

CAN'T BE DENIED

For Preview

**The Impact of Customer Discrimination
Participant Handouts**

Video Vignettes

Vignette #1—The Old Coot

An elderly gentleman tries to get service at a hotel. The bellhop is talking on his cell phone—having a personal conversation—and ignores the man. Once the man gets to the counter, he is again ignored by the clerk who is chatting with another customer. He catches a glimpse of several employees behind a door who are talking amongst themselves and laughing. The manager is nowhere to be found. The man tries to catch the clerk’s attention by dropping his keys on the counter, but no one acknowledges him. He eventually walks out and asks the taxi driver to take him to “a good hotel.”

What are the problems in this scenario?

What customer service policies should have been implemented in this situation?

What should the manager have done in this situation?

What is the potential cost to the hotel for this service?

Do you think the employees at this hotel are discriminating against this man because he is elderly? Why or why not?

Vignette #2—The Shoe Store

A man, likely of Hispanic origin, enters a shoe store. A clerk and the manager secretly follow this man around the store, apparently to make sure he does not steal anything. The man then approaches the cashier with his order. She is not particularly interested in him until he orders over \$2,000 worth of shoes. She is very surprised by this order. After the man leaves, the manager and the clerk congratulate each other for a job well done.

Why do the clerk and the manager congratulate each other at the end of this scenario?

Did the clerk and the manager accomplish what they should be accomplishing?

What should the focus be for these employees?

How do you think the Hispanic man would feel if he knew he was being followed?

How do you think the Hispanic man felt about the cashier's surprised reaction when he purchased over \$2,000 worth of shoes?

Vignette #3—In Your Neighborhood

A black man walks into a bank to open a checking account. He walks up to the teller and tells her what he would like to do. She rudely points him to the bank officer area. He sits down and tells the bank employee there that he would like to open an account. She asks him if he would rather use a bank closer to his home implying that he must live in some other neighborhood. Then she notices the large amount of money he is using to open the account and that he is a doctor. She quickly changes her attitude toward the man. He decides not to use that bank and leaves. She tries to call him back once she realizes her mistake.

What assumptions were being made about the man who was trying to open the account?

What did that woman mean about a bank closer to his home?

Do you think that man could file a discrimination suit against that bank? Why or why not?

What would be some good policies for this bank to have when dealing with customers?

Vignette #4—The Bad Busboy

A black couple is seated at a dirty table in a restaurant. One busboy avoids the table. The server tells the busboy to clean the table, but the busboy refuses. He suggests that those people go somewhere else if they don't like it. The customers sit at the dirty table for some time. The manager gets involved in the situation and tells the busboy that he needs to clock out immediately and that he needs to discuss this situation with human resources. Two other black employees give each other the high five after the manager leaves. The manager then goes and apologizes to the customers and offers them some coffee.

What was this restaurant's policy about discriminating against customers?

How did the manager enforce this policy?

In what ways did this manager lead by example?

How do you think the customers felt after the manager apologized to them?

Why do you think the man still felt angry?

Bad Customer Service

Think about a time that you received really bad customer service. What happened?

What did you do about it?

Was there some method for you to use to complain about the service? If so, what was it?

Will you go to that place again? Why or why not?

How much money did you spend at that place?

Did you tell friends and family about your experience?

When people receive really bad customer service, they are far less likely to try that place of business again if there is no method for complaint. If their complaints are heard by someone, or they have been able to write their complaints down on a complaint card, they are somewhat more likely to try that place again. If their complaints are then dealt with to the customer's satisfaction, they are much more likely to try that place again. If none of this happens, customers generally will not give a place another try. If the service was truly terrible, customers are also likely to tell friends and family about their experience. The loss of one customer may not cost the organization a lot of money, but as that customer tells others of his or her experience, the loss starts adding up. This is why it is so critical that each customer gets treated with respect and in a way that makes him or her feel important.

Lead By Example

Even when you have a policy that is being implemented, your employees will look to you, their leader, to see which behaviors are acceptable and which are not. Policies that are not followed by management normally will not be followed by employees either. Most policies must come from the top down to be taken seriously.

Leading by example can present a problem for many of us because most of us have our own stereotypes and prejudices based on our upbringing and our past experiences. Prejudices can come from our parents, our family, our neighborhoods, our schools, and our jobs, among other things. Prejudices are not necessarily racial or cultural, but can be based on many differences. We must look inwardly and examine our own biases before we can effectively model non-discriminating behavior. After we acknowledge our prejudices and stereotypes, we must determine how our behavior is impacted by these prejudices and stereotypes. It is essential that we avoid treating people differently based on these prejudices and stereotypes. We will best be able to lead by example when we are able to monitor our own behavior towards those who are different from us.

Think about some stereotypes and prejudices that you may have. How are these stereotypes and prejudices portrayed in your actions? How can you change your behavior to avoid discrimination?

Monitor Employee Performance

With any customer service policy dealing with discrimination, you must find ways to monitor employees for strict compliance. Sometimes we feel uncomfortable monitoring employees, like we are spying on them. However, monitoring employees is essential. Many times employees are simply not doing what we think they are. And even though we have policies in place, some employees will not follow them. One of the best ways to monitor employees is to ask people to act as customers and then get their feedback on how they were treated. It would be particularly helpful to get people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds to act as customers. Their feedback could be very valuable in keeping your organization out of trouble.

What are some other ways to monitor employee performance?

Enforce the Policy

Customer service policies dealing with discrimination must be firmly and consistently enforced. The consequences for failing to follow your customer service policy must be clear to each employee in your organization. Not only should the policy be clear, but it must also be enforced consistently. There needs to be zero tolerance for discrimination. You simply cannot let instances of discrimination slide or turn your back to them because a “good” employee is the one discriminating. You must deal with each employee who discriminates against customers, even if the discrimination is not blatant. Subtle discrimination, if left alone, often becomes much less subtle as the employee gets away with his or her behavior. You must set the standard for all employees.

Also, you should make sure you handle all customer discrimination complaints quickly—within 24 hours if possible. It is important to deal with each problem right away so that the problem does not end up costing your organization more than one customer. Your policy should contain clear procedures to follow any time a customer complains. After you deal with a customer complaint, it is often a good idea to follow up with the customer who complained, in writing if possible. That way your customers will know you are serious about providing a good environment for all customers regardless of differences.

What are some ways to enforce your policies regarding customer discrimination?

What procedures will you need to follow to enforce these policies?

Who will need to be contacted?

Customer Service Assessment

Please read the following questions and mark the answer that most accurately describes your organization. It will help you better assess your organization if you answer these questions as truthfully as possible.

	Almost Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
My employees greet customers very quickly upon entering my place of business.					
<i>My employees make personal calls when customers are present.</i>					
If my employees can't help a customer right away, they quickly explain to that customer why not and that they will be with him or her as soon as possible.					
<i>My employees have personal conversations with each other while customers are present.</i>					
<i>My employees would rather help white customers than black customers or customers of different ethnic origins.</i>					
<i>My employees make assumptions about a customer's ability to pay or tip based on that customer's race or ethnicity.</i>					
<i>My employees will closely monitor black customers or ethnic customers to make sure they don't steal anything.</i>					
My employees make sure all customers are helped before they leave my place of business.					
My customers have a 1-800 number posted in a prominent location that they can use to complain about bad service.					
There are comment cards in my place of business that customers can use to complain about poor service.					
<i>Customers complain about the service they receive from my employees.</i>					
I have someone come into my place of business, anonymously, to monitor the customer service my customers receive.					

	Almost Never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Almost Always
I have people of different racial and cultural backgrounds come into my place of business, anonymously, to monitor the customer service my customers receive.					
All new employees must learn our customer service policies.					
All of my employees are familiar with our policies regarding customer service and discrimination.					
I strictly follow my organizations customer service policies and our policies regarding discrimination.					
Leaders in my organization follow our customer service policies and our policies regarding discrimination.					
I have specific procedure in place for dealing with customer complaints.					
All customer complaints are dealt with in my organization.					
All customer discrimination complaints are handled within 24 hours.					
I follow up with customers who have complained about discrimination in my workplace.					
<i>My employees discriminate against customers on the basis of race of ethnicity.</i>					
All employees who discriminate against customer are dealt with immediately.					
There is a specific department at my place of business to deal with any allegations of discrimination.					
My employees provide a friendly environment for all of our customers.					

Scoring:

For each question in black, give yourself 5 points for **Almost Always**, four points for **Often**, three points for **Sometimes**, two points for **Occasionally**, and one point for **Almost Never**.

My total score for the questions in black is _____.

For each question in gray boxes (*italics*), give yourself 5 points for **Almost Never**, four points for **Occasionally**, three points for **Sometimes**, two points for **Often**, and one point for **Almost Always**.

My total score for the questions in gray boxes (*italics*) is _____.

Add your two scores.

My total score is _____.

If your organization scored between 100 and 125, you are doing well with your customer service. Your organization is doing what it needs to in order to protect itself from customer service complaints. Also, your organization is staying competitive in the marketplace because it is providing customers with the good service they deserve.

If your organization scored between 75 and 100, you could be providing better customer service to your customers. You will want to monitor your customer service employees more closely to make sure they are not discriminating against customers and that they are providing good service to your customers. Your organization could be in danger of having a customer discrimination suit filed against them.

If your organization scored lower than 75, you need to take immediate action to fix the customer service in your organization. You are in serious danger of having a customer discrimination complaint filed against your organization. Also, you are losing customers to other organizations that treat their customers with respect. The bottom line is that your organization is not likely to survive in this competitive market.