

Chapter 10: Communication Skills



IT Essentials: PC Hardware and Software v4.1

Chapter 10 Objectives

- 10.1 Explain the relationship between communication and troubleshooting
- 10.2 Describe good communication skills and professional behavior
- 10.3 Explain ethics and legal aspects of working with computer technology
- 10.4 Describe call center environment and technician responsibilities

Introduction

- Troubleshooting is as much about communicating with the customer as it is about knowing how to fix a computer.
- Learn to use good communication skills as confidently as you use a screwdriver.



Communication and Troubleshooting

- A knowledgeable technician who uses good communication skills will always be in demand in the jobs market.

As technical knowledge increases, so does ability to quickly determine a problem and find a solution.

- A technician should establish a good rapport with the customer since a relaxed customer is better able to explain the details of the problem.
- The technician has access to several communication and research tools. Any of these resources can be used to help gather information for the troubleshooting process.

Communication and Professionalism

- A technician's professionalism and good communication skills will enhance their creditability with the customer.
- Successful technicians control their own reactions and emotions from one customer call to the next.



Determine the Problem

- **Know** - Call the customer by name.
- **Relate** - Use brief communication to create a one-to-one connection between you and your customer.
- **Understand** - Determine what the customer knows about the computer to effectively communicate with the customer.
- Practice active listening skills. Listen carefully and let the customer finish speaking.
- After the customer has explained the problem, clarify what the customer has said.
- Ask some follow-up questions, if needed.
- Use all the information to complete the work order.

Holds and Transfers



Putting a customer on hold:

- Let the customer finish speaking.
- Explain that you will put the customer on hold and why.
- Ask for their permission to do so.
- Explain how long they will be on hold and what you will be doing during that time.

Transferring a customer:

- Let the customer finish speaking.
- Explain that you will transfer their call, to whom, and why.
- Tell them the number you are transferring them to.
- Ask for their permission to do so.
- Thank the customer and explain the details of the transfer.
- Tell the new technician the details of the case.

Types of Difficult Customers

Recognize traits to manage a call accordingly.

- A **talkative customer** discusses everything except the problem and uses the call to socialize.
- A **rude customer** complains during the call, makes negative comments, may be abusive and uncooperative, and may be easily aggravated.
- An **angry customer** talks loud, tries to speak when the technician is talking, is usually frustrated and upset that they have to call somebody to fix the problem.
- A **knowledgeable customer** wants to speak with a technician that is equally experienced in computers and usually tries to control the call.
- An **inexperienced customer** has difficulty describing the problem and may not be able to follow directions correctly.

Proper Netiquette

- Be pleasant and polite.
- Open with an appropriate greeting.
- Check grammar and spelling.
- Remember you are dealing with people.
- Follow the standards of behavior that you follow in the rest of your life.
- Know where you are in cyberspace.
- Respect other's time and bandwidth.
- Be ethical.
- Share expert knowledge.
- Respect the privacy of others.
- Forgive other's mistakes.
- Use mixed case lettering. All upper case lettering is considered SHOUTING.
- Never send chain letters through email.
- Do not send or reply to flames.
- If you would not say it to their face, then do not send it.

Workstation Ergonomics

- Make sure that your desk layout works well
- Have your headset and phone in a position that is easy to reach and easy to use
- Adjust your chair to a comfortable height
- Adjust your monitor to a comfortable angle
- Place your keyboard and mouse in a comfortable position
- Minimize external distractions such as noise



Time Management

- Prioritize your activities
- Follow the business policy of your company
- Make sure call back a customer as close to the callback time as possible
- Keep a list of callback customers and check them off one at a time as you complete these calls
- Avoid giving favorite customers faster or better service
- Avoid taking only the easy customer calls
- Avoid taking another technician's call unless you have their permission

Stress Management

- Take a moment to compose yourself between customer calls
- Ways to relax include:
 - Relaxed breathing
 - Listen to soothing sounds
 - Massage your temples
 - Take a break for a quick walk or to climb a flight of stairs
 - Eat a protein snack
 - Avoid stimulants



Service Level Agreements (SLA)

- A contract defining expectations between an organization and the service vendor to provide an agreed upon level of support
- A legal agreement that contains the responsibilities and liabilities of all parties involved

Service Level Agreement

4.2.4. SERVICE MONITORING

The objective of service monitoring is to effect the smooth identification (proactive) and facilitation of the resolution of incidents as they may arise during the operations. The IT services are continuously monitored by Regional IT-Operations staff and system management tools based upon the Tivoli Framework. In case of exceptions, the responsible operations staff is automatically notified.

Affected user groups will be notified (through phone or e-mail) of any incident that could affect user productivity.

In normal circumstances, the system will be attended by Regional IT operators in all working days of the serviced branches/subsidiary as defined in the SLA-addendum for each customer (see appendix).

Monitoring is performed by CSN, 24 x 7 hours, including nonworking days. In case of incidents detected the responsible Regional IT staff is notified.

4.2.5. CONTINGENCY

A backup facility or contingency site will be employed when critical intervals are reached.

The maximum time for this facility to be operational is 24 hours. During this period affected user-groups are kept informed about the progress.

Maximum loss of transaction data from the last backup window:

Contingency arrangements for:

1. hardware failures, alternative AS/400 system
2. network related problems or site disasters, alternative location

The contingency plan maintained by Regional IT-Operations defines the details of the procedures and arrangements.

4.2.6. MAINTENANCE WINDOWS

The customer is informed about planned maintenance activities and planned changes at least 1 week in advance. A change schedule is maintained and published to all involved countries.

Maintenance Window (defined in local time of the customer):

Period	Maintenance Window	Remarks
Monday - Friday (working day)	-	
Saturday	01:00 to 24:00 (local time)	Maintenance period after finishing EOD and weekend processing
Sunday	01:00 to 24:00 (local time)	

Response Time Guarantee

[Business](#) • Response Time Guarantee

- Within 3 business hours of receipt of your online request for a personalized rate quote, you will be contacted by phone by a personal loan consultant
- Business hours are 8:00 AM through 6:00 PM Central Time, Monday through Friday,

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Business Policies

Be aware of all business policies about customer calls.

- Time on call
- Time in queue
- Number of calls per day
- How to pass calls
- Promises to customer
- Follow SLA
- When to escalate



Ethics and Legal Aspects

- Respect the customers and their property including, their equipment and their data
 - E-mails
 - Phone lists
 - Records or data on the computer
 - Hard copies of files, information, or data left on desk
- Obtain customer's permission before accessing their account.
- Divulging any customer information is unethical, and may be illegal.
- What are the copyright and trademark laws in your state or country?

A Call Center

- Usually very professional and fast-paced
- A help desk system
- Customers call in and are placed on a callboard
- Available technicians take the customer calls



Help Desk Software

Uses	Software
Log and track incidents	Software to manage call queues, set call priorities, assign calls, and escalate calls
Record contacts	Software to store, edit, and recall customer information
Research products	Database of supported products, including features, limitations, versions, constraints, bugs, availability, and online help files
Run diagnostics	Diagnostic utility software, including remote access to customer's computer
Research a knowledge base	Database of common problems and their solutions
Collect customer feedback	Software to collect customer feedback

Call Prioritization

Name	Definition	Priority
Down	The company cannot operate with any computer equipment	1 (Most Urgent)
Hardware	One or more computers not functioning correctly	2 (Urgent)
Software	One or more computers have software or operating system errors	2 (Urgent)
Network	One or more computers that cannot access the network	2 (Urgent)
Enhancement	Request for additional functionality	3 (Important)

Level-one Technician Responsibilities

- Gather pertinent information from the customer
- Document all information in the ticket or work order

<input type="radio"/>	Contact information
<input type="radio"/>	What is the manufacturer and model of computer?
<input type="radio"/>	What OS is the computer using?
<input type="radio"/>	Is the computer using AC or DC power?
<input type="radio"/>	Is the computer on a network? If so, is it a wired or wireless connection?
<input type="radio"/>	Was any specific application being used when the problem occurred?
<input type="radio"/>	Have any new drivers or updates been installed recently? If so, what are they?
<input type="radio"/>	Description of the problem
<input type="radio"/>	Priority of problem

Succinct Problem Descriptions

A level-one technician succinctly documents a problem.

Customer Problem Description	Technician Documentation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Printer will not print 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The printer will print a test page, but not from an application.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mouse does not work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The user is not able to control the cursor.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot get onto the network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The user is not able to login to the network.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor is not working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor settings have been altered. No images can be seen on the screen.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer will not turn on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The computer will not boot to the Windows OS desktop.

Level-two Technician Responsibilities

- Usually more knowledgeable about technology
- May have been working for the company for a longer period of time
- Receives escalated work orders from level-one technicians
- Calls the customer back to ask any additional questions
- May use remote access software to access the customer's computer to diagnose the problem and possibly to resolve the issue

Chapter 10 Summary

- To be a successful technician, you will need to practice good communication skills with customers and coworkers. These skills are as important as technical expertise.
- You should always conduct yourself in a professional manner with your customers and coworkers. Professional behavior increases customer confidence and enhances your credibility. You should also learn to recognize the classic signs of a difficult customer and learn what to do and what not to do when you are on a call with them.
- There are a few techniques that you can use to focus a difficult customer during a call. Primarily, you must remain calm and ask pertinent questions in an appropriate fashion. These techniques keep you in control of the call.
- There is a right way and a wrong way to put a customer on hold, or transfer a customer to another technician. Learn and use the right way every time. Doing either of these operations incorrectly can cause serious damage to your company's relationship with its customers.

Chapter 10 Summary (Continued)

- Netiquette is a list of rules to use whenever you communicate through e-mail, text messaging, instant messaging, or blogs. This is another area where doing things the wrong way can cause damage to your company's relationship with its customers.
- You must understand and comply with your customer's service level agreement (SLA). If the problem falls outside the parameters of the SLA, you need to find positive ways of telling the customer what you can do for them, rather than what you cannot do. In special circumstances, you may decide to escalate the work order to management.
- In addition to the SLA, you must follow the business policies of the company. These policies will include how your company prioritizes calls, how and when to escalate a call to management, and when you are allowed to take breaks and lunch.

Chapter 10 Summary (Continued)

- A computer technician's job is stressful. You will rarely get to meet a customer who is having a good day. You can alleviate some of the stress by setting up your workstation in the most ergonomically beneficial way possible. You should practice time and stress management techniques every day.
- There are ethical and legal aspects of working in computer technology. You should be aware of your company's policies and practices. In addition, you may need to familiarize yourself with your state or country's trademark and copyright laws.
- The call center is a fast-paced environment. Level-one technicians and level-two technicians each have specific responsibilities. These responsibilities may vary slightly from one call center to another.

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