CHAPTER 3

MANNING THE CONTACT POINT

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- *Discuss the first impression of your initial approach when handling customers' needs.*
- *Discuss pitfalls to avoid when handling customers' problems.*
- *Describe what you can do and what you should do to avoid dissatisfaction in extreme and unusual situations.*
- *Discuss why assisting the customer is important.*
- *Discuss the importance of working with records of customers.*

You often hear the lament, "No one notices the things I do right, only the things I do wrong." Unfortunately, that is too often true! Perhaps that occurs because we expect people to do things right or because we find it easier to pick out those things that are wrong and evaluate their consequences. To emphasize this point, we use examples and illustrations in this book that point out mistakes you can avoid.

Chapter 1 listed several contact points to which customers could come to receive services. These may be personal services, specialized services, or routine services.

The customer who wants to request a school, register an allotment, correct a service record error, or discuss a personal problem requires more than routine, impersonal service. You should treat that customer as an individual with a special need.

Most customers have routine needs that can be met on an impersonal basis. For example, the post office sorts mail for delivery; on payday the disbursing officer verifies and distributes pay—both are routine services. Even though routine services are impersonal, that doesn't mean they are unimportant; they are both personal and important to the customer receiving them. Performing all routine services properly eliminates many customer service problems.

This manual does not attempt to present customers' problems and their solutions. Rather, it identifies problems in personal interactions, discusses factors that influence attitudes, and suggests ways to improve your effectiveness.

THE INITIAL APPROACH

It has been said that the first impression is a lasting impression. Upon first meeting someone, you quickly form opinions based on that person's dress, speech, mannerisms, and rating or rate (if known). These first impressions are not always fair, but they do exist; they do affect our attitude.

MAKING A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

Customers form a first impression about you based on the same criteria you use to form your first impression of them. However, these impressions affect your customers differently than they affect you. You will extend service to numerous customers during the course of a day—you meet a customer, form an impression, provide a service, and then redirect your attention to the next customer. The impression you form may affect your mood, but it usually does not extend beyond the individual customer or group of customers.

On the other hand, a customer's impression of you usually gets generalized to the entire office. For example, a customer has a particularly complicated problem, and you are able to solve it by looking up the

applicable references. The customer may make a comment to his or her shipmates such as, "That disbursing office is on the ball. The people in that office know what they're doing."

Presenting a Good Appearance

The first thing the customer notices and uses in forming an impression is appearance. Appearance includes not only your personal appearance, but also the appearance of the contact point.

The appearance of the contact point reveals your attitude toward the job you are doing. A neat, efficient-looking, businesslike working space implies that the people working there are efficient and businesslike, but a space that has a patchwork appearance has the opposite effect. Although an unkempt appearance may not affect your performance, it can affect the customer; the following are some examples:

APPEARANCE	AFFECT ON CUSTOMER
Spilled food on the steam table	I wonder what the galley looks like?
Service records scattered around the personnel office	I wonder if one of those is mine?
Hospital Corpsman's uniformed soiled	I hope the needle was cleaner than that.

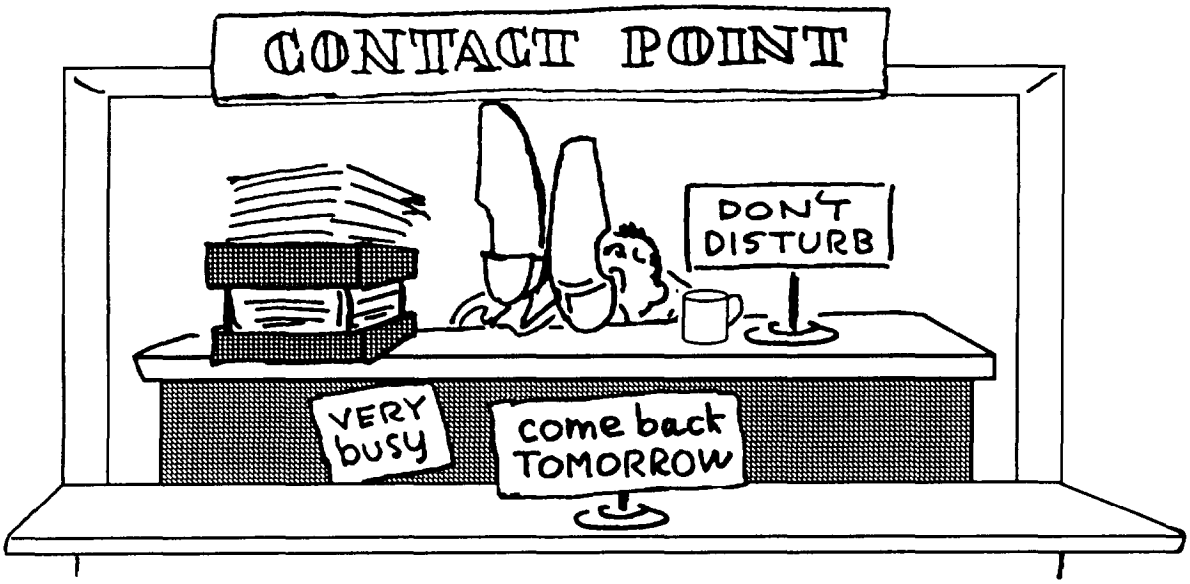
A careless attitude toward your appearance makes a customer feel you might also be careless about the service you provide.

Projecting Your Attitude

The customer forms a mental picture of you based on your attitude. Your attitude is a message about your mood, feelings, and opinions that you unconsciously communicate. Through your attitude, the customer soon realizes how you feel. You don' t have to express your feelings in words because your attitude expresses them for you—and it doesn't take long. Your attitude shows how you view your job, your rating, the Navy, the customer, and the customer's problem.

TOWARD YOUR JOB, YOUR RATING, AND THE NAVY.— The following shows the difference in a negative and a positive attitude by two people in the same job:

NEGATIVE ATTITUDE	POSITIVE ATTITUDE
I wish I could get out of this rat race.	I perform an important function by providing needed services.
They treat me like a servant.	We are all members of the same team.
I'm tired of this little dinky job.	This job is never boring. I learn something new everyday. What I do and how I do it is important to the customer.



NEGATIVE ATTITUDE	POSITIVE ATTITUDE
Those dumb kids don't know what they want.	Because of these kids' inexperience, I can see the importance of my services.
Don't bother me!	May I help you?

If you have a negative attitude toward your job, have you stopped to ask yourself why, and what can be done about it? Consider the following examples:

Are you in a job that doesn't fully challenge you. Do you have too much time on your hands? Use this time as an opportunity to sharpen your skills to better serve at your particular contact point. You may even start looking at the demands of jobs that are more responsible. Tolay's Navy is becoming smaller; and along with that, the number of people who are willing to do more than the bare minimum is becoming smaller. Those who are willing to do more are far from being suckers. They are special in the sense that they obtain satisfaction from doing their job well.

Do you view your job as being routine? Do you think it offers no challenge? If either is true, research the overall purpose or objective of your job to see how it fits into the mission of your activity or command. You will not only gain an appreciation for the importance of your job, you may qualify yourself for a more responsible position.

If you are job dissatisfied, look around for a job you would prefer. The next step would be to qualify yourself for that job. To illustrate this fact, supply was fortunate to have a conscientious SKSN. He had mastered several rather complex accounting procedures through research, practice, and personal guidance. Because of his initiative, when the SK1 assigned to the accounting department was transferred, the SKSN was immediately assigned his duties. The SKSN saw the job as a challenge and worked hard to get it—so can you.

Regardless of how you answered these questions, you will nevertheless communicate your attitude toward your job to your customers. Your customers will quickly sense your attitude from your speech and manner.

TOWARD THE CUSTOMER.— Your attitude toward the customer relates closely to your attitude toward your job. The customer quickly senses your attitude from your speech and manner.

Have you ever ignored customers when they entered your office to try to impress them with how important or how busy you were? Were the customers impressed? No doubt! But, not as you may have expected. They were probably more impressed with your lack of concern for their needs.

When a customer comes to you for help, a perceived level of confidence in your ability to provide it already exists. Offensive language or a superior attitude will quickly undermine this confidence.

"Speaking down" implies that you consider the customer to be less than your equal. That attitude may make the customer feel that the service you provide is less than your best. The language you use can give the impression that you are speaking down, so avoid using language that might be unfamiliar to customers. You need to know what language to use, when to use it, and how to use it. When engineering or deck division personnel come into the office for information, you must use words they can understand.

We will speak more about stereotyping later but for now, we want to issue a word of caution about its effect on the customer. Stereotyping is the practice of fitting people and things into preconceived molds. For Navy members, it is also the practice of fitting members of ratings or occupations into an established "norm." The fallacy of this practice is that hardly anyone fits into that norm. The best way to avoid stereotyping is to recognize the contribution each rating makes to the Navy. True, a person outside your rating may not understand every aspect of your specialty; but how proficient are you in that person's specialty?

Try to identify whether you have the habit of stereotyping your customers. Then take steps to overcome that habit. Though you may not be aware of the habit, the CUSTOMER IS AWARE OF IT.

TOWARD THE CUSTOMERS' NEEDS.— The customers' needs will span the continuum from the ridiculous, through the routine, to the difficult. However, these categories reflect your opinion of the needs and requests—not the customers'. These needs, requests, and problems are important to customers; otherwise, they would not be there.

You must do more than show a positive attitude toward your job and the customer; you must also show respect for the person's need for service. Disrespectful comments, such as the following, indicate that the customer's request is not important and that you have better things to occupy your time:

Everybody knows that!

You came all the way up here for that?

You didn't know!

You were supposed to be here yesterday.

We'll get to it.

Case Number 3 illustrates the effect of disregarding the customer's need. SN Boat may not have been eligible to strike for RM, but the response he received was not satisfactory. Instead of intimidating SN Boat into believing he couldn't qualify for RM, SN Christmas should have explained the qualifications required. LPO Brush should never have allowed or taken part in such treatment of a customer. Had they given SN Boat the answers he needed, they could have met his needs even though they couldn't give him the answer he wanted.

MEETING CUSTOMER NEEDS

In the preceding chapter we presented various case studies to help you analyze the effects of your actions as a contact point representative. These analyses were intended to help you see yourself from the customers' point of view and to help you answer the question, Am I providing good service? In most of the case studies, when the customers began seeking help, they were in a good mood, had trust in the ability of the contact representative, and were willing to accept the representative's solution. In reality, that is not always the case.

Trying to meet a customer's needs involves several obstacles: coping with a negative attitude, maintaining self-control, determining the specific cause of the problem, and identifying contributing causes. These obstacles can complicate the customer's problem and your efforts to provide a solution.

Coping With a Negative Attitude

Regardless of the nature or seriousness of a problem, a customer's negative attitude can complicate it. The customer may

be angry, worried, or frustrated;

lack confidence in your rating; or

be unwilling to accept anything less than the desired solution to a problem.

If you can recognize such attitudes and make appropriate allowances for them, you may avoid further complicating the customer's problem.

An angry, worried, or frustrated customer may have difficulty in stating a problem accurately or completely. The customer may omit significant information, confuse opinion with fact, or refuse to give personal information.

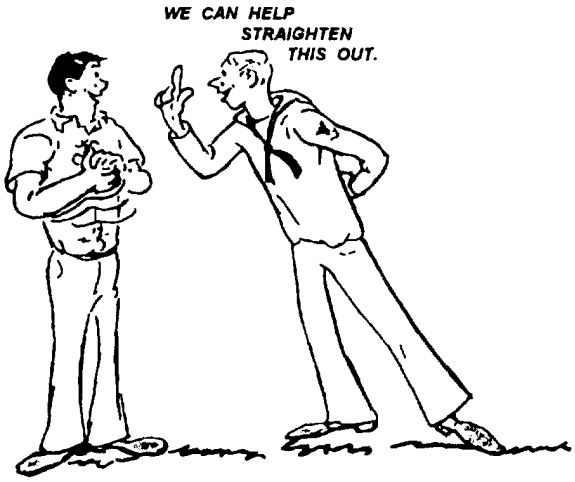
To meet the needs of a customer with a negative attitude, first try to determine the cause of the problem and then target why the customer is emotionally upset. (What caused the anger, and toward whom is it directed?) You can sort this out by letting the customer express his or her feelings.

The adage "The customer is always right" is not always true. No customer has the right to personally abuse a contact point representative. However, the customer who is allowed the opportunity to "blow off steam" (within reason) may then become apologetic and ready to accept your help.

When faced with an upset customer, remember that your purpose is to serve the customer's needs. Any other

response on your part may serve to justify the customer's negative attitude.

A calm, confident manner is the best approach. When you do not respond with anger or rudeness to a customer's emotional outburst, you have taken the first step toward solving the customer's problem, whatever its nature.



Maintaining Self-Control

Earlier when we discussed your attitude toward customers, we were taking about customers in general. Although personal interaction isn't difficult when your customers are pleasant, it may become difficult when the person is unpleasant.

Occasionally, you will have a customer who seems to rub you the wrong way. No matter how hard you try, you can't remain pleasant or friendly because of the customer's attitude or manner of speaking. In this situation the best solution is usually to keep the contact as impersonal as possible. Ignore the customer's manner and attitude and concentrate on the problem.

Your performance is viewed by the customer, your coworkers, and your supervisor. For them to rate you as a person who does your best work, you must maintain self-control. Running out of patience and allowing your temper to flare reduces your ability to think and act properly.

Determining the Specific Problem

Frequently when customers have a need, they tell you the results they want instead of telling you the problem; you then must identify the nature or cause of the problem and provide a satisfactory solution. Case Number 4 is an example of this situation. In this example, SN Frost wanted to know why he wasn't allowed to take the advancement examination so that he could advance to PO3. Before the PN could answer that question, she first had to identify SN Frost's specific problem.

You must be familiar with all areas of your rating to be able to identify specific problems and to know where to find specific answers. For example, to identify a specific health problem, medical personnel must know the symptoms of certain illnesses. Once they have identified the illness, they must know where to find solutions to treating the illness. In the same way, you must be able to identify the real problem behind the customer's actions and words. Once you have identified the problem, you must know where to go for a solution.

Identifying Contributing Causes

Most customers have routine, easily identifiable problems. You can solve these problems without any great difficulty. However, there are exceptions, such as in Case Number 5. In this instance, a problem of no pay resulted from an error that had occurred at the previous command. The problem was further complicated by the customer's emotions. To solve the problem, both the customer and the contact point representatives had to have a mutual desire to achieve results. The YN and the disbursing officer had to identify the problem and then take positive action to correct it.

Contact point representatives must be especially alert at all stations that serve as home ports for ships. Because its natural for ships to deploy, it is just as natural for the home port to be a massive contact point for spouses remaining behind. All Navy spouses will vouch that everything generally runs smoothly until the ship disappears over the horizon. Then the roof caves in! When both partners—husband and wife—are at home, both can work jointly to solve problems; but when alone the spouse must handle the problems the best way possible.

A Navy spouse, husband or wife, has a strong influence on the decision of the member to reenlist (ship over) or return to the civilian sector. That is not unreasonable. After all, the problems that arise in a marriage are best handled by both partners.

When the husband or wife is absent because of deployments, training, or upkeep, the spouse may be unfamiliar with Navy procedures or with the area. These unknowns may further complicate problems that already exist. The Navy spouse doesn't need added complications to an already stressful situation. This is no time for wrong answers or indifferent service. Therefore, when your customers are Navy dependents, make sure they receive the services to which they are entitled.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

In the previous section we discussed why a good attitude is important to customer satisfaction. We will now consider some specific mistakes you might make as a contact point representative in handling customer needs. These mistakes grow out of negative attitudes toward the customer, the customer's problem, the Navy, and their job.

JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS

Quite often you may jump to a conclusion because you feel you have all the facts needed to make a decision. But when you jump to a conclusion, you are actually making a decision based on incomplete information. It is like having one half of the pieces to a puzzle! When you do that, you often ignore additional information provided by the customer.

Jumping to a conclusion for routine needs might save time, but it can lead to misunderstanding. When you make assumptions, you quit listening and begin to organize yours thoughts for your response to the customer. As a result you may miss information that could be important to solving the problem. Because of your misunderstanding, you then may be unable to provide the correct service.

You have a better knowledge of your field than the customer has. Therefore, you might assume that you know the customer's need before the customer finishes expressing it.

Earlier, we discussed the customer who has only a vague idea about the nature of a problem. Conclusion jumping seldom helps this type of customer. You have to use tactful, skillful questioning to properly identify what this customer is trying to tell you.

Case Number 7 illustrated some conclusions arrived at by both the customer and the DK. In the customer's case, SA Doe was influenced by wishful thinking. His shipmate had told him he could draw special pay; the DK agreed. The DK assumed that SA Doe knew how much he could draw and that he knew the procedures for drawing the special pay.

You are responsible for giving customers all the facts to help them receive the service they need; you shouldn't assume that the customers already know that information. Likewise, customers shouldn't jump to conclusions before hearing all the facts. In this case, the customer was misled by incomplete information, and the contact point representative initially did nothing to provide the customer with the needed information.

CONTROLLING PERSONAL REACTIONS

You may have adverse reactions to the customer. You may not like the person's appearance, speech, or attitude. These reactions can hinder you in providing the quality of service that the customer needs or deserves.

Attitude is probably the most common cause of adverse reactions. Maintaining a professional manner is difficult when the customer is cynical, overbearing, or a smart aleck. However you must overcome your personal reaction to the customer's attitude and redirect your energy to providing the needed service-isn't that what it is all about?

Customers who have an extreme dislike for the Navy often express that feeling through their attitude or approach. Their negative attitude or approach, in turn, evokes a negative reaction. The customer sometimes unconsciously displays a negative attitude or approach to produce results that will justify the poor opinion the customer has of the Navy. If the customer receives poor service because of the negative attitude or approach, then a negative opinion is justified.

You will probably remember a customer who gave you a rough time on a previous visit, and that memory may affect your response when you serve that customer again. Your idea of helping may then be to help the so-and-so over the side. You may see that as solving your problem, but it would not contribute very much to the customer's well-being.

Not all personal reactions are violent; they may be mild reactions caused by unconcern or lack of interest. However, these reactions can be just as deadly to a customer's satisfaction. For example, everyone possesses a feeling of self-worth. If the contact point representative denies this self-worth by showing a lack of concern or interest, the customer may show the same lack of concern or interest toward the Navy and its representatives as a defense.

You should be careful not to reflect negative attitudes through your behavior toward the customer. The following are some examples of such behavior:

- You may reflect your attitude toward a specific rating by your lack of interest in a problem of a member of the rating.
- You may reflect your view of yourself as intellectually or educationally superior in the way you to talk down to the customer.
- You may reflect your aversion to touching by placing a pen on the counter rather than handing it directly to the person. (Have you ever wiped your hand on your trouser leg after shaking hands with someone?)

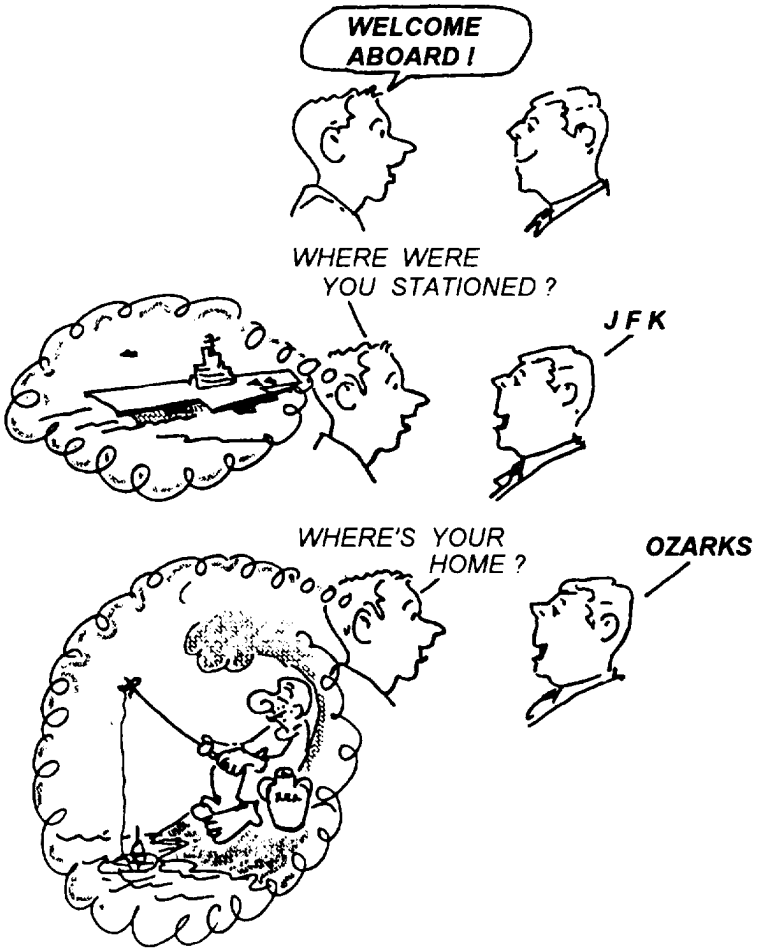
STEREOTYPING

Stereotyping is forming a standardized, oversimplified mental picture of members of a group. We attribute fixed or general traits to all members of that group—disregarding individual, distinguishing qualities or traits. Stereotypes can be based on traits such as sex, race, religion, nationality, length of hair, or even dress. We form mental pictures of people, things, and events based on the traits of that group to which they belong.

Stereotyping eliminates the need for us to know a person as an individual. It allows us to conveniently place a person in a group. Based on the traits we attribute to that group, we then believe we know all about that person. Placing the person in a group implies that the person has the same characteristics as everyone else in that group or category. That in itself is bad enough, but placing the person in a category you regard as inferior is even more offensive.

Don't confuse stereotyping with the practice of using personality and physical characteristics as memory aids. Many people rely on these to recall facts about individuals (name, occupation, etc.).

The following illustration points out the difference between a mental picture that is a valid aid to communication and one that is an unwarranted stereotype. Mental pictures are important because they are a quick way of conveying messages, but you must be sure they really fit the individual before you apply them.



FAILING TO COMMUNICATE

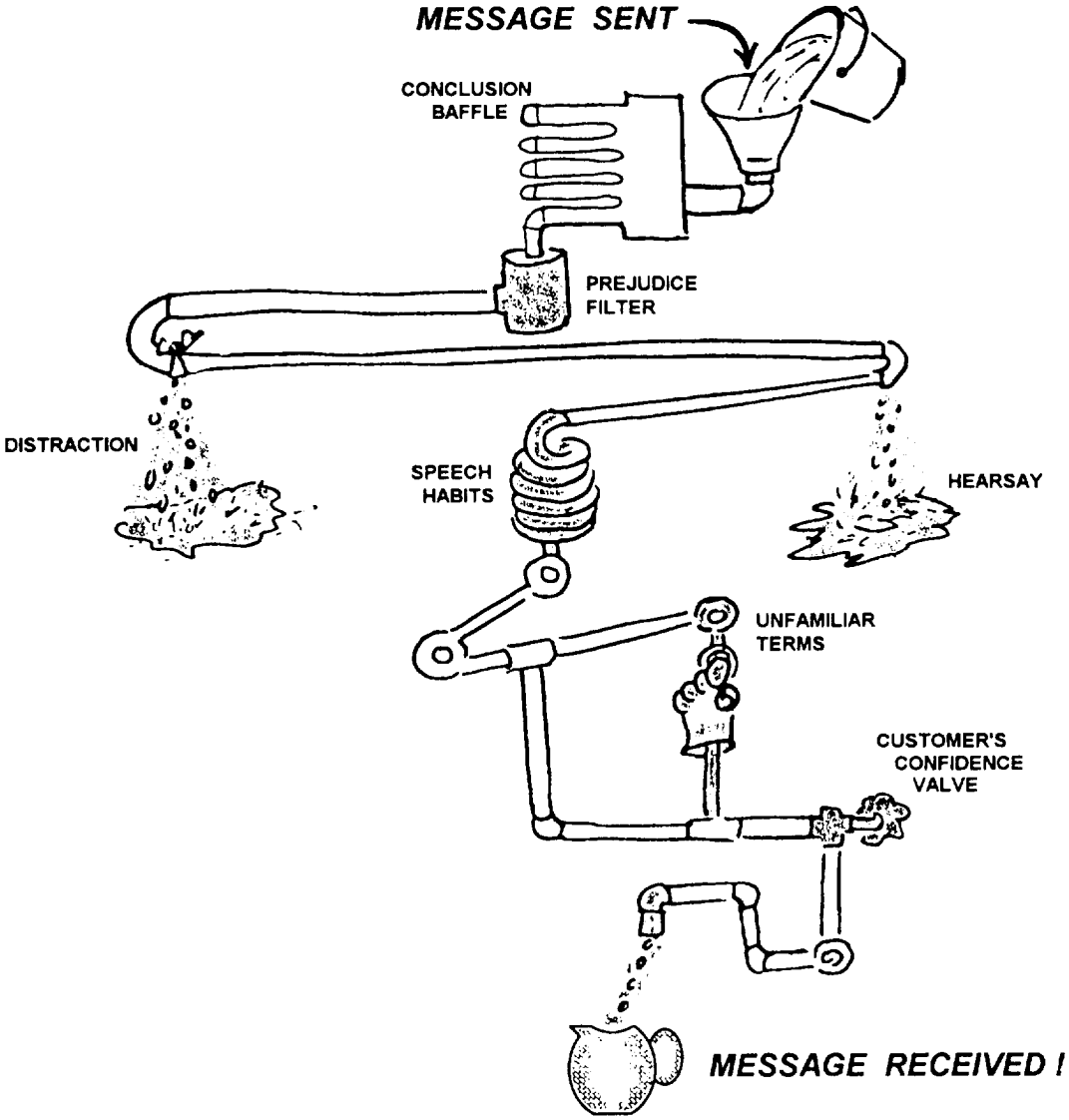
Communication requires more than just talking. One person cannot communicate. Communication involves a sender and a receiver and a message understood by both. The sender must be able to select words or visual signals that accurately convey the desired meaning and can be understood by the receiver.

All responsibility does not rest on the sender; the receiver must hear what is being said. When interference (lack of understanding or distractions) garbles the message, the receiver should ask the sender to repeat or explain the message. Misunderstanding information may be worse than receiving no information since it can result in disappointment, frustration, missed opportunity, or improper action by the receiver.

Sometimes it seems that you can almost see the earplugs in a customer's ears. What you are saying is not getting through. You may be tempted to shrug the incident off by saying, "I did my part. It's not my fault if the customer wouldn't listen." Are you sure that you did your part? After all, the customer came to you for information or advice but didn't receive it. Any one of several causes could have interfered with your message:

- The customer was vague about the particulars of the problem.
- You communicated with jargon, unfamiliar terms, or slang.
- You didn't make your explanation as thorough as you should have.
- You communicated or inferred that the customer or problem wasn't important.
- The customer had other problems.
- The customer felt rushed.
- The customer lacked confidence in your ability to provide the requested service.
- You failed to make sure that the customer understood.

Several types of language barriers can interfere with effective communications. Cultural differences, physical problems, language that reflects bigotry or prejudice, speech habits, and confusing terminology all can create a barrier to communication. However, the first two barriers—cultural differences and physical problems—are the most difficult for the speaker to



overcome. You, the customer, or both you and the customer may cause the barrier.

Overcoming Cultural Differences

Persons for whom English is a second language often have difficulty with pronunciation and sentence structure. English is considered one of the most difficult languages to learn. Words that sound alike have completely different spellings and meanings, and words with similar spellings are pronounced differently. You cannot change the language, but you can overcome the barrier.

First you must listen with CARE and be sure that you know the nature of the need or problem; show an honest concern for what is being said. Then, carefully phrase your questions, using relatively simple words; ask only one thing at a time. By first determining the nature of the problem, you will be able ask questions to gain additional information.

The customer who has difficulty speaking English also may have trouble understanding it. When the customer has difficulty understanding, speak more distinctly and more slowy. Watch the person's facial expressions for signs of misunderstanding.

Overcoming Physical Problems

Speech impediments, such as stuttering or lisping, also cause misunderstanding. We did not list speech problems in our discussion of causes for adverse reactions. However, in some instances they may cause

a negative reaction. You may react negatively to the person who has difficulty speaking, and that person may react negativey to your inability to communicate with him or her.

The person with a speech problem is frequently sensitive about that problem and will resent any exaggerated manner of speaking on your part to overcome it. To overcome this barrier, maintain a positive attitude and concentrate on understanding the speaker's words rather than the speaker's choice of words.

Avoiding Language That Reflects Prejudice and Bigotry

A major roadblock to effective communication is the use of words that reflect prejudice and bigotry. Such words show derision and deny the equality of another person. They give those who use them a false sense of superiority. They also reflect the personal characteristics of the speaker.

Prejudice and bigotry and the use of words that reflect those characteristics stem from fear, ignorance, and superstitions. Any term that shows derision could be included in this category, including commonly used terms such as *snipe* and *deck ape.*

People use words of prejudice and bigotry as a judging device—to size people up and to evaluate their traits. Using such terms relieves them of the need to know the person. The fallacy of this practice is that their actions reflect their attitudes and alienate the very person they are trying to help.

Everyone has prejudices of some kind. They are a part of our emotional character and the preconceived opinions we have of a person based on insufficient evidence. However, prejudices are directly opposed to our constitutional concept of justice—that a person is presumed innocent until judged guilty.

Rooting out prejudice takes time and effort, but the results are well worth it. In the meantime, make a constant, conscious effort not to use words that create resentment and anger.

Improving Speech Habits

Some speech habits, such as slurred pronunciation, running words together, speaking too fast, exaggerated drawl or brogue, and profanity, interfere with understanding.

When a customer with one of these speech defects comes to you for service, concentrate on WHAT is being said—not HOW it is said. That will keep the distraction to a minimum.

The speech of the contact point representative may create a language barrier as well as that of the customer. Therefore, you should analyze your own speech pattern to determine whether you need to improve your manner of speaking. It's possible that you may have one or more of the habits discussed here.

Normally, we don't listen to our own speech, but you can get a reasonably accurate sample of your speech habits by recording an informal conversation and then listening to it carefully. Disturbing speech habits are not too hard to change, but first you must be aware that you have them.

If you find that your speech creates a language barrier, make an conscious effort either to eliminate the problem or to compensate for it. To compensate, speak slowly and give the listener time to follow and interpret what you are saying or to ask questions.

Avoiding Confusing Terminology

The contact point representative sets the final barrier through the use of jargon, technical terms, and acronyms that confuse the customer. Using these terms and acronyms among coworkers who are familiar with them is okay. However, do not use them when speaking to the customer who is not familiar with them.

RESPONDING IN KIND

Just as you respond to the attitudes of other people, you also respond to their moods. If the customer is in a friendly mood, you are more likely to be friendly. If the customer is in an angry mood, you may become cautious and defensive. If the customer is anxious or worried, your response may be vague and noncommittal. If the customer displays an impersonal attitude, you may do the same. In these situations, you have permitted the customer to set the mood for your contact. Instead of taking the initiative, you have responded in kind.

As a contact point representative, you usually behave in an impersonal, detached manner upon your first contact with a customer. You behave in this manner for fear that the person will reject your move by showing no response or by responding negatively. By first determining the customer's mood, you feel you haven't wasted friendliness or good humor on someone not worthy of it. However, the best tactic is to reverse the situation. Instead of waiting to detect the customer's mood, *you* speak up first. By recognizing the customer's presence in a friendly, positive manner, you may influence the *customer's* mood.

Showing friendliness is very much like having a secret power over the behavior of the customer. If the

customer rejects your offer of friendliness, it is the customer's loss—not yours. Friendliness is not a commodity that will experience extinction, so share it freely.

Hostility and anxiety reduce the customer's ability to see a problem fully, to express it correctly, and to accept the solution objectively. If you respond in kind, you reduce your ability to deal with the problem.

When the customer is emotionally upset, you must deal with two problems—the emotion and the need that aroused the emotion. Nothing can be gained by responding in kind to the customer's mood. In fact, such a response will probably make matters worse. Instead, try to calm the customer by being calm yourself. Show by your actions that you are ready, willing, and able to handle the problem.

GIVING THE AMIABLE RUNAROUND

The emphasis on being friendly to the customer is a means to an end; not an end in itself. Your purpose in manning the contact point is to provide a service. You do not have a choice of providing either the friendly atmosphere or the service—you must provide both.

A friendly, helpful atmosphere at the contact point puts the customer at ease. A customer that is at ease can relate the problem more accurately; that, in turn, enables you to take constructive action to correct the problem. However, some contact point representatives think their job is to keep customers smiling and get rid of them; that is, to give them the amiable runaround. True, the customer goes away happy; but at some later time, that customer returns in a not-so-happy mood because the problem was not resolved.

A considerable amount of time and effort is required to deal with some problems or needs. In such instances, some contact point representatives try to make their job easier by convincing the customer that no action is needed in their particular case. This response denies service to the customer. If a customer requests service to which he or she is entitled, you have the responsibility to provide it. "It's all taken care of," tells the customer that you have taken all necessary action. That is a good response if you have truly taken that action; if not, you have performed a disservice—not a service.

PROMISING THE CUSTOMER ANYTHING

You have probably met a contact point representative who agreed with every statement you made, sympathized with you, promised everything you wanted, but DID NOTHING. This type of service is similar to the amiable runaround. It is a method used to "keep 'em smiling."

This type of service sometimes develops as the result of a "short-timer" attitude. In other words, some people who know they will soon transfer or retire become lax in performing their duties. They say to themselves: Sure, I'll promise you whatever you want to get rid of you; after all, I'll be long gone when you return to find out why nothing has been done. Promising anything may leave the customer temporarily satisfied, but you have only postponed, and possibly complicated, the problem.

Many times customers hear only what they want to hear. That causes them to hope or expect for results based on rumor, misunderstanding, or misinterpretation of fact. The way a customer asks a question usually tells you what the customer wants to hear. You have three choices in the way you answer customer's questions:

1. You can give the answer the customer wants to hear, although you know it is not completely accurate. That almost certainly guarantees disappointment to the customer later.

2. You can make vague statements and let the customer interpret them as he or she likes. That lets you off the hook because you really didn't give the customer wrong information.

3. You can give the customer the CORRECT information or interpretation. That may cause some grumbling, but the customer will not be depending upon hopeless expectations.

Offering anything less than the best information is unfair to the customer. A half-truth may be just as misleading and damaging as an outright lie. Future plans may be based on your "bum dope"; the morale, as well as the finances, of the customer could suffer because of it.

The friendly attitude of a contact point representative who gives this type of service is simply a cover-up for an attitude of unconcern.

OVERSTEPPING YOUR BOUNDS

When providing service to customers, you may be tempted to overstep your bounds. That is, you may sometimes feel like criticizing coworkers, policies, procedures, or instructions or joining in customer complaints. Resisting these temptations, however, can often lead to positive results.

Criticizing Coworkers

Heavy work loads, inexperienced personnel, unfamiliar situations, and carelessness all lead to the likelihood of errors, which you must correct at some later date. If you seldom make a mistake, you may have a problem understanding why other personnel frequently do.

When you find a mistake while helping a customer, resist the temptation to "sound off" to the customer about the person who made the mistake. Such action gains nothing; correcting the error requires the same amount of effort whether or not you express your feelings. Instead, simply explain when and where the mistake was made, and then take steps to correct it. Most customers will forget their annoyance once they understand the problem and know that it will be corrected.

Criticizing Policies, Procedures, and Instructions

If you disagree with official Navy policy, command policy, or divisional procedures or instructions, resist the temptation to criticize them to your customers. You don't have to agree with all of them, but you must follow them. Discussing them among your coworkers may lead to a better understanding of policy. It may also result in positive changes, such as a more efficient procedure or a better flow of information, that improve your ability to help the customer. Discussing them with your customer, however, serves no helpful purpose.

When a customer's request is denied because of current policy or regulations, frustration or resentment is a natural reaction. If you express your disapproval or criticism of this policy or regulation, it increases the customer's feeling of resentment or frustration. You have not helped-you have only made it harder for the customer to accept the inevitable answer. However, you should explain when a policy is only temporary or when it is expected to change so that the customer knows the current governing instructions.

Encouraging Complaints

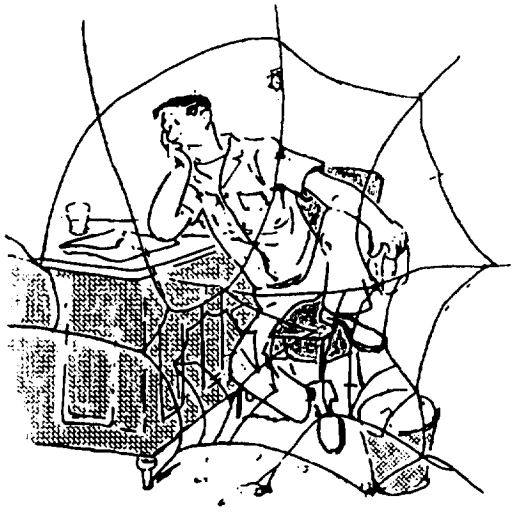
Since you are a source of answers to problems, customers may sometimes bring you a problem that you are experiencing yourself. The SN's comment, "The division officer doesn't like me," in Case Number 4 opened the door for the PN to offer his shoulder for the SN to cry on. The PN could have joined the SN in a duet of self-pity and condemnation, but what would that have accomplished? Rather, the PN determined the real cause and took positive steps to correct it.

You may have some customers whose problems are only imaginary. They want to complain about their petty officers, division officer, duty assignments, working conditions, or the hole in their socks. In these situations, you must listen, but remain objective. Once again consider Case Number 4. PN Doe listened objectively to SN Frost's complaints about his division officer. Then she checked the Page 4 of SN Frost's personnel record and found he had not completed his PARs. After a phone call to Frost's division officer, PN Doe was able to show the customer the specific causes of the problem. Her action to correct those causes did much to improve the customer's attitude and discourage complaints. Had she encouraged the customer's complaints by sympathizing with him or agreeing with his feeling of unfair treatment, she would have reinforced the customer's negative attitude.

What should you do when faced with a similar situation? You should try to improve the customer's attitude. If, like the SN, a customer has an attitude that he or she is being picked on, try to show the customer the specific causes of the problem. Then, take action to correct those causes. Your actions will do much to improve the customer's attitude.

SHOWING APATHY

You show apathy by acting as though a customer is too much of a bother; apathy is discouraging to a customer. You can reflect apathy with a shrug of the shoulders or words that imply who cares? What's your hurry? or, What's the difference? Such responses give the customer little hope in getting help with a problem.



Keep in mind that, no matter how simple or unimportant you consider a request, the customer depends upon you to provide a service. Answering a question or looking up information may require a little effort on your part, but the extra effort is a mark of good service. As stated earlier in this manual, customers usually have only one place they can go for a particular service.

Apathy is the result of a negative attitude toward life in general or toward your job or duty assignment. Apathy is difficult to overcome because apathetic people have already given up hope for improvement in their life or their job. People develop apathy for various reasons:

- They see no purpose in their job.
- They see no benefit in providing customer service.
- They have been doing the same job too long.
- They see no possibility for advancement or increased responsibility.
- They are not challenged by responsibility.
- They have no plans for continuing their Navy career, so they have decided to perform at the shear minimum.

Apathetic contact representatives who do nothing to change their attitude are shortchanging themselves as well as the customer and the Navy.

MAKING THE CUSTOMER WAIT

The customer often hears, "What's your hurry? You're not going anywhere!" The implication is that time is a factor only for the contact point representative—never for the customer. Ordinarily, the customer should receive help without having to wait. However, a customer who has to wait because you are snowed under will usually understand.

Options are available to reduce waiting time; you can set up appointments or set up special service hours, just to mention two. Use any system for routine service that speeds the process, but make sure it allows for emergencies. Never use a system to limit service.

BREAKING ROUTINES

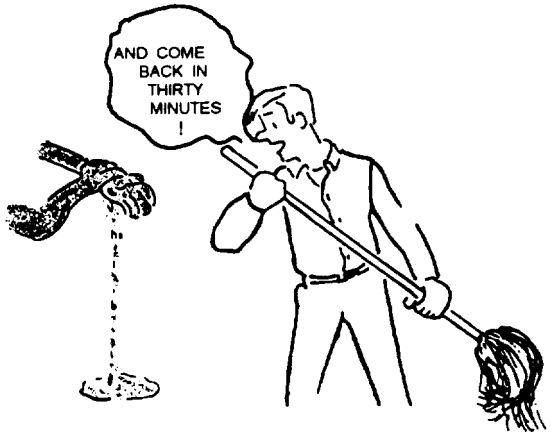
It is Thursday afternoon, and HM Doe is busily engaged in putting the finishing touches on a spotless

sick bay. He is just finishing the deck when in walks MM Boate. He is tightly gripping his left wrist while blood wells from a cut and drips onto the floor.

"What's the idea? Can't you see the 'Secured' sign on the door," demands HM Doe?

"What do you mean, secured? I cut my hand!"

"Sorry about that, but I haven't got time now to treat it—I have to finish up field day. Come back in about 30 minutes, and quite dripping blood on my clean deck!"



Does this seem farfetched? Not at all; it is an extreme example, but it actually happened.

Routines or procedures help us provide more efficient customer service by enabling us to do jobs easier, faster, and more accurately. However, if following a routine becomes more important than providing service, you need to take a good, hard look at your job priorities. Routines are intended to improve service, not to hinder it.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Thus far, we have focused our discussion on attitude. Although attitude is important when dealing with others, good attitude alone is not enough. The customer comes to the contact point for service-not camaraderie.

What would be your reaction in the following situation? You have gone to the dental clinic with a toothache. The DT meets you at the door with a smile, shakes your hand, shows you to a chair, and offers you a cup of coffee. You say, "Thanks just the same, but this tooth is driving me up the wall. Can you take care of it?' The DT replies, "Oh, I don't know anything about teeth—but I'm friendly."

This situation is ridiculous. You know that carrying out your responsibility at a contact point requires professional competence. Professional competence includes knowing what you can do, how to do it, and when to do it.

KNOWING MEMBERS' RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES

All Navy members have certain rights and privileges by law. You have the responsibility as a contact point representative to know what these rights and privileges are and to whom they apply.

Some customers choose not to take advantage of certain rights and privileges, while others may not be eligible for them; for example:

- You may have no dependents; therefore, you have no eligibility or need for dependents' health care.
- You may choose not to take advantage of available educational opportunities.
- You have too many years of service remaining to worry about the details of retirement.

Even though some customers will not use the rights and privileges they are eligible for, others will. You must be prepared to answer their questions regardless of whether they intend to take advantage of them or not.

Some contact representatives feel they are doing customers a favor by providing information about these rights and privileges. They think they may grant or withhold such information as they wish. That should not be the case, and it should never occur! The Navy provides these rights and privileges as incentives for enlistment and reenlistment and as a form of compensation. Withholding them for any reason except as provided by law undermines members' morale and confidence in the Navy and defeats the purpose of providing them.

KNOWING REGULATIONS

After the customer has explained a problem, you must then decide what you can do to solve it. You must have a thorough knowledge of pertinent regulations and directives if your decision is to be appropriate.

One thing common to all contact points is the volumes of regulations, manuals, and directives that set

forth the limits and procedures that govern your performance. You do not need to memorize their contents, but you should know what information each reference contains. Then when a question arises, you will know which source to turn to for the correct answer. In fact, rather than trying to learn all the answers, you should concentrate on learning the proper sources for finding the answers. You will soon learn the answers to many routine questions, and you will find that you don't have to look them up each time. However, if you rely on memory for answers to infrequent problems, you run the risk of error because of obsolete information.

Many sources provide information on the rights and privileges of Navy members. They include official and unofficial Navy publications and commercial periodicals as described below:

- Official publications include manuals, instructions, and notices; they are used by all levels of the Navy.
- Unofficial publications reach a larger audience than do the official. They include *All Hands*, systems commands and bureau newsletters, and ship and station newspapers.
- Commercial periodicals, such as *Navy Times*, also have wide circulation among Navy members and dependents.

All of these references contain information about the Navy members' welfare: rotation and assignment, pay and allowances, advancement opportunities, health care, and exchange and commissary benefits. You cannot cite unofficial and commercial publications as authority. However, since they usually contain information and reasons for changes or new programs, which are not included in official directives, you can use them to get background information. Background information can help you do a better job of explaining the directives to the customer. Often, unofficial and commercial publications also provide advance information that alerts you to forthcoming changes or new programs.

The contact point representative must afford the customers rights and privileges impartially, but keeping in mind that all customers don' t have the same rights and privileges. At some point, you will have the unpleasant task of explaining why a disappointed customer is not eligible for a particular program or service. The following are examples of such situations:

- Two members are reenlisting. They are both completing their first 4-year enlistment, and both are at paygrade E-5. One is entitled to a selective reenlistment bonus (SRB) and the other is not.
- An MS2 and SH2 both reported aboard ship in January 1988. Therefore, the projected rotation date to shore duty was July 1991 for the MS2 and July 1992 for the SH2.

The underlying reason for setting limits and qualifications is to ensure the Navy has enough capable personnel to perform the jobs to meet the needs of the service. If that were not a consideration, a member who attends college could at the end of a 4-year enlistment be handed a discharge and a diploma. That would provide the member with the maximum educational benefits, but it would not provide the Navy much in the way of operational manpower. Our programs must do both—maintain enough personnel to carry out assigned missions while offering the greatest possible opportunities to Navy members.

You have two responsibilities when dealing with a customer who is not eligible for some right or privilege. The first, of course, is to be certain of your facts so that you do not deny an opportunity to which the member is entitled. The second is to explain the reasons the customer is not eligible so that your motives will not be questioned. A customer must have no doubt that the denial was based on regulations, not on your opinion or favoritism.

KNOWING YOUR LIMITATIONS

Just as important as knowing what you CAN and SHOULD do is knowing what you CANNOT do.

Although benefits are to be afforded impartially to all eligible members, they may be omitted at some commands because of any one or a combination of the following:

- Directives
- The size or location of your ship or station
- A lack of qualified personnel

The amount of services normally available differs between a small ship and a large ship or between a ship and ashore station. Thus, the limitations may be inherent to the command. The following are some examples:

- A PO2 transferring from ship to shore is entitled to shipment of personal effects, but ship's personnel can't make the arrangements. That must be done ashore.

- A member aboard a destroyer has every right to expect competent service aboard ship on matters relating to pay. Not so, for a member aboard a minesweeper—this member must depend upon the facilities ashore or the facilities of another ship.

- A ship's store aboard a carrier carries as many products as some exchanges ashore. The ship's store on a destroyer must limit itself to little more than necessities.

- A member stationed ashore may take advantage of the tuition aid program or VA benefits and attend college during off-duty hours. The member afloat seldom has an educational opportunity other than correspondence or extension courses.

- Medical and dental facilities in the Navy are the best available. However, the services that are provided by the Naval Hospital, Bethesda, Naval Medical Command National Capital Region, are far greater than those aboard ship. Shipboard personnel are no less dedicated or qualified. The limitation results from lack of facilities and personnel. Even the services aboard ships vary with their size and mission and the personnel and facilities available.

- Legal assistance is a very valuable service. However, legal assistance aboard a ship without a lawyer is limited to referring the member to legal assistance officers ashore.

- The size of the enlisted dining facility afloat or ashore is usually high in quality and the choice of items offered Here again, a lack of facilities and personnel could impose limitations.

Unexpected loss of personnel, equipment failure, or an unusually heavy work load may impose temporary limitations on the operations of your contact point. You must then work around those limitations to ensure you still provide the best possible service.

KNOWING ALTERNATIVES

Few of our decisions in life are based on a "do this or do nothing" type of choice. We usually have alternatives from which to choose. The following are examples of some choices Navy members might make:

- Members who have completed their enlistment have several alternatives: extend, reenlist, or separate.

- An SK in charge of a ship's store can choose whether to suggest a substitute for an item that is temporarily out of stock or to simply say, "We don't have it."

- Members who score too low on tests to qualify for the rating of their choice may choose to retake the tests to try to improve their scores or they may choose to strike for a related rating that does not require the higher scores.

- As in Case Number 7, a contact point representative may know of a service provided by another contact point that could help a customer. The contact point representative can choose to help the customer by sharing that information or to let the customer find out through other means.

As a contact point representative, you should not try to make decisions for the customer, but you should explain options. Even though customers may not always make the wisest choice, they should have the options explained to them.

CUSTOMER ASSISTANCE

The mechanics of your job are normally of no concern to the customer unless they have a direct bearing on the customer's problem. However, they sometimes might be the reason for action or a lack of action contrary to the customer's wishes. In that case, some explanation will increase the customer's confdence in your ability and knowledge.

On the other hand, needless discussion about how hard your job is or how much effort you are exerting to get the job done would be counterproductive. The customer is not likely to feel an overwhelming gratitude for a job done under protest.

You are never justified in ignoring a customer; to be ignored is discouraging to a customer. There are times when you can' t drop what you are doing; however, you can acknowledge the customer's presence. If you are busy with a customer, a look and a nod will acknowledge the second customer's presence. However, your actions to put the second customer at ease should not cause the first customer to feel rushed. If you have other brief work that you want to finish, one sentence of explanation is sufficient. Most people don't mind a

reasonable wait when they know that you are aware of their presence, but they should not have to beat on the counter to get your attention.

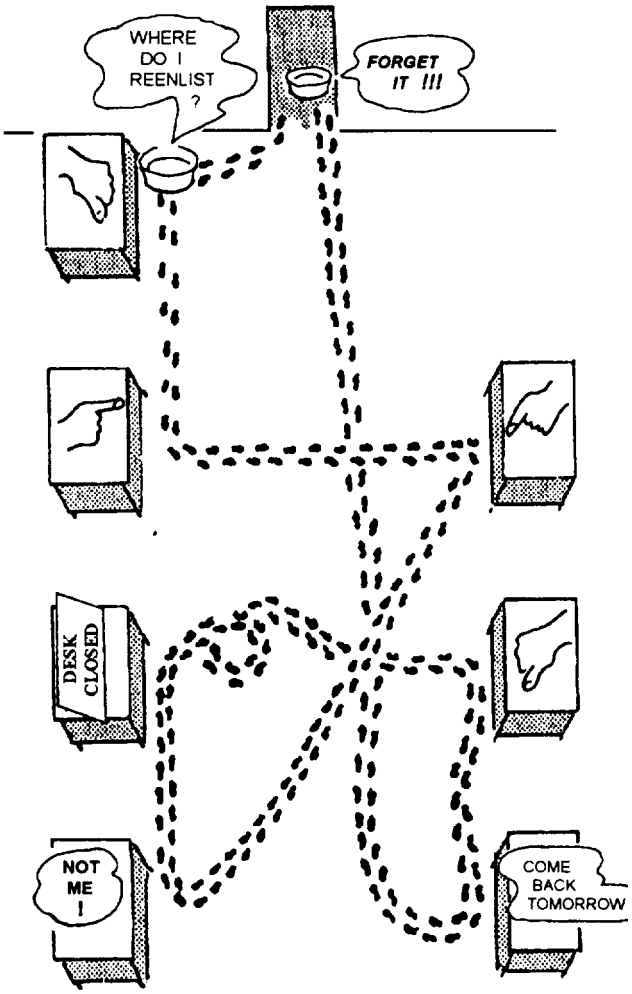
Customer service at large activities is frequently a problem for customers. A dispensary or sick bay provides most services in one room. On-the other hand, a hospital provides services in many rooms and usually on several floors. The customer can get the feeling of playing hide-and-seek at any command, large or small. When referring the customer to another location (desk, office, or building), be courteous and be sure to give good directions.

ANSWERING QUESTIONS

Answering questions at a contact point requires a sizable amount of patience. That is especially true when you must answer the same questions over and over.

Some of the questions are simple, others are hard, and some are ridiculous; but all deserve the courtesy of an answer—even those that seem ridiculous. Answering those types of questions may help customers realize they simply used the wrong choice of words or that they needed more information. Customers can then rephrase the questions to clarify the type of information needed.

The young PO3 that asks, "Hey, can I ship my furniture now?" really means something quite different. Sure, the furniture can be shipped now or anytime. The PO3 is really asking, "Am I now entitled to ship my furniture at government expense?'



Any change in entitlement, such as the one entitling PO3s with over 2 years' service to ship personal effects at government expense, brings on the questions. You should anticipate and become familiar with the changes so that you can provide accurate and timely answers.

You, being the specialist in your field, must respect the customers' lack of expertise. The lack of expertise is the reason for the questions. Don't belittle the customer's lack of knowledge. The customer is most likely as knowledgeable in his rating area as you are in yours.

MEETING UNEXPRESSED NEEDS

If you have the impression that you are to act only when the customer pushes a button, then you have the wrong impression. True, you perform much of your

work in response to customer's expressed needs; but at times you should take the initiative.

The PO3 mentioned in the above section had heard about the new entitlement for shipping household goods, but had he heard about the other portions of the instruction: dependents' travel pay and dislocation allowance.

Each command makes a constant effort to make sure that everyone "gets the word" through the use of bulletin boards, notes in the plan of the day, and announcements at quarters. You can improve this effort by volunteering information that the customer can use but may not know to ask for.

Customers may get information from many sources, but that information may not be correct. During your conversations with these customers, you can usually tell from their questions or comments that they have received incorrect information. When that happens, be sure to tell them the correct information.

GIVING SIMPLE EXPLANATIONS

Let's look at a story of a junior officer who was assigned to draft a letter for the captain's signature. After much work, the junior officer had a draft ready to go topside for approval. The next day, the officer was astounded when the captain returned the draft with the word "KISS" printed in bold, red letters across the first page. Did that mean the captain liked it? The officer pondered the meaning of the word for awhile and then began to ask others in the office if they knew what it meant. An old-timer finally explained, "That is the 'old man's' way of telling you to do it over. It means, Keep it simple, stupid!"

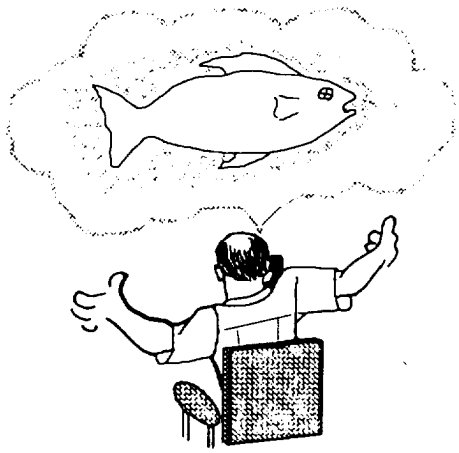
That expression may be rather crude, but it is good advice. Anytime you explain something to someone, your explanation must be understandable. You should not place the customer in the embarrassing position of having to ask for an explanation of unfamiliar terms. If you use a term in a way that implies the customer should know what it means, there will be an even greater reluctance to ask for clarification.

Watch for signs that indicate the customer does not understand your instruction or explanation. When you see those signs, back up and rephrase your explantion or instruction.

USING TELEPHONE COURTESY

Few inventions can equal the telephone for efficient labor-saving and time-saving convenience. However, because we use it carelessly, we don't always obtain maximum benefit.

Good telephone communications require more thought than face-to-face communications. You don't think so? Consider a sportsman who is bragging about the success of his recent fishing trip. Upon meeting a friend, he explains by spreading his arms and saying, "I caught one this big!" When talking face to face, our gestures and facial expressions help to convey the intended message of our words. However, if the sportsman makes the same statement while talking on the telephone, his words have little meaning.



When customers come to your contact point during a time when you are busy helping others, they can see the reason for your delay in serving them. However, when they call on the phone, they cannot see the reason for your delay in answering. If the phone rings several times before you answer it or if you answer and immediately say, "Hold on," they may think you are telling sea stories instead of tending to business.

Suppose you have almost completed a financial report; you have only a few more figures to add, and then you will know if it's going to balance. The phone rings and you ignore it. It rings a second and third time, and you begin to mutter obscenities about the aggravation.

In this scenario, the phone rang at an inconvenient time; but the caller had no way of knowing that. You might as well have answered it on the first ring since it interrupted your concentration anyway. Besides, answering immediately after the first ring saves time for both you and the caller. To swear at the phone for ringing

is as logical as throwing a hammer after having smashed your thumb with it.

At times when you answer the phone, you may be too busy to help the customer. When that happens, ask if you can call back rather than keep the customer waiting on the phone for an extended time. A minute spent waiting on the phone seems twice as long as a minute spent waiting at the contact point.

When you answer the phone, first identify your office or activity and then identify yourself. As in case number 7, some contact point representatives answer the phone correctly, but they speak so fast the customer can't understand what is said. When you speak too fast, you may then have to listen to a long, involved story before you can refer the customer to the correct number.

Just as facial expressions and gestures help us express a thought, they also help us convey feelings and attitudes. The words and the voice you use over the phone must do the entire job. Tact is, therefore, vitally important.

Telephone use presents an added problem for the person who has difficulty with the English language or who has a speech defect. The same consideration should be shown to such a person over the phone as when talking face to face.

Perhaps the guiding principle when using the telephone should be to remember that you are not talking to a telephone, but to a person.

COMMUNICATING CLEARLY

There is a story of a New York plumber who wrote the Bureau of Standards at Washington that he had found hydrochloric acid fine for cleaning drains. He then asked if it was harmless. Washington replied, "The efficacy of hydrochloric acid is indisputable, but the chlorine residue is incompatible with metallic permanence."

The plumber wrote back that he was glad the Bureau agreed with him. The Bureau replied with a note of alarm, "We cannot assume responsibility for the production of toxic and noxious residues with hydrochloric acid, and suggest that you use an alternate procedure."

The plumber was happy to learn that the Bureau still agreed with him.

Whereupon Washington exploded, "Don't use hydrochloric acid; it will definitely eat the pipes!"

A federal law or a Navy policy about a specific subject is issued in the form of an official publication. The publication uses specific language to show exactly what the law or Navy policy is intended to permit or prevent. It addresses the reader who is familiar with that subject, so a person having a limited knowledge or experience in that subject may misunderstand the information given. Your job as a contact representative may require that you explain information contained in these publications. Your explanations should leave no doubt in the customer's mind about the intent of the information.

The advantage you will have over the Bureau of Standards, as described in the above story, is face-to-face communications. You can watch for gestures and facial expressions that tell you if the customer understands your explanation. If needed, you can then rephrase your explanation.

FILLING OUT FORMS

Sometimes the supply of forms a Navy member must fill out seems endless. You are familiar with the forms used at your contact point as well as their purpose and how to prepare them. Therefore, you may easily forget how frustrating they can be to the customer.

The Navy has forms for every purpose-and good reasons for them. A form provides information required for certain actions. You may view the forms used at your contact point as self-explanatory, but the customer may view them as perplexing. That is particularly true for a person who has been in the Navy only a relatively short time.

Filling out a form can be doubly frustrating if after completing it, the customer receives it back with the words, "Do it over. You filled it out wrong." To avoid having to ask someone to fill out a form a second time, take a little extra time with that customer. Before the customer ever begins to fill out the form, explain any items that might be misunderstood. The extra effort will save you time because the customer is more likely to complete the form correctly.

EXPLAINING FUTURE STEPS

Quite often when the customer comes to you for help or advice, you will only be able to provide partial assistance at that time; you will have to take additional action later. You need to explain to the customer what that action will be. Be sure that both you and the customer agree on and understand who will initiate the future action. The customer should have no doubts about WHAT must be done, WHEN it should be done, and WHO is to get it started. You should have no doubts

about the customer's understanding of the actions to be taken. If several actions are involved or if these actions cover an extended period, you might want to repeat the basic actions to be taken just before the customer leaves.

GIVING FURTHER ASSISTANCE

Frequently you can help customers get additional help by referring them to another source of information at another contact point. When your refer a customer to another contact point, make sure the customer knows where to go and what to ask for. Be sure to make the referral in such a way that you do not appear to be giving the customer the runaround.

EXPLAINING RESULTS OF ACTIONS

PO Frost purchases a home and is told that he might be allowed to make the mortgage payments through an allotment. After checking with a DK in the disbursing office, the PO decides that the allotment is the best way to make the payments. Since he has already made the August mortgage payment, PO Frost starts the allotment effective in September. He expects the allotment to cover the rest of the mortgage payments beginning with the September payment. What PO FROST doesn't understand is that he will have to make another payment before the allotment begins to be applied to the payments. The DK in the disbursing office could have prevented this misunderstanding. The DK needed only to state, "The amount of the payment will be deducted from your pay in September, but the first check will not be mailed until 1 October." That is just one example of the need to explain fully the results of action being taken.

MAKING PROMISES

Earlier we spoke about the practice of promising action simply to pacify and get rid of the customer. "That is not the only type of promise that leads to ill feelings. Some contact representatives actually promise service or action over which they have no control. In Case Number 5, the disbursing officer might have promised PO Seaman that his pay would be straightened out by a certain date. However, since the disbursing officer had no control over when the pay order would be received from the previous command, he made no promise.

As a contact representative, you might have a customer who is filling out the duty preference card for future assignments. That member might want your assurance that the next transfer will be to a duty of choice. However, you can't legitimately make that promise because the future assignment is out of your control.

Don't promise performance that is above your capacity to deliver; and don't be too optimistic about your capacity to deliver—unforeseen events may interfere. If you have any doubt that you might be unable to keep a promise, explain that possibility to the customer. Then assure the customer that you will do your best, but don't promise to deliver.

RECORDKEEPING

Many of the actions at a contact point involve records; these records may consist of various forms and records of actions. Many of those records are required by official directives. Some examples areas follows:

- Pages of the service record
- Personnel advancement requirements
- Entries on the leave and earning statement (LES)
- Forms required for starting or stopping allotments
- Postal money order forms
- Forms required for transportation of personal effects
- Performance evaluation forms
- Applications for Navy correspondence courses

If you are performing your duties satisfactorily, you will know how to fill out the forms and records of action appropriate to the services you provide—or how to help the customer fill them out. You will know the required number of copies and what their distribution should be.

In processing records, all that you need to do to give the customer satisfactory service is to perform your regular duties correctly. Strive to keep accurate records. Making a mistake can cause trouble for yourself as well as for others who must process your paperwork. However, mistakes are likely to result in much more trouble for the customer than for you.

KEEPING RECOMMENDED RECORDS

You keep some required records as governed by official directives. However, you keep some required records that are not governed by written directives. The following are examples of some records you must keep even though you have no written directives:

- Educational counseling record—You make an entry in this record each time the customer receives counseling or takes any new action, such as enrolling in a course or taking a test.
- A personal reference—You keep this record of names, offices, and phone numbers for sources of information and assistance.
- Handwritten notations—You keep handwritten notations as a record of an interview with the customer and future actions to be taken.

MAKING PROPER DISPOSITION OF RECORDS

Proper disposition of records is just as important as keeping clear, complete, and accurate records. No matter how good your records are, they are of no use if they aren't filed correctly.

Official directives or the instructions printed on the record often tell you what its disposition should be. Then your duty is merely to make sure you follow those instructions. Rarely does a good reason exist for losing an allotment request or failing to place personnel advancement requirements in a member's service record. Neither does a good reason exist for failing to insert a service record page into a record folder or for making proper distribution of the copies.

Some records don't provide a distribution list; however, making the right distribution of the record is still important. The following are examples of how you should make some routine distributions when no list is provided:

- You should file a copy of correspondence pertaining to a Navy member in that member's service record as well as in the general file.
- When holding forms for future action, you should attach a note to them indicating what action is required and when.
- You should make notes in a tickler file or on a calendar to remind you when to take certain types of actions.

FOLLOWING STANDARD FILING PROCEDURES

Always use standard Navy filing procedures. You may have a private filing system that works fine, but you are not the only person who uses the files. Others must also be able to locate items in the files.

CHAPTER 4

THE TEAM APPROACH

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- *Discuss the team approach when handling customer needs.*
- *Identify effective ways of improving the team's ability to provide quality service.*
- *Discuss training techniques when relating to customer service.*
- *Discuss and take personal inventory of the service you receive as a customer.*

In the previous chapter, the emphasis was on how YOU should perform at the contact point to meet the customers' needs. However, most contact points consist of more than one person. Together these people work together as members of a team to perform the functions of the contact point. In this chapter, we will concentrate on how the members of the contact point team work together to meet the customers' needs.

ACHIEVING TEAMWORK

Each member of a football team is an individual. Yet, if each member functions as an individual on the field, the results are easily predictable. Eleven quarterbacks would have a difficult time advancing the ball. Even one or two members acting individually would have a disruptive effect on the team's performance. Whining requires teamwork

The team is not an entity in itself; it is a group of individuals. You may be a member of that group as a striker, a junior petty officer, a leading petty officer, or a supervisor. Being a member of a team does not deny you the chance to perform as an individual. Rather, it allows you to cooperate and act together with other team members toward a common goal. Thus, a team consists of individual members with varying personal traits—some positive, some negative. To achieve teamwork, you must emphasize the positive traits.

EMPHASIZING POSITIVE TRAITS

Most team members have some undesirable traits, which they may or may not be aware of. No one would argue the value to both the person and the team of having undesirable traits identified and corrected. However, emphasizing a person's undesirable traits usually antagonizes the person and accomplishes little. Rather, by emphasizing the person's desirable traits, you may find that the undesirable traits begin to disappear. Most people have a strong desire to be accepted by their peers, and they will adopt the behavior that leads to that acceptance.

PROVIDING ENCOURAGEMENT

Yea-a-a-a team! The intent of a cheerleader's yell is to infuse spectators with enthusiasm that will give the team members the additional push they need to win. This attitude of encouragement is another important aspect of teamwork. Team members who encourage each other work well together.

PROVIDING ADVICE AND ASSISTANCE

Providing advice and assistance is an important aspect of teamwork. You might be more proficient in a specific area of your rating because you have had more experience than other team members. When that is the case, offer to provide advice and assistance to those who need it.

Remember, you are not playing a game in which you win or lose—you are providing service. If you see a team member about to make a mistake that could have adverse results for the customer, act to correct it. However, make sure your action is tactful. The scenario might go like this: "John, I may be able to save you some time. This situation is similar to the one that I just experienced a few days ago, and we found that by. . ." Thus, you have acted tactfully to correct the problem by