

6.3 The importance of communication skills and written communication

Have you ever been in a situation where you thought 'What did he say?' or 'What did she mean?' Have you ever read a diagram or instruction and thought 'I don't understand this' or 'This isn't explained well'. If you have, you have experienced poor communication.

External communication

Effective communication skills are essential in the hospitality and catering industry. Good communication is a key aspect of good customer service in all activities in the industry. This is called external communication.

External communication is carried out in many forms:

- verbal – speaking and listening
- non-verbal – body language – expressions, gestures, posture, eye contact
- written – on paper or using ICT.

Internal communication

Communication is a two-way process with responsibilities on both sides. It is also essential for effective teamwork. This is internal communication. How the team you work in and your other colleagues communicate with each other will impact on the quality of service you provide. You need to communicate by:

- Telling colleagues what is required – for example, writing down orders in a clear, easy-to-read way so no mistakes are made.
- Seeking information – from more experienced or senior members of staff. This may be written or spoken.
- NOT being over familiar with colleagues if it is likely that customers can overhear. A certain amount of formality is needed in work situations.

Urgent and non-urgent

Communication can be urgent or non-urgent, which influences how and by what method you communicate. For example, this could be the difference between dealing with a complaint or making 'small talk' (chatting) with customers. Dealing with urgent communication can be difficult if it involves an upset or distressed customer. It is important to stay calm in these situations and seek help from senior staff.



Communication is important both when facing customers and dealing with colleagues

Effective letter-writing needs the following three basic principles:

- the need to define the purpose of the letter
- the need always to consider the reader of the letter
- the need always to use language appropriate for these two above points.

Also important are:

- Be clear – use the right punctuation.
- Be concise – don't 'pad it out'.
- Be correct – with facts and figures and spelling and grammar.
- Be complete – provide all information needed.

- Be courteous – use the right words to create the right tone.
- Make sure that the layout is neat and attractive.
- Avoid use of jargon.

Letters need to fall into three parts:

- 1 context – what it is about
- 2 detail – the facts
- 3 conclusion.

Written communication

There are many forms of written communication used in the hospitality and catering industry. The main ones are letter-writing, faxes, memos and record or work cards. There are also menus to write and place cards and signs to draw and write.

This written communication can be paper or ICT-based.

Take care in what you want to say as once the communication has been sent, you can't influence how others interpret it and have no chance to change the tone. Something that is badly written with incorrect spelling or bad grammar gives a bad impression.

Fax

This is a written form of communication sent through the telephone network by a special machine.

This form of communication can be an instant sending of a letter or documentation. Faxes are not very common now because of the increased use of emails but they can be useful occasionally.

Email

This is another instant form of communication and has the advantage of being able to send large documents without feeding each page through a fax machine. Often letters sent by email are less formal than paper letters for example 'regards' is often used at the end of an email letter rather than 'yours sincerely' at the end of a paper letter. Memos are also sent via email. Emails are used internally – especially for memos, as well as externally to send promotional offers and confirmation of bookings, as well as personal letters.

Memos

These are still used for internal communication and can be used as reminders of meetings or to pass down facts or information from a manager or supervisor. The contents are short and concise.

ACTIVITY

Write a letter to a butcher supplier complaining about the size of the chicken breasts delivered the week before. Be polite but express your concern.

CHECK YOUR KNOWLEDGE

- 1 List the three types of communication.
- 2 Give two examples of urgent communication and two of non-urgent communication.
- 3 What are the three parts of a letter?