



Republic of Mauritius

Ministry of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms

Providing Quality Counter/Customer Services



Ministry of Civil Service and Administrative Reforms

**Guidelines on
Providing Quality
Counter/Customer Services**

Putting People First

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A customer is the most important visitor on our premises.

He is not dependent on us.
We are dependent on him.

He is not an interruption of our work.
He is the purpose of it.

He is not an outsider to our business.
He is a part of it.

We are not doing him a favour by serving him.
He is doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to do so.

Mahatma Gandhi

Putting People First

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1. The vital importance of Counter/Customer Services

By its very nature, government services are essential to the development of a thriving & competitive economy and the maintenance of a stable society. Citizens and corporate bodies, as customers of the government, have a legitimate right to quality, timely and efficient public services.

The impression one gets from a Counter/Customer Service is of crucial importance as efficiency and effectiveness of the Ministry/Department, and by extension of the Civil Service, are perceived through the attitude of front-line officers, the response time and the actual service delivery.

The quest for quality & excellence in delivery of public services is a must. Indeed a quality public counter/customer service leads to satisfied customers and generates a positive image of public organizations. In line with the vision and commitment of Government to provide high quality and seamless services, public organizations should aim to provide their customers with a courteous, rapid and effective service.

2. What is a Counter/Customer Service?

A Counter/Customer Service is a front-line service where customers interact with public officers and are provided with various types of services, often essential ones such as the issue of civil status certificates, identity cards, passports, and other permits and licenses.

The ‘Improvement of Counter/Customer Services’ initiative is a key element of the government's strategy for quality services. It aims at improving the quality of service delivery by encouraging public officers to adopt a customer centric approach.

“If you do build a great experience, customers tell each other about that. Word of mouth is very powerful.”

Jeff Bezos

Founder & CEO of Amazon.com

3. A Quality Counter/Customer Service: An Integrated Approach

To offer Quality Counter/Customer Services, an integrated approach needs to be adopted at the various stages of service delivery:

- **Prior to the Counter/Service delivery**
Measures that provide customers with qualitative information and a good waiting experience.
- **At the counter/Service Delivery**
Measures for a courteous and efficient service.
- **Back office operations**
Measures for a simplified, effective and efficient processing system.

These guidelines aim at assisting public sector organizations to put in place Quality Counter/ Customer Services and constantly improve upon these.

“Everybody doing his best is not the answer. It is first necessary that people know what to do.”

W. Edwards Deming, Consultant

4. Front Office Checklist

Prior to getting the actual service delivery at counters, members of the public should be provided with appropriate and adequate facilities that contribute to the perception of obtaining a quality service.



n **Easy Accessibility**

As far as possible, Counter/Customer Services should be centrally located and be of easy access, preferably on the ground floor.

n **Directional Signs**

Colourful & clear Directional Signs, which are visually easy to understand and include colourful pictograms, should be prominently affixed and give unambiguous directions regarding where and what services are delivered.



n **Waiting Area**

Waiting areas, especially where there are a large number of customers, should be equipped with comfortable and adequate number of visitors' chairs. These areas should be kept clean and well-ventilated.



n Notice Boards

Important documents that should be prominently displayed include:

- The poster of the new 'Code of Ethics for Public Officers'.
- Extracts from the Customer / Citizens Charter of the organization pertaining to service delivery.



n Magazine Racks

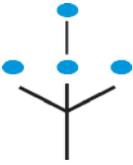
Whenever possible, light reading materials should be provided. Information regarding the various types of services offered and requirements to benefit from same should be clearly published in Citizen's/Customer Charters and customized pamphlets and brochures. These should be made available for consultation in magazine racks and properly displayed.

n Queuing System

The queuing system put in place should take into account the arrival rate of customers and the waiting area available. Appropriate crowd management techniques, depending on the type of services offered, should be resorted to.



Various queuing systems can be adopted, namely:



- one queue for one service counter
- one queue for multiple counters offering the same service
- one queue for multiple counters providing an array of services each.

As far as possible, multiple queues for various counters offering the same service(s) should be avoided to ensure a smooth flow of customers.

n **Calling System**

Where there is a large number of customers, a Calling System whereby customers are individually called to counters through numbers obtained upon their arrival, should be put in place. Numbers can be issued through electronic machines or manually at the entrance.

If the Calling System is adopted, it is important that appropriate waiting areas with adequate seating capacity be provided. Seats should be installed in such a way as to enable customers to see clearly the numbers being displayed at the counter or to hear the numbers being called by front line officers.



Advantages of this system include

- elimination of long queues at counters
- an impartial service based on the first come first serve approach.
- a comfortable waiting experience since customers remain seated while waiting for their turn

“I don’t want to stand in endless queues, filling out incomprehensible forms and coming back after lunch! You see my needs are simple. All I want is RESULTS. Give me results and I am a happy tax-paying citizen.”

Views of a citizen

5. Delivering Quality Counter Services

Front line officers posted at Counters or dealing with customers should deliver quality services in a professional manner. They should be knowledgeable about the various services provided and the activities of the organization and be in a position to effectively and efficiently attend to members of the public. They should be smartly dressed and wear nametags for easy identification by customers.

n Prior to Opening



Prior to the opening of the Counter, it is essential to ensure that the following activities are carried out before the start of each day for the smooth delivery of quality services:

- Ensure the availability, in adequate quantity, at the Counter of documents to be used such as application forms, explanatory notes, information sheets, brochures, etc.
- Check that all equipment such as date stamps are in good working order.
- Make sure that the working environment at the Counter and waiting areas are clean and well ventilated.
- Officers at the Counter should be present at least ten minutes before the Counter opening time and ensure that the Counter is opened at the specified time.



Responsible Conduct Expected

The attention of officers posted at Counters or otherwise delivering public services is drawn to the fact that it is their duty and responsibility to abide by the provisions of the “Code of Ethics for Public Officers” which stipulates *interalia* that public officers should:-

- (i) not cause embarrassment to colleagues or members of the public by their dress, speech or behaviour;
- (ii) not consume alcoholic beverages while on duty;
- (iii) not smoke where it is illegal and likely to inconvenience others;
- (iv) not harass, bully or otherwise intimidate members of the public or colleagues;
- (v) be polite and courteous towards members of the public and treat them with equity, diligence and fairness;
- (vi) help the public to understand their rights and obligations;
- (vii) respect the confidential nature of information disclosed to them by members of the public for procedural purposes.

What is a corrupt behaviour? At what point does bribery and conflict of interests arise? The law does not always tell us clearly. Often, a personal sense of responsibility and the ability of the public officer to make ethical choices must take over.

Public officers delivering public services are therefore advised to stand guided by Section 11 of the “Code of Ethics for Public Officers” which relates to “Acceptance of Gifts & Other Benefits”.

Officers dealing with members of the public are susceptible to be offered gifts and other benefits. They shall not solicit or accept gifts, rewards or benefits, which might compromise their integrity, that of their organization and the Civil Service.

A public officer shall not allow himself to be put, or appear to be put, in a position of obligation to return a favour to any person or body. According to the Prevention of Corruption Act (POCA), it is illegal for public officers to accept any gift or token or hospitality from members of the public.

Officers are strongly advised to visit the Ethics Online Corner at <http://civilservice.gov.mu> or <http://ethicscorner.gov.mu>

Good Habits/ **Bad Habits**

The following section depicts the good habits expected of counter officers and the bad habits to be avoided

GOOD HABITS

- 4 Being punctual. Having someone replace oneself at the Counter in case of lateness.



- 4 Maintaining a smart and neat appearance.
- 4 Being polite and courteous at all times, e.g receiving customers pleasantly with a smile & making them feel at ease, saying please and thank you.



- 4 Being ever ready to help, guide and assist customers e.g in filling of forms, informing them politely if forms are incorrectly filled or of missing documents. Listening with empathy.

BAD HABITS

- 8 Arriving late or making people wait before opening the Counter.
- 8 Dressing inappropriately when on duty.
- 8 Being rude to customers.



- 8 Challenging, arguing, scolding or ill-treating customers, especially if documents are not appropriately filled or important documents are missing.



- 8 Discriminating amongst customers.

GOOD HABITS

- 4 Being patient and open to suggestions and comments.
- 4 Maintaining the same positive attitude towards all customers.
- 4 Keeping a professional and high standard working atmosphere.



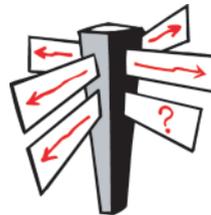
- 4 If the service is not delivered at the Counter, redirecting customers to the respective schedule officers.
- 4 Opening additional Counters or extending Counter services as and when required.

BAD HABITS

- 8 Making customers wait at the Counter while conversing with colleagues or on the phone, when on duty at Counters.



- 8 Read, eat, drink, speak and laugh loudly.
- 8 Misdirecting customers to other sections or misunderstanding



people's specific requirements.

6. Acting behind the scenes for a Quality Service

ⁿ Management as Leaders

Quality Counter/ Customer Services can be achieved through the following five easy steps:

- Step 1 : Adopting a Customer Centric Strategy
- Step 2 : Setting Performance Standards
- Step 3 : Improving Systems & Procedures
- Step 4 : Managing Human Resources
- Step 5 : Emphasizing Role of Support Staff

Step 1: Adopting a Customer Centric Strategy

Top service providers have a clear and well articulated customer service vision, outlined from both the customer's and the organization's perspectives.

The vision should be developed in consultation with front line staff for a consistent quality customer service.

A Customer Centric Strategy should take into account the specific needs of customers to develop an efficient and effective system that ensures a quality service delivery.

*Examples of customer-focused initiatives are:***n One Stop Counters**

One Stop Counters centralize all counter/Customer Services provided by various Departments /Divisions of the organization or of multiple organizations at one place. This saves members of the public time and effort as they can obtain the various services at one central location.

n Decentralization of Services

Counter/Customer Services that are decentralized and located at branch or mobile offices so as to be close to customers, easily accessible and more convenient.

n Extending service time at counters

Ensure that counters are open when a large number of customers are expected to be free, that is before the actual opening time of most offices and after office hours, during lunch time and on Saturdays, if possible.

n One Stop Bill Payment Centre

Allow customers to pay various types of bills at one place so that they do not need to go to several places to settle their bills, thus saving time and effort.



n **Enquiry Services through telephone/Internet**

Make provision for phone enquiries and queries through e-mails to be treated with due diligence and answered efficiently in a timely manner. Queries should be professionally handled through computer databases where updated records are easily accessed to provide accurate records of relevant information.

n **Hotline**

In particular, where hotlines are in place, these should be fully functional during the stated hours of operation and operators should be cordial and attend to callers properly.

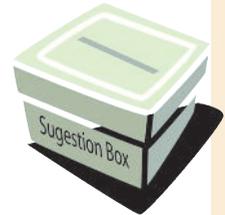
Step 2 : Setting Performance Standards

Performance standards should be set and monitored to ensure that service delivery is according to the expected standards. These service standards should be published in the Citizen's/ Customer Charter of each and every organization so as to inform customers of the various services provided, the time frame within which these will be delivered and any specific requirements to benefit from same, or any documents that should be provided, e.g identity card, photographs, etc.

An effective Feedback Mechanism should be put in place to enable citizens to evaluate the services provided and express their complaints if any, along with suggestions and overall feedback.

Feedback can be obtained through:

- Suggestion Boxes/emails
- Customer Feedback Forms
- Customer Surveys



Step 3: Systems and Procedures



Constant innovation & improvements in systems and procedures contribute towards the upgrading of the quality of Counter/ Customer Services.

Counters are to be modern in design, with PC facilities where required and adequate space for storage of working documents e.g forms.

Short procedures, easy directives, updated and simple forms that do not confuse customers are called for. Logical work processes and a conducive work environment which assist in the smooth delivery of customer-friendly and timely services are needed.

Improvements related to systems and procedures may include:

- forms which are well designed, easy to fill, and accompanied by clear guidelines.
- collection, storage, analysis and distribution of information through an efficient Management Information System.
- guidelines on procedures, work directives and check list of duties to be readily available.
- optimal use of office equipment and furniture to maintain the quality of daily work.



Step 4: Human Resource Management

The development of human resources so as to enable delivery of an excellent Counter/ Customer Service is of prime importance.

Front line officers should be properly selected and coached. They should have a pleasant personality and trained to be emotionally stable when dealing with customers, especially demanding ones. An adequate number of staff should be provided in relation to the workload.

Knowledge and skills of officers should be upgraded through customized training in areas such as Quality Service Delivery and Customer Care. They should be provided with adequate guidelines to assist them in dealing with problems or to make use of their better judgement when required.

Human Resource Development can be carried out through:

- Induction/training programmes for new officers prior to their placement.
- in-house training for existing officers.
- conducting of motivational programs for staff, for example by establishing regular communication between counter staff and management to discuss problems faced and devise ways to resolve these.
- establishing a job rotation system so as to expose staff to various areas to improve their skills and knowledge.

Step 5: Role of Support Staff



Support from staff is very important to ensure the success of the provision of Quality Counter/Customer Services.

In order to upgrade and maintain the quality of such services, support staff should:

- strive to improve their skills and knowledge in carrying out their daily responsibilities
- live up to the performance standards expected to ensure that the service provided is always up to the standard
- abide by directives and guidelines adopted
- practise an excellent work culture
- submit views and proposals to improve work environment, especially where they are directly involved.

“The achievements of an organization are the results of the combined effort of each individual.”

V. Lombardi – Football Coach, USA

7. Try the Tests

n **Is your organization a customer-friendly one?**

- Do you have clear indicative directional signs?
- Do you have in place a ticketing system?
- Are your customers provided with adequate sitting facilities while waiting?
- Do you have a courteous and helpful staff?
- Do you deliver your services within the time frame set?

n **Are you delivering Quality Customer/ Counter Services?**

- Am I always punctual at my post at the counter?
- Am I courteous, helpful and friendly?
- Do I attend to customers efficiently?
- Do I advise and redirect customers as appropriate?
- Are my customers satisfied when leaving the counter?

Always Remember:

For a citizen, the public officer behind a counter or delivering a service is the organization.

The way that a citizen is treated when applying for a service is the way he/she perceives the organization and public service delivery in general. To the public, the government is one whole.

Simple measures, such as a professional and courteous greeting, often do not require intensive investment but can work wonders in improving service delivery.

By virtue of its dynamic nature, providing quality public services is an ongoing challenge. A challenge that can be met easily if one stays tuned to the needs of the public and continuously innovates to effectively meet these needs.

“Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of intelligent effort.”

John Ruskin, Author



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June 2016