

Customer care

Activity 5: Ask me about my job

Introduction

Almost any job holder will have customers of one sort or another, whether these be external or internal. It is an important part of learners' development and awareness to be able to look at customer care not just as a customer, but also as the person providing it. This activity invites learners to explore customer care from the perspective of providing customer care.

The small group work included in this activity provides opportunities for learners to develop their speaking and listening skills and to share their ideas with each other. By listening in to the conversations, you can assess the extent of learners' understanding and can intervene with questions designed to promote deeper thinking and reasoning.

The activity also provides learners with practice in asking questions as a way of checking out their insights into the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to deliver customer care in a real or an imaginary job. This not only develops their questioning skills. It also helps them to see things from another person's point of view.

Learning objectives/outcomes

Learners should be able to:

- identify the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to provide customer care in the context of a named job and the challenges that customers might present
- ask open and closed questions as appropriate to confirm, clarify, correct or develop predictions they have already made
- understand the likely effects of the different types of question.

Resources required

- Copies of **Sheet 5.1: Imaginary job holder's description of their job** or **Sheet 5.2: Real job holder's description of their job**.
- Copies of **Sheet 5.3: Providing customer care in the job**.
- Copies of **Sheet 5.4: Some principles of good customer care** (optional).

Starting points

This activity assumes that learners have already begun to think about customer care from the customer's point of view. So you might first take learners through **Activity 1: My best and worst experiences as a customer** followed by **Activity 3: Principles of good customer care**.

It would also be helpful if learners have had some practice in asking closed and open questions and are aware of the different types of responses likely to be elicited.

Planning learning in multiple environments

This activity could form a valuable part of an induction programme, helping learners to explore what it means to work in their chosen subject or vocational area.

It can also be used in career planning sessions to help learners develop their job-seeking skills and prepare for work or work experience.

In addition to being used in a classroom, it can be used on a work placement or as part of on-the-job training.

Suggested approach

The whole activity takes learners through the experiential learning cycle by:

- developing their theories and concepts about customer care in a specific context
- planning their questions to try out their theories
- trying out their questions on a real or surrogate job holder
- reflecting on the results
- discussing what they could do differently.

You will find more information about the experiential learning approach in Part 3 of **Cross-curricular themes: continuing professional development guide**.

Preparation

Option 1: The ideal way of conducting this activity is to involve someone from your organisation who does a job similar to the one described in **Sheet 5.1: Imaginary job holder's description of their job**. Such a person might run the learning resource centre or be the person who responds to queries about the services your college or organisation provides. This approach would ground the activity in reality and help make it come alive.

The extent of their involvement would be to:

- spend approximately 10 minutes with you ahead of the session so you are able to write **Sheet 5.2: Real job holder's description of their job**, a customised version of **Sheet 5.1**, describing their specific job
- join your session for 15–20 minutes to answer learners' prepared questions.

Brief the job holder to respond fully to open questions and to respond precisely to closed questions so that learners appreciate the different information that the types of questions elicit.

Option 2: If you are unable to enlist the help of a suitable person, you could step into the imaginary shoes of the job holder as described in **Sheet 5.1** and answer learners' questions yourself. If you choose this option, you might like to use one or two props to make it clear that you are temporarily stepping out of your teaching role and adopting a different role for the purposes of the exercise. For example, you might display a notice saying 'Information centre' and stand/sit next to it when you are in role. Alternatively, you could make and wear a label with an appropriate job title.

Stage 1: Small group work

Explain the learning objectives. Put learners into pairs or groups of three. Give each learner a copy of **Sheet 5.1** (or **Sheet: 5.2** if you have chosen Option 1) and **Sheet 5.3: Providing customer care in the job**. Ask them to read the job description and then discuss the skills, knowledge and attitudes they think the job holder would be likely to need to provide good customer care. One person in each pair/group should record on **Sheet 5.3** the ideas that emerge.

Monitor progress by listening to the discussions. Ask questions to prompt learners to think more deeply and widely. However, if you ask questions only when you disagree with what learners are saying, they will learn that your question signals that they have said something 'wrong'. Your interventions will be more powerful if you use questions to stimulate debate. This will reduce learners' dependence on you as the arbiter of right and wrong and will help them to become more skilful as learners.

When you judge that this part of the task has been completed, move on to the next stage.

Stage 2: Whole group

Invite learners to share their lists with the whole group. Ask learners to explain their thinking by making reference to the job holder's description. Through further discussion in the whole group, agree a list of required knowledge, attitudes and skills.

Stage 3: Small group work

Invite learners to resume working in pairs or small groups and to consider the challenges* the job holder is likely to face from customers. Again, monitor progress by listening to the

discussions. When you judge that this part of the task has been sufficiently explored and each group has identified at least one potential challenge, move on to the next stage.

*A challenge might be to:

- make sense of a complicated request for information
- understand someone with limited knowledge of English
- understand someone whose speech is impaired by a physical disability
- meet the needs of someone who is showing impatience and/or annoyance
- tell someone that you are not in a position to give them what they think you ought to be able to give them.

Stage 4: Whole group

Invite learners to share their ideas with the whole group.

When the group has agreed on at least three possible challenges, move on to the next stage.

Stage 5: Small group work

At this point, re-allocate learners to groups of four. Explain that the purpose of this part of the activity is to use questions to find out as much as they can about the customer care aspects of the job they have been analysing.

Ask each group to take the lists of knowledge, skills and attitudes and the likely challenges, and construct at least four questions to ask the imaginary or real job holder. The questions should help them to confirm, clarify, correct or develop the predictions they had made in the small groups.

Listen to the groups' discussions and use your own questioning skills to help them appreciate the difference between the responses that are likely to be generated by open and closed questions. Again, ask questions to stimulate debate rather than just to make corrections.

Stage 6: Whole group with job holder

Invite a representative of one small group to ask the real or surrogate job holder a question. Ask the whole group to listen carefully to the answer.

Review the question and answer by asking the group the following questions:

- Was the question open or closed?
- What was the result? (For example, did it make the job holder think? Did it get an informative answer or a very short one that added little new information?)
- If the question did not elicit the intended information, how might it be rephrased?

Repeat the process with a question from another group and review the answer.

Continue doing this until at least one question from each group has been asked and reviewed. If you have time and learners' motivation is high, you might invite more questions.

If learners are reluctant to ask questions, be prepared to ask one yourself in order to get things moving.

Stage 7: Consolidating, checking and reflecting on learning

Ask each learner to write down and then display for you to see, at least one thing that the real or imaginary job holder said that was new or particularly interesting about customer care. Mini-whiteboards are useful for this. Alternatively a sheet of paper will be adequate.

Repeat the process, asking each learner to write down and then display something that they have learned about questioning.

Invite learners to reflect on the learning process. Here are some suggestions of questions you could ask.

- What did you enjoy about working in a small group?
- What did you find difficult about working in a small group?
- What will you do differently the next time you work in a small group?

Alternative approaches

The two options described under Preparation offer alternative approaches.

A further option would be to choose to interview someone from the learners' subject or vocational area. This would be a valuable feature of an induction programme and could be extended to include questions about other cross-curricular themes (Enterprise and Health, safety and well-being).

Differentiation to meet individual needs

If you are working with a group who may have a limited understanding of customer care and you predict they will need support in this activity, you could provide them with a list of knowledge, skills and behaviours. They could then choose the ones they think will apply to the imaginary or real job holders' description of their jobs.

The activity could also be adapted for less confident learners by providing extra prompts, such as **Sheet 5.4: Some principles of good customer care**.

There is scope for learners to work at their own pace and level. The questions generated by the more confident learners might be more numerous and more insightful than those of their less confident peers.

Challenges – what learners might do next

A useful extension activity would be to re-allocate learners into different groups of three or four and ask them to prepare an exchange between a challenging customer and the job holder. It could include:

- what the customer said
- a response from the job holder that demonstrated good customer care.

The more confident learners could develop this into a longer conversation.

Embedding literacy, language and numeracy (LLN)

Every learning activity includes many different opportunities to develop LLN skills. Always try to find a naturally-occurring opportunity to work on them, where learners can immediately appreciate the relevance and importance of the skills they are learning to use. Your LLN specialist can advise you on how this can be done.

The priority skills learners will need to complete this activity are speaking and listening.

At Level 1, respect the turn-taking rights of others during discussions.

- Understand that an effective discussion involves everyone having a fair chance to make their contributions.
- Know and use some strategies to signal to others that they can speak (facial expression, gesture, phrases).
(Adult literacy core curriculum reference SLd/L1.2)

At Level 2, make relevant contributions and help to move discussions forward.

- Understand that to be productive, discussion needs to progress towards agreed decisions, proposals and solutions.
(Adult literacy core curriculum reference SLd/L2.1)

A useful activity might be:

a fun session in which learners work in small groups to devise a two-minute scenario: a customer asks for something and the job holder sticks to their prepared sales pitch which is at odds with the customer's needs. Debrief the activity by identifying some 'dos' and 'don'ts' to prevent the situation arising in reality.

Sheet 5.1: Imaginary job holder’s description of their job

Job title	Information desk assistant
Job holder’s description	<p>I am here to give customers the information they need. I am responsible for dealing with their enquiries on a range of issues. Some of the information is available in leaflets and booklets and I have to make sure that I keep my stocks of these up to date. Sometimes I need to look things up on the computer database. Occasionally, I’ll have to ask a colleague in a different department for help. I also coordinate the desk’s information boards and literature displays.</p> <p>It can get very busy here at times. The telephone will be ringing and there will be several people queuing up for attention. I get all sorts of different people asking for information. They don’t always know whether they are in the right place to get what they want. Sometimes they are not even sure what it is they need, so I end up being a bit of a detective.</p> <p>I have internal customers too. They can be the most demanding of all because they often ask complicated questions and want an answer in a hurry. They get impatient if I don’t have the information at my fingertips.</p> <p>As the centre is open until 10.00pm each day, I have to work two evenings a week. Sometimes the people coming in late in the evening have had a bad day and they tend to take it out on me if I can’t give them what they want immediately.</p>

Sheet 5.2: Real job holder's description of their job

(To be completed in a similar way to **Sheet 5.1** if an outside person is to be questioned. The prompts offered below provide a framework for the description.)

Job title

Job holder's description I am here to...

It can get very busy here at times when...

I have internal customers too, who...

Sheet 5.3: Providing customer care in the job

What does the job holder need to know in order to provide good customer care?

What does the job holder need to be able to do in order to provide good customer care?

What attitudes does the job holder need to have in order to provide good customer care?

What might customers say or do that could make it difficult for the job holder to deliver good customer care?

Sheet 5.4: Some principles of good customer care

1. Be approachable and welcoming.
2. Ask the right questions to find out what your customer needs.
3. Listen carefully and show that you understand how the customer is feeling.
4. Take responsibility for meeting your customer's needs – don't leave it to others or blame others.
5. Treat every customer as an individual and treat them with respect.
6. Be responsive. Go the extra mile to help the customer.
7. Be reliable. Don't make promises you can't keep.
8. Turn a complaint into something positive by dealing with it effectively.

Session plan

Aim: To help learners understand customer care from the point of view of a job holder.

Learning objectives/outcomes

Learners should be able to:

- identify the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to provide customer care in the context of a named job and the challenges that customers might present
- ask open and closed questions as appropriate to confirm, clarify, correct or develop predictions they have already made
- understand the likely effects of the different types of question.

Time	Teacher plan	Learner activity	Resources
0-20 min	Stage 1 Explain the learning objectives. Put learners into pairs or groups of three. Introduce the job description.	Through discussion, identify and list: the knowledge, skills and attitudes required for the job • challenges facing the job holder.	Sheet 5.1 or 5.2. Sheet 5.3.
20-30 min	Stage 2 Ask learners to share their lists. Facilitate discussion in order to reach agreement on a joint list.	Contribute to reaching consensus on an agreed list of skills.	Flip chart paper and pens.
30-45 min	Stage 3 Put learners into pairs or groups of three. Ask them to discuss the challenges the job holder is likely to face when dealing with his/her customers. Listen to discussions. Ask probing questions where appropriate.	Discuss challenges. Probe each others' ideas and reach agreement.	

45-60 min	Stage 4 Facilitate whole group discussion to reach agreement on three likely challenges.	Contribute to reaching consensus.	Paper and pens.
60-75 min	Stage 5 Allocate learners to new groups of four. Set task: to generate questions to ask job holder. Listen in to discussions. Ask probing questions where appropriate.	Contribute to generating questions that will confirm, clarify, correct or develop predictions made in Stages 1 and 3.	'Real' job holder.
75-90 min	Stage 6 Introduce 'real' job holder or step into role of job holder. Invite questions from learners. Facilitate review of impact of each question. Record questions on flip chart.	Ask questions of real or surrogate job holder. Reflect on impact of different types of question.	Flip chart.
90-100 min	Stage 7 Consolidate, check and reflect on learning.	Identify and display at least one new insight into customer care and one piece of learning about asking questions.	Mini-whiteboards or paper and pens.

Assessment of learning objectives/outcomes

- Teacher observes and listens to groups working together.
- Individuals reflect in final part of session on their experience of working co-operatively.
- At end of session, individuals contribute particular points learned in the session.

Differentiation to meet individual needs

- Scaffold the activity for less confident learners by providing extra prompts, such as **Sheet 5.4: Some principles of good customer care.**
- Buddying with more confident learners.

Teacher evaluation

Consider which parts of the session were effective and why.

Learner feedback

Consider whether the activities were suitable for all learners and whether the session helped to develop the expert learners.

Personal, learning and thinking skills developed

- Teamwork:
 - Collaborate with others to work towards common goals.
 - Reach agreements, managing discussions to achieve results.
 - Show fairness and consideration to others.

Literacy, language and numeracy skills developed

Language

At Level 1 and 2, use listening and speaking skills to make relevant contributions to discussions, respecting the rights of others to speak in turn and using appropriate phrases to interrupt.