

CORE PRINCIPLES OF EXCELLENT CUSTOMER SERVICE

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INTRODUCTION

The Ombudsman is committed to delivering high quality customer service in a timely and flexible way that meets the needs of individuals and ensures a fair investigation and resolution of disputes. The Ombudsman Customer Service principles are expected to reflect its core values. They should apply to its work with its peculiar stakeholders which include Complainants, Respondents and service providers as well as how staff work together to achieve the organizational goals. It doesn't matter how great our mandates and the services the Ombudsman provide are, if its customer service is poor; people will complain about it and it will lose its credibility and patronage. It's not impossible to turn things around, however, transforming an organization's customer service requires a serious commitment to meaningful change and work across the entire organization.

WHAT IS CUSTOMER SERVICE?

Customer service is the act of providing support to both potential and existing customers. Customer service professionals usually answer customers' enquiries through several avenues which may include but not limited to in-person, phone, letters, email, chat, and social media interactions and may also be responsible for creating documentation for

self-service support. Due to the peculiarity of the Ombudsman services, the ombudsman customer service could be seen as the act of providing timely, empathetic help that keeps customers' needs at the forefront of every interaction. The customer service is a direct connection between the people and the Ombudsman.

IMPORTANCE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE TO THE OMBUDSMAN

Since it is the role of the Ombudsman to bridge the gap between the government and the citizens by promoting a more people-oriented approach to government, implementing essential customer service can improve its relationships with customers and improve. Excellent customer service gives members of the public a complete, cohesive experience that is in line with an ombudsman's purpose of ensuring good service delivery. The understanding that customer service is the cornerstone of the customer's experience helps the Ombudsman institution to leverage it as an opportunity to delight customers and engage them in exciting ways. The following are some of the benefits of good customer care to the Ombudsman institution:

1. Increase patronage by customers

Good customer service always helps to increase patronage by customers. It is what keeps the customers coming back for more services and spreading by word of mouth about the services they received. When it comes to the importance of customer service, customer patronage and retention is one of the biggest factors to keep in mind. Thus, when the customers are given great experiences, they'll continue to come back and also encourage others to take advantage of the services provided by the Ombudsman.

2. Encourages Customer Loyalty

Customer loyalty is the customer's commitment and cooperation to all the procedures of investigation and dispute resolution. Often times customers become difficult because of the unpleasant attitude they receive from the organization. A loyal customer will always select the ombudsman's method of settling disputes instead of going for litigation or any alternative service provider and this helps to eliminate any competition. Without a doubt, loyal customers are very valuable asset because they ease dispute resolution process. Customer loyalty can be encouraged by offering excellent customer service.

3. Builds a Strong Culture and Reputation

A strong culture and reputation goes a long way for any organization. The culture is the psychology, attitudes, and beliefs that influence the impression the members of the public have about the institution. The story of the organization and how its team members engage with customers is what develops culture and reputation. While interacting with members of the public, always keep in mind that the customers need to be able to differentiate you from other organizations that have similar mandate when it comes to values.

4. Get referrals

People usually turn to their network of family and friends when they have problems. The importance of referrals is undeniable. Referrals are a powerful way to get your customers to do the marketing for you and, with great customer service, you increase the chances that current customers will refer you to their social circle. At the same time, bad

referrals can be the building blocks of a negative reputation, and can ultimately drive away future customers in the long run.

CORE PRINCIPLES OF EXCELLENTS CUSTOMER SERVICE

There are many principles of excellent customer service but for the purpose of time I will discuss four key principles. They are; **personalize Interaction, competent, convenient, and proactive**. These factors have the biggest influence on the customer experience and if practically applied, they will also keep the customers satisfied and boost the image and credibility of the Ombudsman institution:

1. Personalize Interaction: Good customer service always starts with a human touch. Personalized interactions greatly improve customer service and let customers know that the ombudsman cares about them and their complaints. Communicate using plain language so that they can make appropriate and informed choices. Communicate in a way that can be understood, avoid using jargon, provide clear and relevant information. Discuss with the customers at the beginning what they can expect from the service provided. Explain the complaints handling process and keep them updated about what is happening to their cases. Listen carefully and ask questions to understand the Customer's grievances. Make sure the Customers are clear about the processes of complaint handling at every stage of the complaint. Assure them that the Ombudsman is impartial, thorough and base its work on facts.

2. Knowledgeable: Competence has been identified as an element that plays the biggest role in a good customer experience. To be competent, staff that interact with customers must have strong knowledge of the mandate of the Ombudsman and the services it provides, as well as the

power to fix the Customer's problems. The more knowledge they have, the more competent they become. Be professional and knowledgeable. Be clear about the information you need from the customers. Officers are to assure customers that the organization is objective, non-judgmental and fair throughout its investigation. This will in turn boost the confidence of the Customers have in the organization.

3. Expedient: Customers want to be able to get in touch with a customer service representative through whichever channel is the most convenient for them. The Ombudsman should offer support through the channels of communication the customers rely on most, and make it easy for customers to figure out how to contact them. Accessible channels should be made available to customers. Social media platforms should be used to display services and demonstrate good customer service through meaningful engagement with Customers.

4.Proactive: Customers usually want organizations to be proactive in reaching out to them. They need to be constantly kept abreast with developments on their cases or proactively reached out to when issues affecting them arise. They may not be happy about the situation, but they will be thankful that they are kept in the loop. Let the Customers know their needs are understood and their complaint will be dealt with promptly. Keep them informed at all times throughout their involvement as to what to expect and when to expect it. Let the them know as soon as possible if the Ombudsman is unable to entertain their complaints.

By building customer service strategy around these four main principles, the Ombudsman will create a positive, hassle-free customer experience for every customer that approaches it.

KEY CUSTOMER SERVICE SKILLS

While delivering consistently good customer service requires work and alignment with the entire organizational goal, a good place to start is putting in place a good customer service team. It is important to hire people who genuinely want to help the customers succeed. Customer service team should be staff that thrive on one-on-one interactions with people, love problem solving, warm, approachable, and great at teaching other people how things work.

Here are some customer service skills that every support professional working with an ombudsman institution should seek to develop:

- Problem solving
- Clear communication
- Writing skills
- Active listening
- Adequate knowledge
- Persuasive skills
- Time management
- Patience
- ETC

THANK YOU