style to match yours. If you stick to the same style with each customer then you will only be building rapport with 25% of your customer base.

One definition of rapport is: “a close and harmonious relationship in which the people or groups concerned understand each other’s feelings or ideas and communicate well.

In order to create this type of rapport, it is therefore important to identify the communication style of different types of customer and adapt your style accordingly.

I'll describe our personal styles using a model developed by two psychologists – [Reid and Merrill](#).

Reid and Merrill introduced four styles: Driver, Expressive, Amiable, Analyst.

I'm sure you have dealt with the 4 types that are categorised below; based on my customer service experience.

You may also want to consider which style you fall in to?

'Driver' style Customer

This style of customer is direct and to the point. They are usually recognised quickly as they will contact you knowing exactly what they want and what they expect.

Additional Characteristics

- They have strong opinions and convictions
- They like to feel in control and don't like inaction
- They are very decisive and quick to respond
- Tend to be efficient and results-focused
- Tend to be very assertive and have a need to take charge
- Have a low tolerance of feelings, thoughts and advice of others

'Analytical' style of Customer

This style of customer will appear deliberate, thorough and logical. They will often ask very specific questions and will want to know options available. Their pace is much slower than the 'Direct' style.

Additional Characteristics

- They like to follow clear processes and weigh all options
- They want to appear right, so they require all the data available to make the best decision
- They tend to be conservative and quite business-like in their approach
- They pay attention to the finer details!
- Tend to appear quiet and unassuming and show little emotion
- They will approach decisions based on fact and logic, rather than your personal thoughts or feelings.

'Expressive' style of customer

This style of customer is more likely to take the social initiative, wanting to engage in friendly conversation. They are likely to be the one to start asking you about your day!

Additional Characteristics

- They can be excitable, chatty and emotional
- They make decisions based on feelings, rather than solely on logic
- They are generally open to ideas and like to take risks
- They are energetic and usually assertive
- They like the conversation to be focused on them
- They make spontaneous decisions

'Amiable' style of customer

This style of customer is often quieter than 'Expressive' styles. They like to support others and need to be reassured. They are less assertive than 'Expressive' styles and will engage in some personal talk if you encourage it.

Additional Characteristics

- They are generally good listeners who enjoy personal contact
- They are perceived as avoiding quick decisions
- They are more co-operative, as they place a higher priority on getting along
- Tend to show trust and confidence in others
- They are less assertive than 'Expressive' styles
- Like close, personal relationships

Do's and Don'ts when speaking to each style of customer

Driver Style		Analytical Style	
Do	Don't	Do	Don't
Be clear, confident and to the point	Ramble about subjects that bear no relevance to the situation – avoid small talk	Prepare all data and solutions in advance	Be disorganised or leave things to chance
Stick to the matters at hand	Be distracted or disorganised	Stick to business rather than personal talk	Be casual, engage in personal conversation, or appear boisterous
If you are calling a customer back – ensure you are prepared with all the facts. Be confident!	Leave loose ends or appear vague about what you are going to do	Develop your credibility by explaining pros and cons of each options	Rush the decision making process
Ask specific questions – it is also a good idea to explain why you need the information, so that the customer understands. the relevance	Avoid rhetorical questions – they are not received well	Focus on what you can do – be specific	Be vague about what you are going to do or need the customer to do
Wherever possible, provide options so that the customer feels in control of making the final decision - expect a quick decision!	Have a pre-prepared solution or make the decision for them	Provide the customer with plenty of opportunity to ask questions and show patience and understanding – they need time to make the right decision	Lead the conversation by focusing on your questions or what's important to you
Expressive Style		Amiable Style	
Do	Don't	Do	Don't
Focus on interaction that engages and supports them	Be informal, cold or process driven	Be person focused	Not task focused
Allocate time early in the call to get to know them	Go straight into facts and figures	Show sincere interest in them – find areas of common involvement	Appear cold or disinterested in what's going on for them. But avoid being too personal and losing sight of the goal
Ask for their opinions and ideas	Be judgmental or task focused	Patiently work with the customer to involve them in the decision making process	Force them into reaching a conclusion or seeing your point of view
Let them know what has worked for other customers in similar situations and how they felt as a result	Just give your opinion	Ask 'How' type questions to draw out their ideas	Don't manipulate them or push them into something, as they are unlikely to argue but that doesn't mean they are happy
Use their name and talk to them on their wavelength	Talk down to them	Focus on minimising risks and giving reassurances	Offer promises or reassurances that you cannot meet.

Have a go identifying the styles of customers you speak to today. What are you going to do differently with each in order to meet their needs and build rapport?

Turner Corner Learning Solutions has a wealth of experience within customer service environments and will work with your business to design and deliver bespoke courses which will improve customer satisfaction and reduce complaints. Contact us to discuss how we can make a real difference to your business.