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Service standards in higher education:

Lasswell's communication model as a training tool

(TITLE)

BY

Crystal R. Alston

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts in Communication Studies

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2017

YEAR

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RUNNING HEAD: LASSWELL'S COMMUNICATION MODEL AS A TRAINING
TOOL

Service Standards in Higher Education

Lasswell's Communication Model as a Training Tool:

The case of Prairie State College

Crystal R. Alston

Eastern Illinois University

2017

Table of Contents

Abstract.....3

Introduction.....4

Review of Literature.....6

Lasswell’s Communication Model.....11

The Case of Prairie State College.....14

Developing Service Standards.....15

The Project.....17

The Service Standards Manual.....19

Developing Training.....21

 Training Outline.....23

Conclusion.....30

References.....34

Appendices.....36

Abstract

This paper examines a service standards training process established during the 2016/2017 academic year for Prairie State College (PSC), a two-year community college located in Chicago Heights Illinois. The goal of examining and revising the service training process was to enhance the quality of service after the college received poor service reviews from a recent satisfaction survey. Lasswell's Communication Model was used to create content and structure for a training manual and workshop as part of the overall service training process at PSC. The service standards and training manual was successfully developed and is currently being tailored to accommodate the needs of the college. PSC plans to facilitate its first customer service training session in summer 2017 and a second session in the fall.

Introduction

Professional development training is designed to improve and increase the capabilities of staff members through access to education and experience. Such training can occur by way of webinars, conferences or online portals, and they are often facilitated by either an organization's human resources department or by an outside source. When organized from within an organization training can occur through formal methods, such as seminars, or informally by watching others perform a job. Professional development training from outside organizations can happen onsite or online. This creative thesis focused on training that occurs within a workplace through the development of a service standards training manual for Prairie State College (PSC). The purpose of this project was to create an educational tool that could be used to help communicate service standards to employees and to enhance customer service at the college. The manual functions as an interactive/hands-on training guide. Its primary objective is to promote healthier relationships among faculty, staff, administrators, students and the community.

During 2016, the Planning, Effectiveness and Accreditation Department at PSC developed and conducted two surveys, one that sampled the student population and one aimed at PSC staff members. Students were asked for feedback concerning their experiences at PSC and staff members were asked to provide feedback about their work environment, including their opinion about leadership, fairness, and their overall experience at the college. The main goals of these surveys were:

1. To determine the cause(s) of low enrollment.
2. To determine the cause(s) of a decline in morale.
3. To identify the strengths and weaknesses of the college.

Based on the surveys results, two major issues were identified. Students, who were reluctant to register for classes and/or return to the campus, indicated it was primarily because of a lack of communication, organization, and how staff members at the college treated them. PSC interpreted this as a failure of customer service between itself and its students. Additionally the staff survey revealed that staff members believe the college lacks service standards and offers no customer service training for employees. To determine a solution to these challenges, a committee was formed and it developed a plan to establish service standards and a training guide for employees. This approach allowed for significant creativity and flexibility in the plan's development since the college did not currently have service standards and lacked training in this particular area. However, one major challenge was to get employees on board with such changes because there had been no guidelines for providing service at the college and therefore employee buy-in of the concept was necessary.

PSC believes that with customer service expectations rising and the treatment of students being critical to its overall success (Revolutionizing Customer Service, 2016), it has become essential to its success to establish service standards. David Cronan, director of human resources at PSC, believes there is a need for training but, because of a lack of state funding, professional development programs and training have been cut which has eliminated such opportunities from campus. Cronan shared that the college has begun to focus its efforts on the reaccreditation process and a strategic plan to stay compliant with Illinois state regulations. He also insisted that the effort to improve service goes beyond accreditation requirements asserting that the college needs to improve its structure. In an October 2016 meeting, Cronan stated, "There comes a time when we have to get rid of

the old way of doing things and make way for real progress." So as PSC begins its reaccreditation process, the administration has decided to focus its efforts on student and staff interactions, internal communication, and ways to improve the overall service at the college.

As a part of this process, the college leadership decided to focus on how students are treated and the ways we can improve customer service at the college. In order to do this, I have developed service standards and a training manual using Lasswell's (1948) Communication Model. The manual uses interactive/hands-on training designed to help convey the significance of customer service to members of the organization and what it means for the advancement of the college. Enhancing service and promoting healthier relationships among faculty, staff, administrators, students and the college community can positively impact enrollment and create an atmosphere of productivity. Developing service standards along with a guide and implementing them through training, can help the college achieve its goal to improve customer service.

This document outlines the procedures, development, and implementation of the Service Standards Training process. Included first is a review of literature on customer service standards in higher education and why training is essential in organizations. Following is a description of the project and a breakdown of how the training manual was designed and organized and what went into creating it. Finally, this paper concludes with an evaluation and suggests implications of the service standard training manual.

Review of Literature

Customer Service

Interactions with customers have never been more important, especially with the

increased use of social media and online platforms, which have provided unhappy customers with a “louder voice” (Revolutionizing Customer Service, 2016, p. 26.) Customers are the most important stakeholders for an organization and successful businesses know they must make every decision with the customer in mind (Ford & Heaton, 2001). Many organizations are aware that unless customers think highly enough of their experience, they may not return “and they certainly won't recommend the place to their friends” (Ford & Heaton, 2001, p. 35).

Customer service expectations are increasing, especially among competing organizations that offer similar products and services (Donaldson, 1995). Customer service has to do with communicating well and developing lasting relationships with stakeholders (Lindstrand et al, 2006). A study conducted by Dado et. al. (2012), indicates that satisfaction is influenced by service quality and directly related to behavioral intentions. This suggests that customers are directly affected by their experiences in establishments. The authors argue that how a customer is treated will determine their behavior towards an organization. It is the difference between whether or not they will buy the product again or if they will return (Lindstrand et al, 2006).

In relation to colleges and universities, higher education institutions are beginning to move toward business models of operation and implementing academic customer service practices (Raisman, 2002). While Raisman says that the phrase “customer service” can be a dirty word to faculty colleagues. Raisman (2002) argues that, there is a direct correlation between good customer service and enrollment success. He believes by creating a welcoming atmosphere and treating students like respected customers, “while making sure they get a great education,” (p. 13) it will result in enrollment and retention

success. The controversy comes in at whether non-profit organizations should adopt a business model or not. The authors asks the question of whether college should mimic business customer service methods. The answer is yes and no. Raisman explains that academia is similar to businesses but in higher education it means “treating students as if they count. It places students, their need for being valued as individuals and their learning at the center of the enterprise.” (pg. 67). He mentions that it simply boils down to respect and courtesy and suggests that while higher education is similar to businesses, colleges must not lower standards or pander to its clients. The author explains that academic customer service is not a surface level tactic; it is a strategic approach to fulfilling the real expectations of students.

While many organizations strive to provide quality experiences for their customers, accomplishing this takes a thorough understanding of what qualifies as excellent customer service and what is expected of the staff in order to achieve it (Dado et al, 2012).

Raisman (2002) also concludes that the customer is not always right. The author believes that customers are often wrong and says it is impossible to please everyone. Furthermore, it is important to note that, “when a customer comes to the wrong business and demands a product that the business does not provide, the customer can indeed be wrong,” (pg. 101). The idea of great customer service in higher education is not to agree and misinform students when they are incorrect.

Raisman states:

Students expect to be informed when they are incorrect and have their knowledge, skills and abilities, and understandings corrected, or at least pointed out.” He

continues by stating that “Colleges are in the business to tell students why they are right and wrong.” (pg.101).

In order to understand how to provide good and efficient service to students, the first step in this process is to develop an organizational guide that provides clear direction for employees to help them understand what good service is and how to provide it.

Service Standards

Lindquist (2015) defines service standards as a business’s service philosophy or attitude. They are an organization's “personal corporate statement, about what an organization does, and how it does it” (p. 1). The author shares a successful company’s way of viewing service standards:

We will endeavor to greet people in the way we want to be greeted. Once they’re with us, we will treat them with respect and the knowledge that they know our business almost as well as we do. In return, we will expect to get the kind of feedback that will allow us to continually improve and change anything that is not working in our organization (p. 1).

Service standards have to do with a company’s purpose, and in the case of PSC, it relates to the mission and values set forth by the college. If the purpose is clear and well defined, it helps people easily determine whether they want to be affiliated with the organization or not (Hatch & Schultz, 2008).

One way to help communicate a well-defined purpose is through branding. An organization's brand relates to the purpose or mission of an organization and defines what the establishment is about, the purpose of its existence, and why the organization is important (Hatch & Schultz, 2008). Branding is an integral part of modern business

strategy (Barlow & Stewart, 2004). The authors explain how branding helps distinguish an organization and/or product from competitors, usually with marketing concepts such as taglines, logos, and slogans. A strong brand helps develop trust and loyalty, allowing organizations to create lasting relationships with patrons (Barlow & Stewart, 2004). A brand is directly related to organizational identity and by creating a solid brand, establishing and articulating service standards will be less challenging for organizations.

A brand's strength has a direct effect on the culture of an organization, which is defined as a system of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs, which governs how people behave in organizations (Ashkanasy, et al, 2000). An organization's shared values have a firm influence on the people in the organization and can dictate how they dress, act, and perform their jobs (Ashkanasy, et al, 2000). Ashkanasy et. al. (2000) argue that when a brand and organizational culture are clear and aligned, they create a competitive advantage in everything from recruiting and retention to productivity and profits. Similarly, by strengthening these elements, Gallup (n.d.,) states that employees and performance become "powerful -- even unstoppable -- forces" (para. 1).

While many organizations have established service standards, most do not practice them. Lindquist (2015) suggests that service standards have to be part of the "business's fabric," and those in leadership roles in the organization need to make the standards a mandatory practice among all employees. For organizations that have established standards, components that are often missing are clear guidelines and effective communication (Smith & Mounter, 2008). Smith and Mounter (2008) suggest that internal communication can help organizational employees understand what is expected of them and believes that it should be "championed" by the leadership of an

organization including senior management and board members.

While businesses commonly state their service standards to their customers and prospects by posting the standards in public places and in marketing materials, you need to state your standards internally, too, and get full buy in from everyone in your organization. If your internal stakeholders don't fully understand and practice your service standards, stating them for external stakeholders will be a meaningless exercise (Lindquist, 2015, (p. 1).

One approach that holds a lot of promise for properly implementing service standards is Lasswell's Communication Model.

Lasswell's Communication Model, developed in 1948 by Harold D. Lasswell (1902-1978), asks the questions: "Who, said what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect?" This is known as the 5W's Method (Sapienza et al, 2015) (see Figure 1).

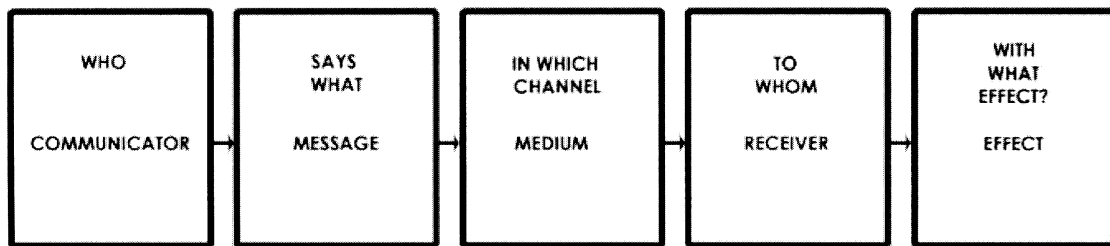


Figure 1. Lasswell's Communication Model

According to Berger (1995) it is considered one the most influential communication models and was developed specifically for mass communication and to study the media propaganda of countries and businesses at that time. Its five elements are used as an analysis tool for evaluating the communication process. Since its creation, it has been applied in different mediums and fields, such as interpersonal communication and group communication, in order to understand how to disseminate messages to various groups in

diverse situations. Berger (1995) argues that the model “suggests that the communicator has some intention of influencing the receiver and, hence, that communication should be treated mainly as a persuasive process. It also assumed that messages always have effects” (p. 12).

The underlying strengths of the Lasswell’s Communication model is that it is considered to be simple and can be implemented in a wide range of communication processes and has been proven to be an effective communication model.

One of the weaknesses of the model is that feedback is not mentioned, which ignores the possibility of noise. While there are newer models that account for feedback and “noise” in communication, Lasswell’s model can be used to achieve effective customer service by asking and analyzing each step in the service process according to the 5Ws. The first step is to ask “who.” Who will be communicating in the customer service interaction? Communication is key to first impressions of an organization, so it is important employees are trained on how to deliver excellent service. The next question is, what? Depending on the dialogue, what will be communicated to the customer? The third question refers to which channel or medium? With social media platforms and immediate online communication options, organizations not only need to provide adequate face-to-face service, but they need to cater to online audiences as well (Lindstrand et al, 2006). The fourth refers to the receiver and asks whom will organizations provide assistance to? This suggests companies analyze the audiences they serve and learn what their needs and wants are. The last step is why, or with what effect? Organizations must know why they are implementing customer service incentives or training in order to be able to measure the outcomes to determine if the service standards are working.

The 5W's method can be used as a blueprint for any organization working to develop a strategy for effective customer service (Goodman, 2009). These steps will ensure that the actions, content, and strategy behind the customer service process will be effective in connecting with customers, providing what the customers want, where the customers want it, when the customers want it (Goodman, 2009).

Training:

One way to implement this approach is to incorporate hands-on training for employees in an organization. This method of training is ideal to increase the practicality of the outcome. According to Figliuolo (2008), hands on activities are one the best and most effective ways to get participants to retain information. Other training methods, such as online instructing and information sessions are often used but according to Matherson & Windle (2017), “the “sit and get” professional development of the past must become a thing of just that...the past.” (p. 28). While the article is focused specifically on teachers, its core message is relevant to higher education institutions in that, it examines the desired outcome verses the method. The authors make a good point as they write about the expectation of teachers today, which are

“...to instruct students via methods that will have them engaging in higher order thinking skills and applying those skills across the curriculum. If these are the expectations set forth for the teachers, then should it not be expected that teachers be provided engaging professional development in which they apply the same skills? ” (p. 28).

Figliuolo explains that when a person sees something done first-hand or takes part in the activity, retention is much higher. Hands-on-training provides a situation that

trainees can refer back to when they are interacting with customers. They are more likely to remember the concepts versus when they are learned through a lecture or presentation. “If you want [trainees] to retain the information, let them live the lessons. It’s sort of like telling a kid the stove is hot. They kind of understand the concept “hot” but don’t have context around that. Let them touch it and they’ll never forget the definition of “hot” let alone the event” (Figliuolo, 2008, para 2).

Such strategies can help in developing service standards, as well as establishing a training manual. Once service standards are implemented at an organization and employees are properly trained, then the organization can work toward achieving its goal to improve customer service. In order to understand how this would work, this paper now turns to a discussion of the case study organization and delves into the process of using Lasswell’s (1948) model to develop a service standards training and the creation of a training manual/program.

The Case

Founded in 1957, Prairie State College is a two-year community college located in Chicago Heights Illinois that held its first classes in 1958. Over the past 60 years, PSC has provided education, adult services, and training for members of the community whose goal is to learn a new skill, begin work immediately after earning a degree, or to transfer to a 4-year institution. Unfortunately, because Illinois lawmakers have failed to pass the budget for more than two years, it has made it difficult for public schools, colleges and universities in Illinois to successfully recruit and retain students. The Monetary Award Program (MAP), a need-based grant, has also been left unfunded,

leaving students who rely on the MAP grant with a lack of resources to pay for college. The decision to delay or deny funding for higher education in Illinois has placed public institutions in jeopardy. While the financial crisis is a hindrance, it is not the only reason enrollment is low at the college. In a recent (2016) student satisfaction survey conducted by Noel Levitz, PSC, on average, scored lower than other community colleges in the categories of *Student Centeredness* and *Campus Climate*. The nationwide survey compared results of other community colleges on a scale that measured levels of student satisfaction, including the importance of each item. It also included the gap difference of each column to show data from highest to lowest. As a part of the survey, participants were asked to rate statements such as – “students are made to feel welcome here” and “Administrators are available to hear students’ concerns.” The results ranged from -0.08 to -0.20 on a 5.50 scale. Participants were asked over 40 questions and the results concluded that more than 80 percent of the student satisfactory responses averaged a lower score compared to other schools included in the survey. As a result, PSC is searching for ways to provide better service to help increase enrollment and retention.

There is a realization we must face in higher education and that is admitting that revenue depends on whether an institution can sell itself to students and parents. The goal is to get them to buy into the brand and purchase our product (college courses, degrees, etc.). One way this is done is by maintaining great customer service. As stated in Mrig, (n.d.):

Meeting the demand for improved service does not have to entail sacrificing the rigor of the institution’s policies and procedures because the core standards of effective service have little to do with promoting ‘customer satisfaction.’ Instead,

what matters most is responsiveness, efficiency, clear communication, and conflict management” (p.3).

The goal of this project was to develop service standards and a training manual for PSC using Lasswell's Communication Model as a guiding framework for the creation of a training manual. According to the first W of the 5W model, the college must work on the communicators (senders) who will be interacting with students the most. These employees are typically those on the front line in departments such as enrollment services, financial aid, and the welcome center. As previously mentioned, Lindquist (2015) suggests that service standards have to be a part of the “business’s fabric,” and those in leadership roles in an organization need to make the standards a mandatory practice among all employees. To do this, the college must first create service standards. After which PSC must develop training to implement the service standards and then make the standards a mandatory practice among employees. This will create a consistent pattern of behavior that will eventually become normative and, as a result, improve service at the college.

Developing Service Standards

Based on research, service standards are essential to the success of an organization (Lindquist, 2015). Once developed, it is important that employees are trained on their content and implementation. The manual designed for this thesis project clearly lays out the standards, suggests hands-on activities and exercises for learning, and provides material for future reference in order to enhance the customer service provided at PSC. To develop a set of standards, a committee was formed at PSC to brainstorm and determine what standards were necessary. This committee included a representative from

each major area in the college. Members included Terri Winfree, PSC president; David Cronan, director of human resources; Jaime Miller, director of financial aid; Joshua Green, faculty member; Peggy Jones, support staff president; Sarah Henderson, support staff recruitment chair; Jay Barriga, manager, ITR operations and client services; and Crystal Alston, public relations and marketing specialist. A survey also was conducted to ask members of the Student Government Association (SGA) about the strengths and weaknesses they encounter at the college with a special emphasis on service.

The survey entailed five questions. The first asked the student to rate their overall experience at the college and the remaining four were open-ended questions. There was also one section at the end for comments. Of the surveys handed out, 60 percent were completed and returned (See Appendix A for survey questions and results). SGA members were asked to complete the survey because of their student leadership involved at the college. Therefore their perspective was important and it helped guide what standards would yield better service for students and the community. Additionally, since the standards would also serve as a tool to help build healthier relations among employees, I attended a College Leadership Team meeting to ask for feedback on what members feel should be included. The College Leadership Team is a committee made up of all PSC managers and administrators at the college. This committee meets once a month to discuss college-wide matters and important upcoming events (See Appendix B for feedback from College Leadership Team).

Based on the initial PSC Noel Levitz survey results, the follow-up survey questionnaire for SGA members, the feedback from the college leadership team, the PSC staff survey results, and research on service standards in higher education, I began

working on codifying the service standards and creating a manual that was tailored to meet the needs of the institution. The final manual includes the service standards, a summary of the training process, and an explanation of how to implement the college's new guidelines.

The Project

Using the survey information and Lasswell's Communication Model as a training tool, I worked with the service standards committee to develop standards for employees. The employee survey was taken into consideration as it provided the college with information on what was perhaps missing, which was professional development and training opportunities. The standards were developed in correlation with the college's core values, which are Learning, Excellence; Accessibility, Respect and Integrity. In addition to the college values, the national survey results as well as the feedback from students, employees and the college leadership helped guide the creation of the serviced standards. These standards formed the foundation of the service-training manual, which I designed to help the college implement the new policy guidelines.

Before the service standards were presented to the college council for approval, each standard was defined and voted on by the service standards committee. The college leadership council is made up of the college president, vice presidents and the director of human resources. The following service standards were submitted for approval:

1. Responsive
2. Courteous
3. Professional
4. Proficient

5. Collaborative

An explanation was provided for each standard, which was adapted from existing conceptualizations and ideas. The explanations provided were as follows:

- *Responsive* – Reacting in a timely and positive manner.
 - Prairie State College employees are expected to treat everyone with timeliness, thoroughness and follow-through. We are to remain approachable, resourceful and provide assistance when needed. All students and college guests should be acknowledged immediately. If students and/or staff must wait, they should be greeted and politely informed.
- *Courteous* – Polite, respectful and considerate in manner
 - Interpersonal interactions with our students, the community and each other must be conducted in a pleasant, courteous and respectful manner. In any interactions in which pleasantry is not possible, staff are expected to act in an assertive and professional manner. Confrontational or abusive interactions are not tolerated at the college or at college related functions.
- *Professional* - the competence or skill expected of a professional.
 - PSC employees are responsible for creating an environment that supports the overall mission and values of the college.
- *Proficient* – Competent and well advanced in an occupation.
 - PSC employees are expected to conduct their duties and responsibilities with efficiency, accuracy, dependability and timeliness. Competence includes advancing and improving skills with the use of professional

development opportunities or other means of additional training to expand knowledge to give a consistently high quality job performance. Employees are expected to adapt to necessary changes.

- *Collaborative* – Work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor.
 - PSC employees are expected to work effectively within and outside of departments or areas at the college to accomplish departmental and institutional goals. Everyone is expected to support their co-workers and work together to provide great service both internally and externally.

A major objective of the committee was to keep the standards simple, clear, and concise which would allow each of the various departments throughout the college to adapt the values in a manner that makes sense for their area. The definitions were established as a collaborative effort and modified to provide employees a brief explanation of the standards. This was necessary since it was potentially going to be challenging to implement standards for employees since this was a brand new initiative at the college. After presenting the standards, the committee evaluated and approved the list and definitions and also provided suggestions that were incorporated into the training manual. After they were approved, I was given authorization to proceed on my project to create the training manual.

The Service Standards Training Manual

The service standards training manual is organized using Lasswell's (1948) Model of Communication. The objective of the training is to increase customer service standards at the college and improve student experiences, employee interactions, and

overall college engagement with the community. It focuses on the need for customer service training and provides guidelines to help create a healthier relationship between the college, students, staff, and community and help facilitate learning at the college. This is done with the hope of increasing enrollment, retention, over service and employee morale. The manual is created to integrate customer service training for current and future employees and is intended to help promote and enhance customer service and communicate a cohesive message that will provide a more consistent experience for PSC affiliates.

The service standards training manual includes a three-day mandatory training series with materials, including an introduction to customer service. It also includes interactive activity instructions, handouts, hands-on exercises, worksheets, a webinar followed by a Q&A session, group activities, journal prompts, self-reflection opportunities and tips on how to implement the standards college-wide. Finally, there is a service standards checklist to be completed by employees, signed, and returned to the human resources department. That checklist is a document asserting that the employee has attended the training and that they understand what was communicated. It also includes a verification clause that reads: *I have read and understand the above Service Standards. I also understand that it is my responsibility to comply with the standards and that my performance review will reflect my compliance.*

The training manual instruction is focused on:

- “Who” employees are to the customers
- The importance of employees’ roles at the college
- How to effectively communicate internally

- Ways to better communicate with students
- Hands-on activities to help increase understanding.

The training manual also includes the mission and values of the college, employee expectations, instruction on phone and online communication etiquette, and guidelines on how to interact with others on campus, including ways to deal with difficult customers and how to create a consistent experience. The purpose of the training is to present the service standards and demonstrate how to communicate with one another, the students, and the community. This will hopefully create a more cohesive experience at the college.

The service standards training manual was created to be a professional development instructional tool, designed to improve and increase the capabilities of staff members through access to education and training opportunities. The purpose of this training manual is to help communicate service standards to employees with a focus on improving customer service, internal and external communication and overall engagement throughout the college. It is also to enhance customer service through the use of interactive/hands-on training and relevant material to increase knowledge and provide assistance through the implementation process.

I chose to develop a three-session training manual to provide employees the opportunity to analyze the information, a chance to implement what they have learned during the training, and to allow them to ask follow-up questions. In order to understand how the contents of the manual were created this paper now turns to the process of developing the service standards training manual.

Developing the Service Standard Training Manual

The service standards training manual was developed using Lasswell's 5W's

method to ensure the actions, content, and strategy behind the customer service process at the college will be effective in connecting with students, employees, and community members. The manual is designed to provide training that will result in effective communication and be used as a strategic tool to improve customer service at the college. The process of developing the manual is broken into sections.

The Sender (Who)

The training focuses on who will communicate in the customer service interaction. The manual's instruction is created to encourage appropriate behavior that will contribute to the college's objective to improve and provide excellent service. The activities and exercises provide the sender (employee) the tools and lessons necessary to help them operate in a manner that is in line with the college's service standards policy. The content used in this area of the training manual is designed to empower the sender and provide them with the knowledge needed to take the lead in giving great service and have confidence and control when dealing with others at the college. In the manual, the "who" focuses on the employee, their responsibilities and roles as PSC staff members, and their influence on the overall college message.

The Message (What)

The service standards training manual also focuses on the message, or content, of service. Activities designed to build communication skills are a significant part of the training manual. It teaches participants how to formulate their messages in everyday situations with others at the college. Lasswell's model has to do with being aware and conscious of the messages spoken or conveyed to others. The manual helps the sender learn the appropriate types of messages that will contribute to good customer service. The

messages are created to reflect the college's brand and the image that the institution would like to project. The goal is to encourage senders to be more mindful and consistent about the messages they deliver.

The Channel (Where)

Hands-on activities and information developed in this portion of the training analyze the areas of the college where service is essential. It also provides instruction on how to offer excellent service through a variety of platforms such as face-to-face interactions, phone calls, emails, and through social media. It sets expectations for employees and allows them the opportunity to practice and incorporate the service standards into their daily activities at the college. Lasswell's model asks the question of whether or not an organization is available through the customer's desired way of communicating. It also addresses if the message is consistent across the board in an organization and through all means of communication with others.

The Receiver (Whom)

The training manual provides information about the target audience served at the college, including employees. The receiver is the target audience (for PSC that includes students, staff, and community members). Lasswell's model suggests that organizations analyze the wants and needs of the institutions affiliates. In order to do this, the organization must analyze their target audience. This receiver's input and feedback help guide training. This goes along with the idea of getting to know how customers want to be treated. Another part of knowing the target audience is that it helps the sender to provide the receiver with the appropriate information needed to give great service. In higher education, it is important for frontline workers to know and understand the target

audience to help deliver adequate service and maintain the college's image. The training manual provides participants with an opportunity to put themselves in another person's shoes to understand different perspectives and provide information about our community and student population. Considering that Lasswell's Model is linear, there are limitations in applying it to this project. One is the feedback loop, which carries the answer back to the customer. This limits the opportunity to obtain data that can help guide future trainings for employees to make them more effective.

The Effect (Why?)

The manual focuses on the purpose of great customer service and the reason the college is implementing such training. As suggested in the Lasswell model, organizations should analyze the effect that is desired and then proceed in the steps to achieve this particular outcome. In the case of PSC, the student satisfaction survey revealed that students did not feel welcome at the college and was given the run-around when inquiring information. The feedback mainly targeted frontline employee interactions with students, which include employees in areas such as academic affairs, enrollment services, financial aid and the welcome center. To counteract the results, the service standards were developed followed by the establishment of a clear and cohesive method for all employees to adopt at the college. To achieve this, the manual includes journal prompts, activities, and hands-on exercises. It also gives participants the opportunity to ask questions. To make sure employees understand the information presented during training, they will be given an evaluation form to be completed at its conclusion. A survey also will be provided to obtain feedback about the learning experience (see Appendix E.) This will allow the facilitators to gain insight on the effectiveness level of the training. To

determine the training's effectiveness over time, annual reviews and future survey results will be examined to determine how well the service standards are being implemented.

Training Manual Outline (See Appendix C).

The service standards training manual is developed for all employees, including managers and administrators and facilitated by trained and knowledgeable staff members in the organization. All will be required to complete the training as this will be a mandated professional development activity. While the training targets frontline employees, all employees will be trained to provide customer service at the college. To understand how the training process works, it is important to look at the manual's layout and structure. By examining what is included in the manual this paper can provide a deeper explanation of how the goals of the process are meant to be fulfilled.

Introduction

The introduction section prepares training participants for the experience. It explains the purpose of the training, defines the key ideas to be utilized throughout, introduces the service standards at PSC, and discusses the objectives of the training. This section is intended to answer preliminary questions for the participants and encourage serious and thoughtful participation.

Module Content

Day one primarily focuses on the sender and lays the foundation to align behaviors with the college's expectations. To do this, an icebreaker activity is introduced to allow participants the opportunity to get to know one another, which is a proven way to effectively start a training session. Day one activities also include information that teaches the sender about what customer service is and how they can demonstrate it in the

workplace. A few talking points included in the manual are:

- Patience – Many times the person we are serving may be frustrated. It is our job to support them and provide them with assistance.
 - Attentiveness – Listen to understand, not to respond. It is important that we listen to others, process the information and then respond in order to provide the most accurate information. (Nichols 2009).

In Lasswell's 5W's formula, the sender (who) has to have the knowledge and tools to provide good customer service. An activity that is included in the manual that helps empower the employee is an exercise called: *It's all about your attitude*. This exercise teaches participants how to maintain a positive attitude in a high stressed situation, remain calm and responsive, and learn how to communicate with different groups within the college. This activity focuses on the sender and the message. Included are scenarios so that participants will be given a chance to interact and role-play.

Lasswell's model suggests that organizations analyze the desired effect, and then proceed in the steps to achieve this particular outcome. To do this, the manual is structured with the desired end in mind. One of the ways to achieve this was to include journal prompts, activities, and hands-on exercises. The manual materials aim to engage participants and encourage learning and understanding. Day two focuses mainly on the message (what) accompanied with group activities, discussions, and the opportunity to act out scenarios. An activity that is presented on day two is "Communication/Acting Skills." This exercise gives participants the chance to practice phone etiquette, how to greet others, ways to read customers, email communication techniques, and listening

skills. This activity gives the sender the information needed to send a consistent and appropriate message to the receiver through various channels.

The objective of day three of training is to help participants understand the target audience, to build a cohesive message, and enhance service at the college. The main activity on day three will allow employees to role-play. Volunteers will be given cue cards with character descriptions. Each person will act out his or her role. The employee will then be directed to implement what was learned during training. The cue cards will pose challenges for the volunteers as they include real life circumstances that influence our attitudes and emotions.

Here is an example of the character descriptions used in the manual:

- **PSC Employee** – You work in the business office at the college as a cashier. This morning your alarm didn't sound. You were running late and on the way to work you were stopped by a train. You arrived late and as you were walking in the door of the campus, you fumbled and spilled your coffee onto the floor. You finally get settled into your seat when a student approaches your window.
- **PSC Student** – You just received word that your financial aid award would not fully cover your class expenses. With little money and no help from your parents, you are forced to seek out resources to pay your tuition. You're not sure where to go or who to ask so you enter the business office to ask a staff member. You're frustrated and annoyed because this is the third office you've been to today. Approach the counter and explain what happened and ask the PSC employee about what you should do.

An additional activity on day three involves listening to a webinar, entitled, *Customer*

Service in Higher Education: Tips from Disney. The college purchased the webinar to be used as a professional development tool. It is included as an activity because it further explains the importance of customer service and gives valuable tips for later use in the workplace. A few talking points included in the manual taken from the webinar are:

- “Do it like you mean it” – Have genuine approach when dealing with others. This gives of the spirit of caring.
- Emotional connection – Connect with students, staff and the community on a deeper level. This builds loyalty with others.
- Empowering the frontline – These employees deal with customers daily, so they will need encouraging and will need the proper tools to go the extra mile for the students.

After participants view the webinar it will then be followed by a Q&A session.

Following the session, they will be provided with a link to the PowerPoint and Webinar materials for future reference.

Handouts and Worksheets

Suggested worksheets and handouts that correlate with the lessons facilitated during the three- day training will be available for participants.

- *Handout #1* Service Standards Worksheet

This outlines the service standards and allows participant to offer examples of these standards and how it can be implemented in their particular area.

- *Handout #2* Instructions, summary, and tips on activities.

Scenario and Cue Cards

The training manual includes suggested scenarios and cue cards with character descriptions to implement throughout the three-day training.

Training Tips

The training manual is designed to be easily implemented and modified to fit the needs of the organization. The training tips are included to assist in the training activities as well as offer suggestions on ways the facilitator can maintain control, stay on task, and conduct the sessions so that objectives are met. A few examples of training tips included in the manual are:

- Allow participants two minutes to speak to give everyone a chance to share.
- Keep a close eye on time to make sure all areas of day two are covered.
- Give participants the opportunity to be creative. Avoid providing harsh criticism.

Participants are there to learn so provide constructive feedback and positive reinforcement. Keep it fun.

Talking Points

Talking points are included to provide direction for facilitators and provide suggestions on what topics and specific information should be covered during training. Talking points can be changed and/or increased depending on the effectiveness and future outcomes.

Journal Prompts

As part of the learning experience, participants will be given journal prompts to encourage them to describe and reflect on their experiences and provide insight on their understanding of the training material. An example of a journal prompt is provided below.

Reflect on your own experiences and share a time when you have received great customer service. What was done well? How did it make you feel? Now reflect on a time when you experienced bad or terrible service. What was done poorly? How did it make you feel? Bring your journal to session two.

This writing exercise gives employees the chance to think about what characteristics made them feel good and the ones they deemed bad or poor quality. This allows them to evaluate their communication in the future.

Training Evaluation (See Appendix D)

An evaluation will be given at the conclusion of the three-day training. It will assess the effectiveness of the training, whether participants understand the presented material, and if they are able to apply what they have learned at the college. The evaluation form includes statements such as:

- I will interact with others in a courteous and professional manner.
- I will be considerate, cooperative and helpful to every staff member to assure quality service.
- I will hold myself accountable for addressing inappropriate comments and behavior.

Participants will complete the evaluation and submit it to the human resources department at the college.

Feedback/Survey (See Appendix E)

Surveys will be handed out in addition to the training evaluation. This will provide feedback for the college about the service standards training material, the preparedness and delivery of the training, its effectiveness, and the overall experience.

Participants will indicate their level of agreement with the statements by checking

Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree.

Examples of questions that appear on the survey include:

- The objectives of the training were clearly defined.
- Participation and interaction were encouraged.
- The content was organized and easy to follow.

The survey allows PSC to evaluate the training and make modifications if needed for future training sessions. The college also will conduct annual student and staff surveys to measure whether or not the trainings are an effective tool.

Conclusion

The overall development of service standards and training manual was successful. The College Leadership Council (CLC) approved the service standards and the training manual was successfully developed using the Lasswell's Communication method. Since fall 2016, after presenting the idea at convocation at PSC, there has been a boost in employee involvement concerning service. When the service standards committee was formed there were four members. Since convocation the committee members have doubled. In addition to the increase in members of the committee, many employees are sharing their ideas about how to improve service at the college. Three departments also have already adapted the service standards to their particular area, including the financial aid department, the workforce development team, and the public relations and marketing department. The first customer service training session is projected to commence in summer 2017 and a second will be conducted in the fall. With no state budget in Illinois, PSC is making efforts to increase enrollment and retention at the college. Developing the

training manual and implementing training is both effective and cost efficient and is the first step of many to improve the service provided by PSC employees. I believe the training will elevate the college and give employees the tools needed to implement exceptional customer service to PSC affiliates.

Using Lasswell's Communication Model provided a guide for me to develop a training manual. It is a functional tool that can easily be applied to various training guides in organizations. It allowed me to organize the information into sections for easy understanding. I believe that by using this method, it was less of a challenge to develop content for the manual.

Many lessons came from doing this project. I know now that I enjoy creating content for training manuals, including activities and instructions. Even though I am an employee at PSC, it was a learning experience to work closely with the leadership at the college and lead meetings. There were challenges during this process that taught me patience, time management, and leadership skills. Since this training manual will be used as a part of the new service standards policy at the college, waiting on approvals was frustrating. Working with a committee also proved to be difficult at times. The members did not always agree and there was pushback when it came to finalizing the service standards.

While I believe the training manual will be a valuable tool for the college, there are some things I would have done differently. I would have summed up the training details and gave more generalized information. Providing too many details has the potential to restrict creativity in that it do not allow the facilitator or organization to create their own scenarios and tailor the sessions to target their specific needs. This also

could result in uneventful training sessions as it would not allow for much additions and changes. I would have also created surveys for community members and staff. Getting feedback from only a small population of people limits the potential of the training. Obtaining suggestions from a larger group lends a wider view on service and gives more information to help guide the training.

Implications for Future Research

Customer service is a vital component in any organization and since we live in a digital society, customer service feedback and complaints come more rapidly and frequently due to mobile apps and online platforms. This can benefit or harm an organization. While this paper lays out the importance of customer service, service standards and professional development training, there are areas that need more research.

- More extensive studies done to assist in identifying the core problems in the organization.
- Include a personality analysis on a select group of employees to gather data to learn if personality characteristics can effect work performance as it relates to customer service.
 - For instance, if a person is introverted, perhaps the training can be tailored to effectively train those individuals.

Thus, future research should focus more on the employees and the issues that may be preventing them from providing good customer service. In the future, I believe the training should be tailored to target specific employees at the college such as managers and administrators. This will not only expose them to the training but will guide them on how to enforce the service standards after training has concluded. I encourage the

college to take seriously the material developed to increase service at the college and begin to train employees on how to provide great customer service.

So far the project has been received with great optimism. Many employees in the organization have volunteered ideas about what service should look like at the college and how it can be implemented. I am happy to report that the service standards committee is in agreement about the direction taken and is excited to begin training at the college. I am hopeful that we will be able follow-through on starting the trainings this year. This topic is important to me because I have worked in hospitality and customer service since my early teens and I know the value that customer service can bring any organization. Maya Angelou simplifies its significance best, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

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Appendices

Appendix A: Student Survey and Results

I. Survey for Student Government Association Members:

1. How would you rate your overall experience at the college?
 - Extremely Satisfied
 - Satisfied
 - Fair
 - Dissatisfied
 - Extremely Dissatisfied.

Please explain why you selected the above choice:

2. How can the college provide better service to students?
3. What services would you like to see implemented at the college?
4. If you could improve anything about the college, what would it be?
5. Please offer any additional feedback to help the college enhance its service to students.

II. Results

The surveys were handed out during an SGA board meeting. Students were instructed to return their completed surveys to the marketing department once they were finished. Twelve surveys were returned out of 18. All surveys were anonymous.

One person indicated that they extremely satisfied with overall experience at the college. Four were satisfied and four circled "Fair". One participant left this section blank (but provided an explanation and two were dissatisfied.

The open-ended questions ranged from vague to very descriptive responses. The following is a summary of the answers.

- Provide more resources for students; offer more classes students need; help students more in the classroom.
- Comment: Administrators are not available to students when there is a problem. “Offices are often closed and no one seems to know anything.”
- Comment: Faculty are very helpful and they seem to care
- Feedback: Students too often are unaware of opportunities at the college. (Scholarships, internships, etc.)
- Comment: “The college feels like an “extended high school.”

Appendix B: The College Leadership Team Feedback

The college leadership team is made up of all PSC managers and administrators. I was invited to attend the February meeting to give an update on service standards at the college and ask members to provide feedback about what they would like to see happened at the college in relation to customer service. Many suggestions were given verbally. Summary points are provided below:

- Implement more employee team building activities at the college.
- Have employees shadow other departments so they can get an understanding of what everyone's job is.
- Hire more staff to handle student overflow in areas such as financial aid and the advising.
- Find phone service companies who can provide assistance during registration.

The decision to make the service standards training mandatory was voted on and everyone with the exception of a few, voted in favor of this choice.

Appendix C: Training Manual

Customer Service Training Manual

Produced/Designed by Crystal Alston and Maintained by The Service Standard

Committee at Prairie State College

May 2017

Service Standards: Our commitment to service is active, ongoing and open to enhancement.

Introduction & Purpose

To best serve our students, staff and community, Prairie State College (PSC) is committed to providing excellent service by implementing service standards that will serve as a guide for PSC employees. The college believes in the worth and dignity of each individual and the importance of improving student and staff interactions, internal communication and overall service at the college.

Enhancing service and promoting healthier relationships among faculty, staff, administrators, students and the college community, can positively impact enrollment, the morale among employees and create an atmosphere of increased productivity. Our goal to provide quality service is an extension to our commitment to the mission and values at PSC. This **Service Standards Training Manual** is a professional development instructional tool designed to improve and increase the capabilities of staff members through access to education and training opportunities for employees at PSC.

Presented in this manual are techniques and information that is intended to promote healthier relationships among faculty, staff, administrators, students and the college community. This includes instruction and activates on how to engage with students and

staff at the college. Participants will be taught strategies on how to effectively provide excellent service, how to remain professional in high stressed situations, how to communicate well during face-to-face interactions, how to provide excellent service via phone and email and strategies on how to collaborate with employees at the college.

The purpose of this training manual is to help communicate service standards to employees with a focus on improving service, internal and external communication and overall engagement throughout the college. Also to enhance customer service through the use of interactive/hands-on training and relevant material to increase knowledge and provide assistance through the implementation process.

Please Note: The interactive training sessions includes peer feedback and self-reflection activities that give participants tools necessary to help them provide excellent service.

Training Tip: This manual includes hands-on and interactive activities. To get the most out of the training, try to limit each session to no more than 12 participants.

Quote: “I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” - Maya Angelou

Rationale

Interactions with consumers have never been more important, especially with the increase in social media and online platforms, which have provided unhappy customers a “louder voice” (Revolutionizing Customer Service, 2016.) Service standards is an organizations “personal corporate statement, about what an organization does, and how it does it” (Lindquist, 2015 pg. 1). Lindquist defines service standards as a business’s service philosophy or attitude and the author shares a successful company’s way of viewing what service standards are.

*“We will endeavor to greet people in the way we want to be greeted. Once they’re with us, we will treat them with respect and the knowledge that they know our business almost as well as we do. In return, we will expect to get the kind of feedback that will allow us to continually improve and change anything that is not working in our organization.” **

Service standards has to do with a company’s purpose and when that is clear and well defined, it helps people to easily determine whether they want to be affiliated with the organization or not (Hatch & Schultz, 2008). One way to help communicate a well-defined purpose is through branding. An organization's brand and culture relates to the purpose or mission of an organization and defines what the establishment is about, the purpose of its existence and why the organization is important (Hatch & Schultz, 2008). Branding is an integral part of modern business strategy (Barlow & Stewart, 2004). The authors explain how the brand helps distinguish an organization and/or product from competitor’s usually with marketing concepts such as taglines, logos, and slogans. A brand is directly related to organizational identity. A strong brand helps develop trust and loyalty, allowing organizations to create lasting relationships with patrons (Barlow & Stewart, 2004). By establishing a solid brand, establishing and articulate service standards will be less challenging for organizations

As PSC begins the reaccreditation process, the college has decided to focus its efforts on student and staff interactions, internal communication and ways to improve overall service at the college. Enhancing service and promoting healthier relationships among faculty, staff, administrators, students and the college community can positively impact enrollment and create an atmosphere of productivity.

Service Standards at PSC

Every individual with whom we deal, within and outside of the college is considered a customer therefore the service standards apply to them as well. The same standards that apply in face-to-face interactions will apply to telephone, email and other written contacts with customers.

The following Service Standards will serve as the college standards by which PSC employees are expected to implement to better serve students, staff and the college community. All procedures, behaviors and policies are influenced by these standards. Our mission is to provide students, staff, faculty and members of the PSC community with outstanding service, accurate information and to create a welcoming environment for all.

1. Responsive
2. Courteous
3. Professional
4. Proficient
5. Collaborative

Objectives & Learning Outcomes

Upon the completion of the **Three-Day Service Standards Training**, participants:

- Will have been introduced to the college's service standards
- They will be about to be able to implement the standards into their daily routine through a developmental process of interactive activities and learning modules.
- Learn the importance of service standards and the impact on a constituent's experience at the college
- Will be given the tools needed to prepare for challenging and difficult situations

- Learn how to communicate during face-to-face interactions, over the phone, written and through email.
- Learn to align behaviors to the college expectations.
- Have the opportunity to reflect on the lessons.

Day One:

Duration: 2 hours

Training Objectives: Introduce Service Standards and lay the foundation to align behaviors to the college expectations.

Introduction: Sweet Talk: Getting to Know Each Other Better

Objective:

- Icebreaker activity

Materials:

- Candy bars and an opaque bag to put them in
- List of questions

Procedure:

Label each table with the name of a candy bar. Each participant will be asked to choose a candy bar from a bag when entering training. After they have chosen their candy bar, instruct them to sit at the corresponding table. At the table, they will be asked to introduce themselves, state their current position at the college. They will then take turns answering questions about themselves. A list of questions will be provided to assist so to keep the discussion on the surface and fun.

Time: 10-15 minutes

Rationale:

Ice breaker activities can be an effective way to start a training session. Interactive and fun sessions run before the main proceedings, which can help people get to know each other and buy into the purpose of the event. (This activity and definition is adapted from thebalance.com)

Training Tip: The candy bars can be replaced with other items such as fruit, trinkets, or any other item that will build interest. Also, a suggestion would be to keep the questions brief and non-intrusive.

Day One (Continued)

Introduction:

What is Good Customer Service Anyway?

Talking points:

- Patience – Many times the person we are serving may be frustrated. It is our job to support them and provide them with assistance.
- Attentiveness – Listen to understand, not to respond. It is important that we listen to others, process the information and then respond in order to provide the more accurate information.
- Clear Communication – A sure-fire way to confuse a student is to provide them with unclear and vague information. If you are not sure, ask someone who is.
- Know your stuff – Knowledge is power. This relates directly to competence. Being knowledgeable about your skill and the skill sets of others in the college, can positively impact the college environment by giving out the most updated and correct information.

Training Tip: Depending on the group, feel free to modify the talking points to make them relevant and most effective for the present audience.

Service Standards

Why Service Standards are important.

Talking Points:

- Creates an interconnected atmosphere where employees are all on the same page
- It does not matter if what we are providing students with lower cost and a quality education, it matters how we treat them and the level of support we provide.
- Treating everyone with the same level of respect and consideration is vital.
- Creates a practice where employees will begin to be proud of their work and the college will begin to develop an improved reputation.
- Gives an outline of college expectations.

Training Tips: Provide participants with examples of popular standards such as Walgreen's "Welcome to Walgreens" greeting or the DMV's "Service Above All" practice. Ask them to name standards they may know about that would be good to implement at the college.

Handout #1

Provide Participants with Service Standards worksheet.

Training Tip: Give employees 5 minutes to complete the worksheet. After they have completed their handout, have them pass it to their neighbor to share idea. Use the handout to explain the Service Standards and give examples for each.

Activity #1: It's all about your attitude.

Objective:

- Learn how to maintain a positive attitude in a high stressed situation
- Remain calm and responsive
- Learn how to communicate with different groups within the college.

Materials Needed: Pens and Scenario Cards

Procedure:

Depending on the amount of participants, each person will be given a chance to role play in an impromptu mock experience. (note: if there are more than 12 participants, break the employees into groups and have them perform this activity as a team). Participants will be given a scenario and then they will need to come up with an appropriate response and/or approach within 5 minutes. When the time is up, encourage them to present their approach to the group. The scenarios will challenge participants because it will target various areas of the college.

Time: 25 – 35 minutes

Suggestions to help with activity:

- Participants can get creative and partner with others to develop a fun skit.
- They can develop their own scenario that helps them to relate to the scenario.
- Helps participants understand their role in delivering excellent service.

Sample Scenario #1:

Elliot Dawson, Director of Student Services is in his way to a meeting when he is approached by Laura Perry, who is in the hall outside of his office. Laura is a new student at the college and is annoyed because she was dropped from a class. Visibly frustrated, she moves toward Elliot and asks him if she could speak with him. How should Elliot

handle this situation?

Sample Scenario #2

Tammy works in the Financial Aid office and a few of her many responsibilities include processing, reviewing and evaluating financial aid applications. The line is around the corner and her phone is constantly ringing. The office is short staffed because a co-worker called in sick. Tammy is struggling to keep up with the volume of calls and visitors. What should she do?

Rationale:

In order to maintain a good attitude, it helps for participant to visualize the scenario, think about the message and act out the behavior. This will assist when they are in a similar situation while working. The scenario will perhaps train participants to understand the “WHO” in the situation. In order to provide excellent service, participants must understand their role in the interaction.

Note: Communication is key to first impressions of the organization, so it is important employees are trained on how to deliver excellent service.

Training Tips: If time allows, ask participants to share their own experience and tell everyone how they dealt with it.

Handout #2

Summary Description:

Techniques and information presented on Day One are designed to introduce Service Standards at PSC. Instruction and activities involve interactive learning with lesson on how to effectively provide excellent service, how to remain professional in high stressed situations, how to communicate well during face-to-face interactions, how to provide

excellent service via phone and email and strategies on how to collaborate with employees at the college.

Activity: Responsive Scenarios – How to maintain a positive attitude in a stressful situation

Rationale:

According to Figliuolo (2008), hands on activities is one the best and most effective ways to get participants to retain information. Figliuolo explains that when a person sees something done first-hand or takes part in the activity, retention is much higher. This activity is designed to place individuals in a situation where they will need to be sharp and strategic. They will be challenged to be creative and realist in their approach to remain calm, effective all while delivering excellent service.

Goal for activity one:

The activity is designed to emphasis the importance of preparedness and to learn techniques to help align the service standards with their role at the college.

Instruction:

All materials will be provided on day one of training. Please arrive on-time ready to learn and have some fun.

Procedure:

Each person is expected to participate in the Service Standards Training. You will be asked to get involved and speak with other members of the group.

Wrap-up:

The information discussed during this three-day training correlates. A brief summary of the training will be provided to participants at eh conclusion of day three.

Journal Prompt: The Good. The Bad. The Ugly

Reflect on your own experiences and share a time when you have received great customer service. What was done well? How did it make you feel? Now reflect on a time when you experienced bad or terrible service. What was done poorly? How did it make you feel? Bring your journal to session two.

Day One Timeline:

- 20 Minutes: Activity One - Sweet Talk: Getting to Know Each Other Better (Ice Breaker)
- 20 Minutes: Describe Introduction, Goals and Objectives
- 10 minutes: Describe Activity Two
- 25 – 35 minutes: It's all about your attitude activity
- 10 minutes: Present journal prompt and the importance of the activity
- 15 + minutes: Q&A and open discussion about the day's lesson.

Day Two: Communication 101

Duration: 2 Hours

Journal Discussion: Allow employees to discuss their journal entry responses with the group

Objective:

Gives employees the opportunity to share their definition/view of what good and poor service is.

Rationale:

Employees are able to think about what characteristics that made them feel good and the ones that deemed bad or poor quality. This will allow them to evaluate their

communication in the future and what will be communicated to the customer.

Training Tips: Allow participants two minutes to speak to give everyone a chance to share.

Handout #1 Provide Participant with Positive Language Worksheet

Objective:

- Learn the importance of positive language when communicating with others.
- Build a stronger understanding about the power of positive language
- The alternative terms to use to help keep even the most difficult interactions positive

Procedure:

Separate participants into groups of two or more. Pass out the handout for the day's lesson and discuss the objectives and main points of positive language. Allow groups 10 minutes to answer the questions on the worksheet. After the time has concluded, the facilitator will briefly go over the worksheet and answer any questions.

Training Tip: Keep a close eye on time to make sure all areas of Day Two are covered.

Activity #1 – Communication/Acting Skills

Times: 45 minutes

Materials: Communication Worksheet

Procedure:

Pass out worksheet for this activity. The facilitator will discuss and demonstrate communication skill expectations in the below sections (parts 1-3). Participants will then be asked to engage in an interactive activity to practice these skills with each other.

Rationale:

Participants will learn how to apply what they have learned on day one including positive

messages, patience, responsiveness and professionalism. It is important for employees to analyze the audience they serve and be able to anticipate their needs.

Suggestions to help with this activity:

A way to do this is to separate the team into groups of 2 and have them practice with each other.

Part One:

Greeting

Read your customers

Part Two:

Telephone/Voicemail Etiquette

Email

Part Three

Listening Skills

Follow-up

Teaching Tips: Give participants the opportunity to be creative. Avoid providing harsh criticism. Participants are there to learn so provide constructive feedback and positive reinforcement. Keep it fun.

Day Two

Handout #2 (to be given out to participants in their folders)

Summary Description:

Techniques and information presented on Day Two are designed to implement and practice Service Standards at the college. The objective is intended to give employee instruction on communication expectations and allow them to practice these techniques

during the sessions. The activities on Day Two incorporate lessons from Day One to help build on participants understanding and knowledge.

Activity: Communication Skills

Rationale:

According to Figliuolo (2008), hands on activities is one the best and most effective ways to get participants to retain information. Figliuolo explains that when a person sees something done first-hand or takes part in the activity, retention is much higher. This activity is designed to place individuals in a situation where they will need to be sharp and strategic. They will be challenged to be creative and realistic in their approach to remain calm, effective all while delivering excellent service.

Goal for activity #1:

The activity provides participants with instruction on how to perform daily routines such as answering the phones, listening and responding to emails. It sets the expectation for employees and allots them the opportunity to practice and incorporate the service standards in their daily activities at the college.

Instruction: All materials will be provided on day two of training. Please arrive on-time ready to learn and have some fun.

Procedure: Each person is expected to participate in the Service Standards Training.

You will be asked to get involved and speak with other members of the group about the day's lesson.

Wrap-up: The information discussed during training correlates with the service standards. A brief summary of the training will be provided to participants at the conclusion of day three. Please bring any questions you may have to the session on Day

3. You will have the opportunity to ask the facilitators and discuss with the group.

Day Two Journal Prompt: Think about today's lesson. What are your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to communicating with others? How would you rate your ability to communicate? What would you like to improve on? Please bring your response to the next session.

Day Two Timeline:

- 20 Minutes: Journal Discussion and Feedback
- 10 Minutes: Describe Activity #1
- 45 Minutes: Communication Skills Activity
- 10 minutes: Present journal prompt and the importance of the activity
- 15 + minutes: Q&A and open discussion about the day's lesson.

Day Three:

Duration: 2 Hours

Activity #1 - Service Standards – Putting yourself in other's shoes

Objective:

- Understand the people we serve
- Build a more cohesive message and enhance service at the college
- Learning how to stay calm and how to handle surprises

Procedure

Ask for two volunteers. One participant will act as an employee and the other will act as a student. Each participant will be given a cue card that will explain his or her role.

Sample Cue Card Descriptions:

PSC Employee – You work in the business office at the college as a cashier. This morning your alarm didn't sound. You were running late and on the way to work you were stopped by a train. You arrived late and as you were walking in the door of the campus, you fumbled and spilled your coffee onto the floor. You finally get settled into your seat when a student approaches your window.

PSC Student – You just received word that your Financial Aid award would not fully cover your class expenses. With little money and no help from your parents, you are forced to seek out resources to pay your tuition. You're not sure where to go or who to ask so you enter the business office to ask a staff member. You're frustrated and annoyed because this is the third office you've been to today. Approach the counter and explain what happened and ask the PSC employee about what you should do.

Teaching Tip: The scenarios are samples and are designed to place both parties in a potentially bad mood. This is to test the PSC employee's approach and it will serve as a learning moment. Feel free to modify the scenarios over time.

Rationale:

In order to provide excellent service, employees will need to understand why they are being trained and why they must perform the Service Standards. By exposing them to this interactive activity, it will teach them to be self-aware and be able to read students, staff or community members.

This will help employees prepare for difficult situations and show them how to handle situations more efficiently and professionally.

Debrief

Ask each participant what it felt like to be in that role. Explain how by putting yourself in other people's shoes can help employees understand and be more patient when dealing with students. Have the group discuss what they would have done in the situation and how it relates to the Service Standards.

Activity #2:

Webinar: Customer Service in Higher Education: Tips from Disney:

Describe the activity to participants.

Talking points:

- Do it like you mean it – Have genuine approach when dealing with others. This gives of the spirit of caring.
- Emotional Connection – Connect with students, staff and the community on a deeper level. This builds loyalty with others.
- Empowering the frontline – These employees deal with customers daily, so they will need encouraging and will need the proper tools to go the extra mile for the students.

Procedure:

Participants will view a webinar. It will then be followed by a Q&A session. They will then be provided a link to the PowerPoint and Webinar materials.

Rationale:

This will allow for participants to get tips on how to implement quality service in their daily interactions with employees, students and the college community. This will also help provide tips on how to provide excellent service at the college.

Conclusion:

By participating in the Service Standards Training, participants are exposed to customer

service techniques on how to serve the PSC students, staff and community. The training focuses on enhancing service and promoting healthier relationships among faculty, staff, administrators, students and the college community, can positively impact enrollment, the morale among employees and create an atmosphere of increased productivity.

Employees who have participated in the training will be asked to submit a survey and feedback. This will help in future trainings. Notes, worksheets and handouts will be attached to the back of the training manual. Participant will also be asked to submit a checklist showing that they understand the information they were taught during training. This will be submitted to human resources where it will be placed in their permanent file. Suggestions for materials needed during training.

- Name tags
- Giveaways
- Candy Bars
- Notepads
- Worksheets (extra copies)\

Content for Handout #1: Prairie State College Service Standards.

With the information provided, please indicate how you feel the service standards can be demonstrated at the college.

Responsive – Reacting in a timely and positive manner. _____

Courteous – Polite, respectful and considerate in manner. _____

Professional - the competence or skill expected of a professional. _____

Proficient – Competent and well advanced in an occupation. _____

Collaborative – Work jointly with others especially in an intellectual endeavor. _____

Appendix D: Evaluation Checklist for Employees

Service Standards Checklist

Communication with Students and Community Members

I will greet our students and community members in a courteous and professional manner.

I will listen effectively to requests and promptly take the necessary actions to assist students and community members.

I will keep students informed of unexpected delays in service.

I will inform our students of normal process time, when they can expect completion and any delays that may arise in the process.

I will touch base with students to update them as to where we are in the process.

I will respond to website questions/requests within 24 hours during normal business hours. This includes social media and webmaster emails)

I will conclude encounters with our students in a courteous and professional way.

Communicating with PSC Employees

I will interact with others in a courteous and professional manner.

I will work to resolve issues with coworkers and other departments by discussing problems directly and working toward agreed upon solutions.

I will be considerate, cooperative and helpful to every staff member to assure quality service.

I will hold myself accountable for addressing inappropriate comments and behavior.

Telephone Etiquette

When at my desks, I will answer the phone within two rings with the exception of

meetings or lunch break.

I will identify myself when answering the phone.

I will listen to the caller's request and assist the caller accordingly.

If I cannot assist the caller, I will direct the call to the appropriate person on campus.

Before transferring the call, I will obtain the caller's permission and provide the caller with the name and extension number of the person who will be assisting the caller.

I will obtain the caller's permission before placing the call "on hold" by asking and waiting for a response.

I will end the conversation in a courteous and professional way by thanking the caller.

Voice Mail

I will respond to voicemails within 24 hours during normal business hours.

I will update my voice mail greeting, advising callers when I will be out of the office for an extended period of time (1/2 day or longer), informing callers of when we will return and who they may contact with questions (if applicable).

E-mail

I will respond to e-mails within 24 hours during normal business hours.

I will update my e-mail notification message when I will be out of the office for an extended period of time (full day or more). I will indicate our expected return date and indicate a contact person for immediate assistance.

General

I will work to anticipate the needs of those we serve by proactively working to meet their needs.

I will be conscious of my communication style (ie; audible voice, eye contact when

speaking to someone, tone of voice) and communicate in a professional manner.

I have read and understand the above Service Standards. I also understand that it is my responsibility to comply with the standards and that my performance review will reflect my compliance.

Employee Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix E: Post Training Survey

Training Evaluation*

Instructions: Please indicate your level of agreement with the statements listed below my writing Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree.

1. The objectives of the training were clearly defined.
2. Participation and interaction were encouraged throughout the training.
3. The topics covered were relevant.
4. The content was organized and easy to follow.
5. The materials distributed were helpful and easy to understand.
6. This training experience will be useful in my work.
7. The trainer was knowledgeable about the training topics.
8. The trainer was well prepared.
9. The training objectives were met.
10. The time allotted for the training was sufficient.
11. The meeting room and facilities were adequate and comfortable.
12. What did you like most about this training? _____
13. What aspects of the training could be improved? _____

14. How do you hope to change your practice as a result of this training?

15. What additional trainings would you like to have in the future?

16. Please provide any comments and additional feedback _____

* These questions were adapted from existing survey questions used at the college.