

Buzz Session – First Impressions

Time: 30 minutes

How many times have you been put off by poor first impressions and then found your first impression not to be totally accurate?

Sometimes first impressions are created before a customer even gets to speak to a member of staff. This is especially true in the case of Call Centres, where complex front end IVR systems may have tainted the customers experience already.

In this situation you may need to work even harder to create a great first impression.

What sorts of things impact on your first impressions of a business? It almost always starts with the impression your business gives from the outside. This may be based on brand awareness, the products it sells, the premises it does business from, its website or marketing or even from the impressions its existing customers have shared. You may have little or no impact on that actual first impression, however you have total control over the first impression you give.

This activity has been designed to really raise your own self-awareness and get you thinking about your own perceptions and the first impressions you create.

The goal of this session	What you'll need:
Through group activity be able to understand how perceptions may vary and the possible impacts this may have on the way you react to situations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sufficient copies of the example photos.
The Aim of this session:-	
To understand how people may react to the same situation in a different way depending on their perceptions and the potential these reactions will make to the first impressions they create.	

Ask Have you ever been in a situation where a colleague or friend describes an acquaintance to you, either in positive or negative terms, however, when you meet them their description doesn't reflect your own thoughts or feelings about them? The description they've given may simply be their own perception of that person and not the reality.

Tell: Another example of how our perceptions of the world differ is in the case of 'selective perception'. This scenario may be familiar to many of us. Let's say you have just bought a brand new iPhone. No sooner had you bought the phone, than you see brand new iPhones all over the place!

Another classic example is that when women get pregnant, they suddenly start seeing pregnant women everywhere. After childbirth, they stop noticing pregnant women and start seeing babies everywhere. This is called selective perception.

This difference in perception from one individual to another can be illustrated graphically.

Trainer note: Show your team the image from the next page and ask them to tell you what they see



Depending on their age, some people recognize a young lady, whilst others recognize an elderly woman. This picture succinctly captures the essence of selective perception. In other words, people tend to see the things that reinforce what we believe, or the things they could relate to, the rest are usually disregarded.

Explain:

Perceptions are triggered by events that we experience over the course of our lifetime. These actions, called “trigger events”, shape how we see or perceive any particular situation. These perceptions are gradually revised and changed each time we experience a set of trigger events. Hence, selective perceptions are continually created and modified.

This concept is particularly important when it comes to delivering customer service. There may be a tendency to allow our perceptions to cloud our judgment and affect the way we treat different customer types.

In the book, “What the Dog Saw: And Other Adventures”, Malcom Gladwell describes seemingly usual incidents and how they are perceived by different people.

For example, two people who witness the same incident may report the activities and incident differently when asked to do so.

Tell: “Perception is not Insight”

Ask: What’s the difference between Perception and Insight

Looking for: Perception is what we think about a situation – first impressions. Insight is what we gain from asking questions and getting to know more about the situation

Tell: Perception isn’t always reality, that’s why it’s so important that we treat each customer as the individual they are, and not let your preconceptions colour the way you deal with them.

A couple of common misconceptions are that attractive people are cleverer or all overweight people are lazy

Discuss: What sort of preconceptions might influence how you deal with customers?

Look for: Face to face: Skin colour, race, ethnicity, body size, attractiveness, facial expressions or features, way people dress, piercings, tattoos etc

Over the phone: tone of voice, accent, dialect

Written: language they use, grammar, spelling

Discuss: Has anyone got any examples they'd like to share with the team about a time when their perceptions have been proved wrong or any particular preconceptions/ beliefs/ values that might impact the service they give to certain customer types/ segments?

Trainer note:

Participants may not feel comfortable sharing their own tendency to bias with the group so perhaps choose an example from your own experience or here's one as an alternative.

One day a manager in a call centre was doing some remote monitoring of her advisors for training purposes when she overheard very unusual behaviour from one of her team. A customer was ringing in to follow up on an application he'd made. To the manager, he sounded perfectly pleasant and cheerful and had a strong Geordie (Newcastle upon Tyne) accent. Almost from the outset of the call the advisor was curt, bordering on rude with the gentleman, leaving the manager both confused and dismayed.

When the call ended she immediately approached the staff member to give her some feedback. She asked how the advisor felt the call had gone and they immediately became defensive, stating how arrogant and rude the caller had been, yet this was not the same experience the manager had heard. She got the advisor to listen to the call and questioned her on what in the customers tone or words had led her to believe that he was either rude or arrogant. At this point the advisor broke down in tears. It turned out that her first husband had been from Newcastle and had badly beaten her throughout their short marriage. This experience had naturally had a profound effect on her, but unfortunately had tainted her view of every man with a Geordie accent.

Ask: How can you make sure you don't let preconceptions get in the way of you delivering great customer service?

Look for: Treat every customer as an individual, treat them with respect, get to know them before giving judgement.

Ask: When you speak to your next customer, what are you going to:

- Stop doing
- Continue to do
- Start doing

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