

Customer Service in a Multicultural Community

Northeast Massachusetts Regional Library System
Danvers, MA 2004

Welcome

- Introductions
- Logistics

Objectives

- Understand perspectives of other cultures
- Understand cultural differences and customer service
- Understand what culture is, how we learn it and how it impacts our behaviors and perceptions
- Learn strategies for communicating effectively with diverse communities

Agenda Overview

- Who are our multicultural customers?
- Factors of good customer service
- Four dimensions of diversity
- What is culture? Learning cultural rules
- Cultural differences
- Communication strategies

Diversity Training Areas

- Cultural awareness and understanding
- Knowledge about specific cultures and how to serve them
- Cultural competence
 - Ability to function across cultural lines
 - Ability to integrate cultural awareness and differences into every aspect of library service and management

Our Environment Today

- Positive
- Trusting
- Open
- Sharing

Exercise 1: Introductions

- Find a partner & introduce yourself
- Talk about origin of your name
- Are there any cultural reasons for how/why you were named?

Why It's Important to Serve the Multicultural Customer

- Benefits to general community
 - Support quicker integration into community
 - Build economic assets of community
- Benefits to multicultural customer
 - Decreases sense of isolation
 - Provide vital survival information
- Benefits to library
 - Develop new generation of users
 - Fulfill library mission

Who Are Your Multicultural Customers?

- Diversity of diversity
- Country of origin
- Length of residence in U.S.
- Facility with English language
- Educational level
- Economic level
- Level of acculturation
- Understanding of the library

Exercise 2: Who Are Your Multicultural Customers?

- How does each factor relate to your community?
- What impact might each have on how you serve your multicultural community?
- Are there other factors that need to be considered?

Describing Good Customer Service

- Think about the last time you received good customer service
- What made it a good experience? How did you feel?

Impact of Culture on Customer Service

- How do we deliver good customer service in diverse communities?
- What is likely to get in the way?

Talking About Differences

- Differences in culture, behavior, attitudes and perceptions
- Why talk about differences?
 - Relate easily to people like us
 - Differences more likely to cause conflict
 - Degree of difference greater with different culture

Stereotypes

- Categorizing all members of a group as having the same characteristics
- May or may not be based on fact
- Tend to be inflexible and closed to new information
- Can lead to prejudice and intentional or unintentional discrimination

Generalizations

- Categorizing many members of a group as having similar characteristics
- Tell us something about groups not about specific individuals within a group
- Based on research or widespread observation
- Flexible and open to new information
- Can lead to curiosity and increased awareness
- Look for grain of truth/combine with personal experiences

What Is Diversity?

- All the ways that human beings are similar and different
- Involves factors that we control and those we can't
- Identifies commonalities
- Identifies differences

Four Dimensions of Diversity

- Form a filter through which we see the world
 - Personality
 - Internal dimensions
 - External dimensions
 - Organizational dimensions

Personality

- Core of diversity
- Our unique way of interacting with each other

Internal Dimensions—Factors Out of Our Control

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Race
- Physical ability
- Sexual orientation

External Dimensions — Social Factors and Life Experiences

- Geographic location
- Income
- Personal habits
- Recreational habits
- Religion
- Education
- Work experience
- Appearance
- Parental status
- Marital status

Organizational Dimensions — Job-Related Factors

- Classification
- Work field
- Division/department
- Seniority
- Work location
- Union affiliation
- Management status

Exercise 3: Assessing the Impact of Diversity on Customer Service

- Think about each dimension of diversity
- Rate the degree of difference each makes in how customers are treated in your library
- 1 = little difference; 5 = great deal of difference
- Indicate if difference in treatment is positive or negative for the customer

What is Culture?

- “Software” that determines our behavior and attitudes
- Shared by all or almost all members of a group
- Passed on from generation to generation
- Shapes our behavior and structures our perceptions
- Constantly, but slowly, changing

Cultural Programming

- We are all culturally programmed
- No individual is culture free
- None of us has the same program

Cultural Rules

- Not written down
- Absorbed unconsciously

Learning Cultural Rules

- Parents/family
- Education
- Geographic region
- Religion
- Race
- Profession

What's Normal

- Normal = Different

Exercise 4: You as a Culturally Diverse Entity

- In each circle write one of the sources of your cultural programming and the most important rules and values you learned from that source
- What reactions to and/or surprises do you have regarding your own cultural diversity?
- Do any of your cultural programs come in conflict with one another? If so, where?

Cultural Assumptions

- Interpret a person's behavior based on our cultural rules
- We make assumptions when we don't understand

10 Areas of Cultural Programming

1. Sense of Self and Space

- Individual Space
- Level of formality
- Greetings/Handshakes

2. Communication and Language

- Nonverbal communication
- Eye contact
- Gestures
- Smiling
- Nodding the head
- Directness or indirectness

3. Dress and Appearance

- Clothing
- Hair
- Grooming

4. Food and Eating

- Food restrictions/taboo
- Utensils/hands
- Manners

5. Time and Time Consciousness

- Linear and finite
- Elastic and relative

6. Relationships

- Nuclear family vs. extended family
- Friendships

7. Values and Norms

- Individual vs. group
- Independence vs. conformity
- Dignity and respect
- Competition vs. cooperation

8. Beliefs and Attitudes

- Religious
- Roles for men and women
- Respect for authority/social order

9. Mental Processes and Learning

- Left/right brain emphasis
- Logic/illogic

10. Work Habits and Practices

- Work ethic
- Rewards/promotions
- Status of type of work

Cultural Programming

- Each cultural norm has advantages and disadvantages

Exercise 5: Cultural Differences and Customer Service

- Give an example of a cultural difference you've encountered/might encounter in serving Spanish-speaking customers?
- What are some ways for you to adapt/respond to the difference?

Communicating With Limited English-Speaking Customers

- Make it visual
- Show and tell
- Use their language
- Take it easy
- Keep it simple
- Say it again
- Assume confusion
- Get help
- Walk in their shoes

¡MUCHAS GRACIAS!