



It's not what you say, it's how you say it!

In this article, Karen Sommerville of Call Focus talks about communicating with customers.

Whilst searching the internet for inspiring quotations on customer service, I came across a very powerful yet poignant quotation, which for me sums up the main cause of misunderstandings between people today: "10% of conflicts are due to difference of opinion. 90% are due to wrong tone of voice".

It reminded me so much of how delicate communications can be. How we say things can often sound different, to the way we think we are saying them. We may think we appear sincere, interested

or that we are showing understanding when we talk to our customers. Yet, we may sound completely different.

It is so easy for customers to misinterpret the meaning behind our words and misunderstand what we have said or perhaps even meant to say. It can influence the impact of our message and might even make or break the conversation. Customers may also believe we don't care - yet we won't know it unless they tell us.

In fact, just one in every 25 customers will tell you if they have a problem. There may be many reasons why people don't speak up; from being



too shy or feeling intimidated, or even thinking that nothing will change. Instead, they will just vote with their feet and go elsewhere.

I have often heard people say that their industry and customers are different. Yet, customers are still consumers who encounter the same challenges irrespective of the business. So, we have to be mindful of how we communicate with them. No one industry is exempt. The only thing that changes is the type of product or service offered and the environment and regulations around them.

Indeed, it is probably even more important that pharmacists communicate effectively with customers, especially when offering a wide range of medical products and advice. Often, customers can be sick, elderly or vulnerable patients who need extra care and understanding. They need to feel valued and know that they can trust you. There is no room for errors or misunderstandings.

Like every other business, pharmacies around Ireland still face the same predicament of looking for ways to develop relations with customer in order to increase customer retention rates.

So, what can we do about it? The great news is that if we pay attention to a few key points, we can improve our communications with customers. As a result, this will help us to ultimately develop better relationships,

increase loyalty and repeat business.

1. **Think before you speak.**
2. **Put yourself in the customer's shoes and be objective.**
3. **Breathe, relax and stand up straight.**
4. **Be friendly, smile and show understanding.**
5. **Listen to what the customer is saying and how they say it.**
6. **Project your voice in the right manner.**
7. **Moderate your volume, speak softly and calmly.**
8. **Express yourself clearly, enthusiastically and at the right pace.**
9. **KISS – keep it simple, straight forward and avoid jargon.**

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10. Always be open minded to possible misunderstandings.

11. If in doubt, ask questions to clarify.

12. Practice, practice and practice!

Finally, it's important that we never allow ourselves to become complacent and assume our customer understands exactly what we meant to say every time we speak. So, take some time to ask questions to clarify and be sincere in showing understanding.

If you would like to learn and improve your communications more with customers, why don't you check out our upcoming training courses on **“Customer Service and Complaint Handling for Pharmacies”** at www.ipu.ie or at 01 4936401. The first workshop takes place

in the IPU on Wednesday, 22 April.

The aim of this workshop is to help staff develop a greater understanding of the importance of communicating effectively with customers both on the telephone and on a face-to-face basis. Participants will learn the importance of managing and exceeding expectations at every step of the service cycle and effectively deal with complaints in a calm and assertive way, without reacting inappropriately resulting in satisfied and loyal customers.

The workshop will be run by Call Focus in conjunction with the Irish Pharmacy Union. Call Focus are specialists in the design of “effective customer communications” helping companies secure greater profitability through the development of their customers. The organisation is headed up by Karen Sommerville, a competent communications, sales and customer relations skills trainer with over 25 years' experience in various sales and marketing roles across a number of industries.

Karen's delivery and training style is very energetic, practical, and interactive, with all exercises and discussions focused around participant's real life situations and business needs. As a result, she regularly achieves satisfaction ratings exceeding 85% on many of her training programmes.