

Chapter 2: Customer Service Skills for User Support Agents

TRUE/FALSE

1. Communication skills are more often difficult for a new help desk agent to learn than technical skills or business skills.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 54
2. Customer satisfaction with a support incident is more directly related to the solution to a problem than to the communication skills a support agent uses.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 54
3. Effective communication skills are more important in telephone conversations than in face-to-face, email, or other forms of communication with users.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 54
4. Communication is a two-way process that involves both listening and responding.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 54
5. Communication is a one-way process that involves an effective transmission from sender to receiver.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 54
6. A customer service ethic is an organization-wide philosophy that the customer is always right.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 54
7. Support staff should return a telephone call when promised, even if no progress has been made on a problem.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 56
8. Of the three essential communication skills, listening comes before understanding and responding.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 56
9. In discriminative listening, a support agent's purpose is to learn about the user, such as his or her knowledge level.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 57
10. The purpose of comprehensive listening is to develop a rapport with a user.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 57
11. In order to educate users, a support agent should use technical terms and explanations in communications with users.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 58

12. Empathy means a support agent takes ownership and responsibility for a user's problem.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 59

13. A support agent who can empathize with a user is one who understands the problem or question from the user's point of view.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 59

14. A common barrier to effective listening is asking probing questions to get additional details about a problem.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 59

15. One method support agents use to communicate effectively with a user on the telephone is to visualize the user and communicate with the visual image.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 60

16. To avoid mistakes and misinformation, scripts designed to guide a support agent through an incident should be read verbatim to the user.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 61

17. Scripts designed to guide a support agent through an incident should ideally be memorized to be effective.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 61

18. When reading a lengthy, prepared response to a user, the best strategy is to tell the user you are reading a passage to him or her.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 61

19. Eye contact and facial expression are examples of nonverbal behavior.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 63

20. Inexperienced support agents tend to speak too slowly when they experience stress during a conversation with a user.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 64

21. A rising inflection at the end of a sentence communicates that a support agent is unsure or lacks confidence.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 64

22. Empty phrases, such as "Now let me see..." are effective ways for a support agent to fill pauses in a conversation.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 64

23. Even in a telephone call, clients can often tell whether a support staff member values the call.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 65

24. Putting a caller on hold is considered a poor customer service tactic.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 66

25. Feedback from users, other support agents, and supervisors is useful information for a support agent who wants to develop a personal incident management strategy.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 68

26. Support agents develop their own incident management strategy from scratch.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 68

27. One goal of incident management is to help users be more self-reliant.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 67

28. A support agent should always be honest in every response to a user's questions.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 69

29. How much information a support agent can divulge to a user is often determined by an organization's policies.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 69

30. Goal-directed diagnostic questions are designed to move a support incident to a successful resolution.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 68

31. Support staff should always provide the information or services a customer needs, no matter what the request.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 69

32. Support agents should avoid apologizing to users who have been kept on hold or who have been given the runaround.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 69

33. One goal of incident management is to give users information about how they should organize their files, improve their personal work habits, and make more effective use of their computers.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 70

34. The likely result of increased user self-reliance will be to eliminate the need for user support agents as an occupation.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 70

35. One goal of user self-reliance is to make users change the way they use computers.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 70

36. Total user self-reliance is probably not achievable, but it is a worthwhile goal.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 70

37. Factors such as personality type probably have little impact on the working relationship between a support agent and his or her colleagues.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 71

38. Employers usually hire support agents whose Myers-Briggs personality type is extrovert.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 72

39. Most support workers and computer users are considered to be a mixture of the personality types on the Myers-Briggs dimensions.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 71

40. A support agent should work to deny the sense of self-importance of users who are “power users.”

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 75

41. A support agent who handles complaints or incidents from angry, upset users should try to move the incident into the problem-solving stage as rapidly as possible.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 76

42. Most users who are angry or frustrated are personally upset with the support agent.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 76

43. A blog is a Web site where users who are angry or abusive can go to post complaints about a company’s products or services.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 79

44. Designers of customer service Web sites find that since Web site content changes frequently, the design of a Web site is less important than its contents.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 81

45. A commitment to customer service excellence means the customer is always right.

ANS: F PTS: 1 REF: 83

46. A comprehensive client service orientation among support staff applies to every staff member, and to every mode of user communication.

ANS: T PTS: 1 REF: 83

MULTIPLE CHOICE

1. Effective communication skills are important primarily to support agents who communicate ____.
- a. via telephone
 - b. face-to-face
 - c. via email
 - d. any of these

ANS: D PTS: 1 REF: 54

2. Dissatisfied clients are more likely than satisfied clients to ____.
- a. resolve support incidents quickly
 - b. contact the help desk repeatedly for assistance
 - c. resolve support incidents at a low tier
 - d. convey a positive business image to other users

ANS: B PTS: 1 REF: 55

3. Effective communication skills are based primarily on a support agent's ability to ____.
- a. listen and read effectively
 - b. understand a user's problem
 - c. communicate solutions to a user
 - d. any of these

ANS: D PTS: 1 REF: 57

4. Excellent customer service in a support organization is based primarily on which of these factors?
- a. The ability to solve user problems
 - b. The ability to communicate effectively with users
 - c. Both A and B
 - d. Neither A nor B

ANS: C PTS: 1 REF: 56

5. Which of these is not a primary strategy for a support organization that aims for customer service excellence?
- a. Treat clients with respect.
 - b. Explain to clients what the support organization can do for them.
 - c. Return calls to clients when promised.
 - d. Meet all of a client's demands.

ANS: D PTS: 1 REF: 56

6. Analysis and evaluation of a user's message are likely to occur during which type of listening?
- a. Discriminative
 - b. Comprehensive
 - c. Critical
 - d. Relational

ANS: C PTS: 1 REF: 57

7. A support agent should aim to use language that is ____ the language level that the user uses.
- a. slightly above
 - b. at the same level as
 - c. slightly below
 - d. none of the above

ANS: C PTS: 1 REF: 58

8. One measure of whether a support agent understands a problem is that he or she can express the user's problem in ____.
- a. the user's words
 - c. industry standard vocabulary

- b. the support agent's own words d. none of the above

ANS: B PTS: 1 REF: 60

9. "I can give you a workaround for this problem, then later we can diagnose the cause of the problem so you don't encounter it again." is an example of ____.
- a. empathy c. sincere greeting
b. probing d. nonverbal communication

ANS: A PTS: 1 REF: 60

10. A user's first impression of a support agent comes from the ____.
- a. solution to the problem c. tone and style
b. incident script used d. incident greeting

ANS: D PTS: 1 REF: 60

11. A script to handle a support incident has ____.
- a. a single sequence of questions and dialog from beginning to end
b. a sequence of questions with one decision point
c. several sequences of questions with multiple decision points or paths
d. none of the above

ANS: C PTS: 1 REF: 61

12. The most effective strategy for using a script is to ____.
- a. read the script verbatim to the user c. memorize the script
b. restate the script in your own words d. use the script only when needed

ANS: B PTS: 1 REF: 61

13. Which type of nonverbal behavior is the least effective posture for support agents?
- a. An open stance c. Establish eye contact
b. Face the user d. Fold arms

ANS: D PTS: 1 REF: 63

14. Which type of nonverbal behavior is suggested for effective voice quality?
- a. Use inflection to add interest. c. Use a warm, upbeat tone of voice.
b. Speak at a normal pitch. d. All of these

ANS: D PTS: 1 REF: 63

15. Inexperienced support agents tend to speak ____ when they experience stress in a conversation with a user.
- a. too slow c. too fast
b. about the right speed d. none of these

ANS: C PTS: 1 REF: 64

16. In a telephone communication, which of the following is the telephone activity a support agent least likely needs to develop?
- a. A call greeting c. A way to hang up on abusive users
b. A way to transfer a call d. A dialog to put a call on hold

ANS: C PTS: 1 REF: 66

17. Which of these is not one of the four goals of incident management?
- a. Make the user more self-reliant.
 - b. Complete the incident in the least amount of time possible.
 - c. Manage stress levels for both user and support agent.
 - d. Provide the user with the information he or she needs.

ANS: B PTS: 1 REF: 67

18. When a support agent does not know the answer to a question, a good incident management strategy is to tell the user ____.
- a. the support agent will research the question and get back to the user
 - b. the support agent doesn't know and nobody else does either
 - c. the question isn't as important as other questions
 - d. to call back later when a different agent is available

ANS: A PTS: 1 REF: 67

19. Which of these is not a recommended incident management strategy for support agents?
- a. Ask goal-directed diagnostic questions.
 - b. Don't admit that you're wrong or don't know.
 - c. Say thanks.
 - d. Teach user self-reliance.

ANS: B PTS: 1 REF: 68

20. A support agent who feels that a user needs substantial assistance with the organization of files on his or her computer system should ____.
- a. indicate how upset he or she is with the user's file organization
 - b. tell the user how to straighten out his or her file organization
 - c. point the user to useful information about file organization
 - d. intimidate the user into changing his or her file organization

ANS: C PTS: 1 REF: 70

21. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) measures ____.
- a. customer service ethic
 - b. personality and work style preferences
 - c. nonverbal behavior
 - d. user self-reliance

ANS: B PTS: 1 REF: 71

22. Incidents that involve complaints ____.
- a. should be terminated as soon as possible
 - b. are likely from angry and frustrated users
 - c. are a valuable source of feedback and suggestions about products
 - d. should be escalated immediately to experienced support staff who know how to handle them

ANS: C PTS: 1 REF: 75

23. Support Web sites that use Web 2.0 technologies differ from earlier support Web sites primarily in ____.
- a. including frequently asked questions (FAQs)
 - b. the authoring language used to build and maintain the site
 - c. improved site navigation tools
 - d. an emphasis on collaboration and communication among users

ANS: D PTS: 1 REF: 79

24. A feature of a Web site where discussions are posted by members of a user community is called a ____.
- a. blog
 - b. user forum
 - c. chat room
 - d. Twitter

ANS: B PTS: 1 REF: 79

25. A Web site that contains large numbers of misspelled words and grammatical errors fails which of these general criteria?
- a. Content
 - b. Organization
 - c. Format
 - d. Mechanics

ANS: D PTS: 1 REF: 81

26. Posts to a user forum with commentary on a single topic, arranged in date order, are called ____.
- a. Web 2.0
 - b. a thread
 - c. a blog
 - d. Web 3.0

ANS: B PTS: 1 REF: 79

COMPLETION

1. An organization-wide commitment that client relationships and client satisfaction are the most important aspect of a business is a(n) _____.

ANS:
customer-service ethic
customer service ethic
client-service ethic
client service ethic

PTS: 1 REF: 54

2. _____ include the ability to listen or read effectively, understand a user's problem, and relate a solution to a problem.

ANS:
Communication skills
communication skills
Communications skills
communications skills
Communications
communications

PTS: 1 REF: 54

3. The three essential communications skills are ____, understanding, and responding.

ANS: listening

PTS: 1 REF: 56

4. One purpose or type of listening is to develop rapport with a user. This type of listening is called _____.

ANS: relational

PTS: 1 REF: 57

5. The purpose of _____ listening is to provide positive support to a user.

ANS: therapeutic

PTS: 1 REF: 57

6. _____ is an understanding of and identification with a user's situation, thoughts, and feelings.

ANS:
empathy
Empathy

PTS: 1 REF: 59

7. A(n) _____ is a prepared sequence of questions and statements that covers the important parts of an incident.

ANS: script

PTS: 1 REF: 61

8. A nonverbal behavior that uses head, hand, and arm movements to communicate active involvement and helps with explanations is called a(n) _____.

ANS:
gesture
gestures

PTS: 1 REF: 63

9. A(n) _____ is a choice each support agent makes about how professional or casual, how respectful or condescending, how formal or informal, and how terse or verbose he or she will be in interactions with users.

ANS:
communication style
personal communication style

PTS: 1 REF: 64

10. A(n) _____ is a collection of tools, techniques, and activities used to move a problem effectively and efficiently from beginning to end.

ANS:
incident management strategy
incident management

PTS: 1

REF: 67

11. _____ is a user support goal that seeks to increase each user's self-sufficiency and reduce a user's dependence on support services.

ANS:

Self-reliance

self-reliance

Self reliance

self reliance

PTS: 1

REF: 70

12. A support agent who explains solutions to users, so they can understand the reasons for a problem and the recommended solution, is addressing the goal of _____.

ANS:

self-reliance

self reliance

PTS: 1

REF: 70

13. A series of questions designed to reveal where a worker falls on four basic personality dimensions is called _____.

ANS:

MBTI

Myers-Briggs

MBTI (Myers-Briggs)

Myers-Briggs (MBTI)

Myers Briggs

MBTI (Myers Briggs)

Myers Briggs (MBTI)

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

MBTI (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator)

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)

Myers Briggs Type Indicator

MBTI (Myers Briggs Type Indicator)

Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)

PTS: 1

REF: 71

14. A coworker who is introverted, communicates directly, bases decisions on objective factors, and is well-organized—like George in the case study in the chapter—is probably a(n) _____ personality type on the MBTI scale.

ANS: ISTJ

PTS: 1

REF: 73

15. A(n) _____ is a user who is technically very knowledgeable (or thinks he or she is) or who believes he or she has connections that warrant special treatment by support staff.

ANS: power user

PTS: 1 REF: 75

16. A user who is rude, uses inappropriate language, or makes personal attacks on a support agent falls into the category of _____ users.

ANS: abusive

PTS: 1 REF: 77

17. _____ is the development of technologies and applications that emphasize interactions and social networking among communities of users.

ANS:

Web 2.0

web 2.0

Web 2

web 2

PTS: 1 REF: 79

18. A feature of a Web site where discussions are organized to which members of a user community may contribute is called a(n) _____.

ANS: user forum

PTS: 1 REF: 79

19. Four general criteria that apply to Web site design are content, _____, format, and mechanics.

ANS: organization

PTS: 1 REF: 81

SHORT ANSWER

1. Explain how a customer service orientation can be included in a user support mission statement.

ANS:

Support organizations can include in their mission statement a goal to provide 100 percent customer satisfaction 100 percent of the time.

PTS: 1 REF: 54

2. Describe three reasons why support organizations emphasize customer service.

ANS:

Any three of the following:

Satisfied customers are likely to be repeat customers.

It takes longer to handle incidents from dissatisfied customers.

Dissatisfied customers are more likely to call back or require escalation.

Dissatisfied customers are more likely to complain to potential customers.
Satisfied customers are less likely to request a product return or a refund.

PTS: 1 REF: 55

3. Describe four strategies support staff can use to provide customer service excellence.

ANS:

Any four of the following:

Provide clients with the information, service, or solutions they need, if there is any reasonable way to do so.

Explain to clients what support staff *can* do for them if the clients' problems cannot be resolved immediately.

Treat clients and potential clients with respect and courtesy.

Communicate to clients how long they are likely to be on hold and how long it will be before they receive a return call or email, and provide time estimates of how long it may take to provide information or solve a problem.

Return phone calls or emails when promised, even if just to report that no progress has yet been made.

PTS: 1 REF: 56

4. List and briefly describe any three of the six listening types or purposes discussed in the chapter.

ANS:

Any three of the following:

Discriminative: Learn about the user.

Comprehensive: Understand the user's message.

Critical: Analyze and evaluate the user's message.

Therapeutic: Find opportunities to provide positive support to the user.

Appreciative: Find enjoyment.

Relational: Develop rapport with the user.

PTS: 1 REF: 57

5. List the three essential communications skills used in customer service situations.

ANS:

Listen

Understand

Respond

PTS: 1 REF: 56

6. In addition to a user's description of a problem, an agent should listen to what other features of the communication?

ANS:

The language the user uses to describe the problem

How the user describes the problem

PTS: 1 REF: 58

7. List three aspects of how a user describes a problem that can provide a support agent with valuable information about how to handle an incident.

ANS:

Any three of the following:

What tone of voice is used?

Does the user sound angry or frustrated?

Does the user struggle with technical terms?

Does the user sound distracted?

PTS: 1

REF: 58

8. Give two examples of phrases a support agent can use that illustrate an empathetic response.

ANS:

Examples may include:

Use "we."

I think I can help you with this.

I can provide you with a workaround for this problem.

I understand that this problem is important to you.

PTS: 1

REF: 60

9. List three aspects of communication that can influence a user's level of satisfaction with an agent's response to an incident.

ANS:

Any three of these:

The incident greeting

The use of a script

Your tone and style

Nonverbal communication

PTS: 1

REF: 60-62

10. Briefly explain the purpose of thanking a user for calling during an incident greeting.

ANS:

It communicates to the user that the support agent appreciates the call and that it is important.

PTS: 1

REF: 61

11. Give three examples of nonverbal behaviors to avoid during communications with users.

ANS:

Any from Table 2-2 on page 63

PTS: 1

REF: 63

12. List five ways a support agent can use an effective personal communication style.

ANS:

Any five of the following:

Define a communications style consistent with company policy.

Recognize the importance of tone and style in communications.

Speak clearly and at a reasonable speed.

Use shorter sentences in preference to longer ones.
Avoid a rising inflection at the end of sentences.
Avoid gender-related terms, wordiness, long words, technical terms, acronyms, and jargon.
Avoid empty phrases.
Use positive rather than negative phrases.

PTS: 1 REF: 64

13. List three telephone activities for which support agents may need to develop an effective dialog.

ANS:

Any three from:

Call greeting

Putting a call on hold

Transferring a call

Terminating a call

PTS: 1 REF: 66

14. List the four goals of incident management.

ANS:

Provide the user with the information he or she needs.

Manage stress levels for the user and support agent.

Ensure that the incident progresses from start to finish in an effective and efficient way.

Make the user more self-reliant.

PTS: 1 REF: 67

15. List four sources a support agent can use to develop an incident management strategy.

ANS:

Any four of the following:

Organizational policies on incident management philosophy and expectations

Incident management strategies covered in support agent training programs

Observation and imitation of respected and experienced support agents

An agent's personal communications experience and style

Feedback from users, peers, and supervisors on your incident management strengths and areas for improvement

PTS: 1 REF: 68

16. List five specific incident management strategies that can help with effective incident management.

ANS:

Any five of the following:

Ask goal-directed diagnostic questions.

Be honest.

Say "I don't know" when you don't.

Apologize.

Say "thank you."

Use incident management, not user management, techniques.

Teach user self-reliance.

PTS: 1

REF: 70

17. Explain the difference between incident management and user management.

ANS:

A support agent should attempt to manage the details of each incident to make sure it progresses toward a satisfactory resolution. The agent should avoid attempts to manipulate, intimidate, or manage the user.

PTS: 1

REF: 70

18. Explain why user support agents want users to call back, but hope that each user's problem gets solved so he or she doesn't have to call back.

ANS:

User support agents depend on user calls for their jobs, but the cost of support services is lower if users do not have to call back about a problem.

PTS: 1

REF: 70

19. Choose one of the four Myers-Briggs personality dimensions and explain the two extremes.

ANS:

Any one of the following:

Introvert (focus energy on thoughts and ideas) vs. Extrovert (focus energy on people, activities, and words)

Sensing (work with facts and experiences) vs. Intuition (emphasize personal insights and reflection)

Thinking (base decisions on logic, analysis, objective factors) vs. Feeling (base decisions on personal values and subjective factors)

Judging (structured, well-organized lifestyle) vs. Perceiving (more open, flexible, exploratory)

PTS: 1

REF: 71

20. List five different types of incidents that are challenging for a support agent to handle.

ANS:

Any five of the following:

Complaints

Power users

Incident that gets off track

Angry users

Abusive users

Users who are reluctant to respond

Users who won't stop responding

PTS: 1

REF: 74

21. Describe how to handle incidents that involve complaints from users.

ANS:

Listen to the complaint.

Don't go into problem-solving mode too early.

Use empathy to indicate understanding.

Record complaints as feedback for product developers.

PTS: 1

REF: 75

22. Describe how to handle incidents from power users.

ANS:

Use inclusive language (“we”).

Use a style or tone that sounds authoritative.

Remember that your role is not to diminish their sense of self-importance.

PTS: 1

REF: 75

23. Describe how to handle incidents that get off track.

ANS:

Try to refocus the incident.

Apologize for the lack of prompt resolution.

Summarize the basic information.

Offer to continue to work toward a solution.

Express confidence that by working together you can find a solution.

PTS: 1

REF: 75

24. Describe how to handle users who are upset or angry.

ANS:

Let them vent their anger.

Don’t offer an explanation or go into problem-solving mode too early.

Reassure the user that the problem is an important one.

Tell the user that you are willing to help him or her resolve the problem.

Remember that the user may continue to vent several times during the incident.

Ask polite questions to refocus the incident.

Avoid defensiveness.

Don’t sound patronizing.

PTS: 1

REF: 76

25. Explain the three principles for handling angry users.

ANS:

Let them vent their anger.

Reassure them that the problem is important and you are willing to work on it.

Angry callers may continue to vent several times during an incident.

PTS: 1

REF: 76

26. Describe how to handle users who are abusive.

ANS:

Try to transform an abusive incident into an angry one, and then into a successful one.

Follow organizational policy and/or special scripts for handling abusive users.

Invite the user to use more appropriate and professional language.

PTS: 1

REF: 77

27. Describe how to handle users who won't respond.

ANS:

Use very simple language and avoid technical jargon.
Try both open-ended and closed-ended questions.
Discuss the problem-solving process and their role in it.
Give positive feedback for information provided.
Suggest that information be exchanged via email or another mode.

PTS: 1

REF: 77

28. Describe how to handle a user who won't stop responding.

ANS:

Use behavior that indicates the incident is over.
Summarize the incident.
Describe the conclusion.
Thank the user for calling.
Use short answers.

PTS: 1

REF: 78

29. List five purposes for a user support Web site.

ANS:

Any five of:
Provide product information.
Take sales orders.
Access technical support.
Provide software updates and downloads.
Communicate with end users.
Encourage communication and collaboration among users.
Provide user forums and blogs.
Provide links to related sites.

PTS: 1

REF: 81

30. List four general criteria used to evaluate a support Web site and briefly explain the purpose of each criterion.

ANS:

Content: Information is relevant, accurate, and up to date.
Organization: Information is well organized and easy to find, and users have the ability to find related information.
Format: Information is in small units; the site uses effective navigation links; and fonts and menus are consistent.
Mechanics: Information is spelled correctly and is grammatically correct.

PTS: 1

REF: 81

31. Describe three aspects of a comprehensive approach to customer service excellence.

ANS:

Any three of the following:

Each employee recognizes that customers are the primary reason for the organization's existence.

Customer service excellence is included in an organization's mission statement.

Support staff are willing to take extra steps to make sure customers are satisfied.

The organization looks for win-win solutions to problems.

The organization devotes adequate resources to support services.

PTS: 1

REF: 83