

The Ballard Group

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Today's service environment is challenging! That's an understatement, right? The world seems to have been turned upside down. What is normal, is not! And, there's no definitive answer as to when the pandemic will end so that utilities can return to what I believe will be a "new normal."

What is very normal right now is that employees are feeling stressed. They may be working longer hours, working shorter hours, working under very different situations – in the office or remotely. They are serving a public that is under stress as well. And they are operating under policies and procedures that have been changed to fit the situation and that will change again when the situation changes.

With all that in mind, it is evident that employees need support and motivation and inspiration; and either new or re-newed skills! The attached list of webinars – each lasting 60 minutes – can help you and your employees deal with the challenges that our current situation presents. The material will be presented in light of the issues faced right now.

The webinars may be scheduled individually, or several may be chosen to put together a series. I've chosen ten that I think would be most helpful right now. At the end of the list, there are some other topics about which I can provide more information.

Please take the time to review the courses and then contact me to discuss details such as logistics and pricing. Thank you for your time and consideration.

LISTENING TO CUSTOMERS IS THE KEY

60-Minute Webinar - Followed by a 30 Minute Q&A

The outcome of successful communication is complete understanding between the parties to the communication. This is difficult because communication is multi-faceted and takes the use of a plethora of skills. Most people are taught how to speak, how to read and how to write at a very early age, but how many people receive proper instruction on how to listen? Probably not too many!

Communicating is as much, if not more, about truly listening. This causes issues for many people – issues in relationships, issues in casual encounters and issues in providing customers with excellent service.

Objectives

- Understand the importance of actively listening to customers
- Use techniques for active listening
- Use listening skills to determine customer needs which lead to more successful conclusions for the customer and the utility

Program Agenda

1. The Importance of Active Listening
2. Barriers to Listening Well
3. Steps to Active Listening

PHRASING FOR SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSIONS

60-Minute Webinar - Followed by a 30 Minute Q&A

Communicating effectively with customers can sometimes be like walking on eggshells because of the sensitive nature of some business transactions such as overdue payments or perceived billing errors. This program focuses on the most frequent communication gaffs committed by utility personnel, and how to alter a customer's negative interpretation. Emphasis for this program is on proper message construction when dealing with potentially emotional situations.

Objectives

- Learn to phrase answers to tough questions in a way that reflects concern and a positive service attitude
- Become more aware of the power behind words and the manner in which they are used

Program Agenda

1. The Communication Cycle
2. Understanding the Customer's Point of View
3. Replacing Negative Service Filters
4. A Different, More Positive Way to Phrase Answers

A PROFESSIONAL TELEPHONE IMAGE

60-Minute Webinar - Followed by a 30 Minute Q&A

In this course, participants will gain a perspective of service excellence from the customer's point of view when conducting business transactions via telephone. They will develop skills for dealing with customers in various recurring scenarios including service connects, disconnects, technical supports, and billing concerns. The skills learned in this program serve to enhance the performance of all employees who interact with customers via phone, resulting in reduced stress, more efficient utilization of transaction time, and improved customer satisfaction.

Objectives

- Be more mindful of the impact they individually have on the image of the utility as they speak by telephone with customers and other callers
- Use skills with each and every caller

Program Agenda

1. Understanding the importance of a professional image
2. Defining the challenges of service by telephone
3. Using voice and speech patterns professionally
4. Developing better technical skills in handling calls

USING EMPATHY TO HELP EMOTIONAL CUSTOMERS

60-Minute Webinar - Followed by a 30 Minute Q&A

This program is designed to help employees effectively manage intense emotional customer interactions. Topics covered include an exploration of the dynamics of emotional behavior, the various patterns of aggressive/assertive behavior, and how to use voice and word-choice techniques to help defuse tension or hostility. Employees will be encouraged to view conflict from a different point of view. Attendees will leave with a four-step proven method for controlling their own emotions so that they can lead emotionally distraught – even abusive – customers to a more reasonable state-of-mind.

Objectives

- Develop a better understanding of the effects of anger on a person's state of mind – including their own
- Become confident and in control of themselves and the negative situation through the use of a systematic four-step approach

Program Agenda

1. Overview of causes and effects of anger
2. Becoming more confident in dealing with anger through self-control
3. A Four-Step Process for resolution

POSITIVE ATTITUDES =A POSITIVE WORKPLACE AND GREAT SERVICE

60-Minute Webinar - Followed by a 30 Minute Q&A

In a recent national survey, companies were asked: What counts more: employee aptitude - hard skills and technical competencies - or employee attitude - soft skills including motivation, commitment and communication? Nearly 60 percent of organizations responding ranked **attitude** as the No. 1 concern. As attitudes deteriorate, so do commitment, loyalty and, most importantly, performance.

Objectives:

- Increase understanding of the importance of attitudes to personal and organizational success.
- Improve ability to develop and keep a more positive attitude.
- Improve understanding of themselves and the people with whom they work and who they serve and how to better relate to them and, consequently, how to be a more positive influence in the workplace.

Program Agenda:

- Introduction
- Defining a Positive Service Attitude
- Creating Your Own Reality
- The Benefits of Positive Attitudes
- Strategies for Developing and Keeping a More Positive Attitude!
- Wrapping it Up – Action Plans

HELPING CONSUMERS UNDERSTAND USAGE AND CONSERVATION MEASURES

60-Minute Webinar - Followed by a 30 Minute Q&A

Although electricity is one necessity that Americans cannot do without, many consumers are remarkably uninformed and misinformed on how to understand and control their energy usage and bills, how the utility designs its rates and what to do to make their homes more energy efficient. Since most Americans take what utilities provide for granted, they do not realize the true value of the reliable service and relatively low cost of electricity. Couple the consumers' emotions with a basic lack of knowledge and scams perpetrated by companies who falsely advertise the benefits of their products/services and serving these consumers can be challenging.

Objectives:

- Improve ability to assist customers in understanding their bills and the utility's rates
- Gain knowledge and expertise to communicate in a more professional and credible manner
- Enable to explain myths and scams in relation to energy efficiency

Program Agenda:

- Introduction
- The Challenges of Serving Uninformed and Misinformed Consumers
- Taking the Emotional Consumer from Unreasonable to Reasonable
- Debunking the Myths and Scams of Usage and Energy Conservation
- Wrapping It Up – Insights and Action Plans

HANDLING HIGH BILL COMPLAINTS

60-Minute Webinar - Followed by a 30 Minute Q&A

High Bills are the number one concern or complaint of all utility customers. As a result, when consumers come calling with these concerns, it is the biggest opportunity that the utility has to serve, to assist and to educate these customers. It is also one of the biggest challenges. Because they deal with so many of these types of complaints, utility reps can become almost robotic in their responses and serve with a lackadaisical or jaded approach. For all the information available to the general public, most people are still highly biased against the utility, feeling that it is the utility's "fault" that their bill is so high and not taking any responsibility for their usage. This can lead to a certain amount of defensiveness on the part of the utility's employees as well.

Objectives

- To help representatives look at these types of complaints in a different light by understanding the "human dimension" to the complaint.
- To explore the reactions that customers have, the level of customer knowledge and the results that customers want
- To revive and enable to respond to high bill concerns in a more confident, knowledgeable and personable manner.

Program Agenda:

- Introduction
- The "Psychology" of High Bills – the When, the What and the How of Responding
- A Dozen Most Common High Bill Complaints and How to Respond
- Wrapping it Up – Action Plans

DEALING MORE POSITIVELY WITH STRESS AND STRESSORS

60-Minute Webinar - Followed by a 30 Minute Q&A

Everyone talks about being “stressed out” but how many people really know exactly what stress is and how it really affects them? In this course, stress will be explored from all angles – what it really is, what effects it has, where it comes from for the individual and how we sometimes make ourselves more vulnerable to stress with poor coping skills.

Objectives:

- , To lead attendees to see past behavior patterns which may not have served them very well through interaction and self-evaluation.
- To explore the responses to the stress of change along with other individual sources of stress.
- To assist each attendee in developing a strategy to deal more positively with stress through a discussion of time-tested tips and techniques.

Program Agenda:

- What is Stress?
- The Effects of Stress – Physical and Mental
- Self-Evaluation of How Vulnerable You Are to Stress
- Developing a Strategy for Dealing with Stress and Stressors
- Wrapping it Up – Action Plans

SERVING INTERNAL CUSTOMERS: WORKING TOGETHER FOR SERVICE SUCCESS

60-Minute Webinar - Followed by a 30 Minute Q&A

This course stresses the importance of the service that co-workers provide to one another. *If the internal customers aren't taking care of one another, the external, end-use customers do not stand a chance!* Shared goals, values and issues will be addressed along with step-by-step best practices to improving relationships and communication with co-workers in the same and different departments. Attendees will leave with a guide to engaging in sometimes difficult conversations concerning delivering excellent service to their members/consumers.

Objectives

- Understand their role in this important aspect of service
- Learn to better partner with co-workers to deliver excellent service to external customers

Program Agenda

- 1. Defining the aspects of service – human, business, hidden
- 2. Understanding the importance/impact of internal service
- 3. Key Issues in guaranteeing good internal service
- 4. Building blocks of collaborative working relationships

PERSONAL STRATEGIES FOR NAVIGATING CHANGE

60-Minute Webinar - Followed by a 30 Minute Q&A

In today's workplace, employees are experiencing tremendous changes in organizational strategies, in the way work gets done, and in the way people work together. These changes present new demands and challenges for every individual in the organization. Without personal strategies for dealing productively with change, employees can become overwhelmed and communication can break down. This module provides an effective approach to navigating change that people in any organization can use. Participants explore skills that help them deal with change both individually and interpersonally, and they develop strategies to deal effectively with a change that's difficult for them.

Objectives

- Understand change and the challenges it brings
- Realize how reactions to change can form habits
- Understand how to turn habitual reaction into positive responses

Program Agenda

- Challenges of the changes being experienced at work
- Describe common responses to change
- Examine and learn from their behavior during changes faced in the past
- How to assess and understand the reasons for change
- How to work effectively and influence others who resist change

Other Topics for Employees – Additional information Available on Request

Personal Leadership Skills for Employees

Understanding the Basics of the Electric System – Generation and Transmission

Understanding the Basics of the Electric System – Distribution Systems

The Seven Cooperative Principles (for cooperatives)

History of the Electric Industry and Electric Cooperatives

Credit, Collections and Disconnections

Engaging and Building Loyalty - What Do Today's Utility Consumers Want

Serving Consumers with Mental or Drug Abuse Issues

Topics for Customer Service Leadership – Additional information Available on Request

Building a Customer Service Team

Setting Service Expectations

Measuring Service Success

Coaching for Service Success