SITXCOM001A
Work with colleagues and customers

Learner guide
Version 1
Training and Education Support
Industry Skills Unit
Meadowbank

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**DISCLAIMER:**

While we have made efforts to ensure that the information contained is accurate, the Tourism, hospitality and events industry is dynamic. Some businesses cease to operate while others start up, new products are developed and existing ones are modified. Refer to your trainer for current updated information.
TOPIC 1 – COMMUNICATE WITH CUSTOMERS

At the end of this topic you should be able to:

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<td>1.</td>
<td>Conduct communication with customers and colleagues in a polite, professional and friendly manner.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Use language and tone appropriate to a given situation in both written and spoken communication.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Source relevant information about products and services and provide information clearly to customers.</td>
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<td>Use appropriate non-verbal communication in all situations.</td>
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<td>Use communication medium correctly and according to standard protocols and organisation procedures.</td>
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The tourism, hospitality and events industry is a service-based industry concerned with meeting the needs of a range of travellers. The industry is also labour intensive so you also find yourself in constant discourse with a variety of people in the workplace and those working for principals and suppliers. This means that you need to develop and use a range of skills to deliver this service well and be positive in your dialogue with colleagues. One of the most important skills you will need is effective communication. Take some time to understand why effective communication is so important.

Who are your customers and colleagues? They can be:
- colleagues in the workplace
- external customers such as suppliers and government agencies or training providers
- other industry sectors
- local groups
We can have dealings with colleagues and customers in the workplace such as an agency or hotel, out in the field at an event or on tour and we can communicate in person or on the phone.

**The communication process**

The way you communicate with your customers will influence their level of satisfaction with the service you provide, whether they will use the services of your business again and whether they will recommend you to their family and friends. Don’t forget that communication with your colleagues (those you work with) is just as important.

To be effective in the tourism, hospitality and events industry you must have excellent communication skills i.e. make sure that the message being sent and received is via a language which both the sender and receiver can understand and is supported by appropriate body language. You must:

- be clear and ensure that the message conveys the purpose and intent to the receiver.
- speak in a language appropriate to the receiver. This includes the choice of words, the tone of voice and the speed and volume of speech.
- write in a language which is appropriate and avoid jargon and words which may be ambiguous. Be precise and ensure that the message is clear to the reader.
- explain the features and benefits of products and services so that the customer can understand exactly what they are purchasing and that they will match their needs/wants. You must also explain fully the terms and conditions of the sale or booking/registration to ensure that the customers have an understanding of their liabilities.

**Choosing how to communicate**

After working out that there is some information or advice you need to communicate to a customer or a colleague, you need to think about the most appropriate form of communication to use. You need to consider the options.

Should you communicate in person or would it be better to use the telephone? Should you communicate by email or send a formal letter?

Your choice will, of course, depend on what it is that you are communicating and to whom you are communicating. Other factors that will influence your method (or channel) of communication include:

- the type of communication method the sender or receiver has access to, e.g. if your customer does not have email access then you will need to choose another way of communicating
- the type of format you need to use, e.g. confirmations by letter may require a standard letterhead
• the degree of formality necessary
• deadlines that you may need to meet
• the travel organisation’s procedures or policies.

What is effective communication?
The tourism, hospitality and events industry is about communicating the right attitude, with the appropriate social behaviour. Effective communication involves sharing information, ideas and opinions; a dialogue between people. This is often called two-way communication and occurs when the sender is able to obtain feedback concerning how the receiver is decoding the message sent.

Asking a few questions to confirm the receiver understands or asking them to do something or to demonstrate their understanding would provide this feedback.

The following diagram shows a simple model for effective communication.

The benefits of two-way communication are that it:

• generates much less frustration than one-way communication
• tends to be more accurate than one-way communication
• will increase confidence in the receiver about their accuracy of interpretation of the information received
• is more likely to promote willingness in the receiver to decide and act on the basis of the information received
• increases morale
may require more time initially, yet because of the increase in accuracy it will save time and effort in the long term because mistakes do not need to be corrected

creates a positive relationship between sender and receiver, and reduces defensiveness and hostility which can adversely affect communication.

The importance of effective communication

In the tourism, hospitality and events industry effective communication is important for many reasons. Effective communication should allow you to:

- better understand the needs and expectations of your colleagues and customers
- avoid potential mistakes or communication problems
- develop more positive relationships with you customers and colleagues.

Characteristics of effective communication

So, how do you know when you are communicating effectively or not? There are a number of factors that point to good communication skills, including:

- an awareness of appropriate non-verbal communication
- appropriate listening and questioning
- an ability to identify potential conflict or any existing conflict
- an awareness of cultural and social differences
- an awareness of the types of special needs your customers or colleagues may have.
- appropriate dress and appearance

Appropriateness is a key word. What is appropriate in one situation may be very inappropriate in another. What is appropriate will depend largely on the context you are in, the people you are communicating with and the way you choose to communicate.

**ADVICE:** Remember, any customers or colleagues you are working with may say that they are happy with what you are doing for them. However, their body language might show negative gestures and possibly the opposite feeling. You will need to practice the skill of observing and analysing basic signals of behaviour to better understand what the body language of your customer is really saying.
Consider the answers given to the following requests. Do you think the customer would be satisfied? Why or why not?

1. A Swiss traveller approaches the domestic consultant in your travel office and says: ‘I would like to travel across to New Zealand for a long weekend to ski. Should I fly to Christchurch or Auckland?’ The consultant replies: ‘I’m sorry, I organise travel in Australia.’

2. Three (3) university students ask a hotel reservations clerk about rooms in Melbourne for the long weekend. The reservations clerk replies, ‘The hotel is fully booked and the waitlist is closed.’

3. A customer enters your restaurant enquiring about a special function. This is her first time to your restaurant. She asks: ‘Can you give me some advice about a dinner for 30 – 40 people please.’ The staff member replies: ‘Here are two (2) menus. Have a look through these and you might get some ideas.’