

Let Me Help, You Ask and I'll Answer

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Think of the number of questions that you hear and respond to each day. Some days, it feels like that's all you do. Callers, colleagues, customers and leaders all have their questions. However, the routine of asking and answering may have become all too automatic. When it comes to relating to customers, maybe you're giving the answer too fast.

Questions can feel like an opening to tell them all about the great services you offer. In a call center, the nurse can efficiently move to a healthcare guideline and begin to give the caller all the clinical information at their fingertips. After all, the caller asked, right?

The answer is a resounding, sort of right. Unless you understand the background and reason behind the question, your answer cannot be targeted or specific. Customers expect the answer you give to address their specific needs. How do you answer effectively unless you spend some time discovering their current knowledge level, if there are personal factors that are driving the question, or if they clearly understand the type of service you offer?

Here is a call center example. The caller asks for information on lymphoma. The nurse moves to her care guides and provides the clinical definitions, treatment routines and targeted population information. Now, consider how different the response would be if the nurse had said, "I can provide that information. Could you provide me with a few more details on why you're interested?" The response and handling will be much different when that caller says, "Yes, I'm interested because my husband was just diagnosed."

Here are some tips and techniques to ensure you and your colleagues are focused on personalizing the response.



Determine their understanding.

Ask questions to determine how much understanding the caller/customer has about the issue, service or concern at hand.



Explore their need.

Are they comparison shopping, confirming information already provided for them, doing a report for school, or trying to diagnose their own conditions?



Evaluate if you are the best resource.

As consumers, telling your story over and over only to be transferred to another person is not a friendly customer service strategy. If you're not the right person, quickly dispatch them to the right expert.



Encourage Dialogue.

Don't just start firing questions; develop a conversation with a two-way exchange. Use interjections. Formulate questions based on the responses they are providing.



Clarify what you are hearing.

Repeat what you've heard or ask if you are uncertain. Listen to their pace and tone to assess their personality type. Give information back in a way that matches their style.



Don't overdo.

There are times when the caller gives you all the information you need. The goal is clear dialogue, so if you understand, give the response. It may be appropriate to follow with a question to ensure your answer met their needs and to determine if you can be of additional support.

We often lose sight of methods that may take longer at first, but will save us time in the long run. In addition, time with our customers gives us the opportunity to position what we have to offer and how the services may be of value to them.



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