

### CUSTOMERS' BEHAVIOURAL STYLES

Do you ever wonder why you 'click' with some people and can't get on with others? Every person is different. We all behave differently, and we usually get on best with people who have a behavioural style that is similar to our own.

However, in your job, you have to deal with all sorts of customers and develop good relationships with them. You need to 'tune in' to each customer and find out what their behavioural style is, by watching and listening to what they do and say.

When you can recognise the behavioural style of each customer, you can adapt your own behaviour and create a good relationship with them.



Behavioural style	How they act	Example
<b>Assertive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confident and sure of themselves</li> <li>Say what they want in a clear, direct and polite way</li> <li>Do not bully or control other people</li> <li>Express their thoughts, feelings or opinions easily, while respecting others' points of view</li> <li>Like getting prompt attention and full information</li> </ul>	<i>'Thanks. You have been very helpful. But actually now that I've thought about it a bit more I think that the Monday night class will suit me better. Can you please book me in for that.'</i>
<b>Aggressive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tend to express their requests or opinions loudly and forcefully</li> <li>Often do not respect (care about) other people's rights and needs</li> <li>Can be impatient and not friendly</li> <li>Getting their needs met is usually more important than developing good relationships</li> </ul>	<i>'I'm not happy about that suggestion. Surley you can think of a better option. Didn't you listen to anything I said!'</i>
<b>Passive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do not make a fuss</li> <li>Often do not make their emotions, thoughts or opinions known</li> <li>May be shy and lack confidence, so their needs are not always clear</li> </ul>	<i>'Well if you think that's best, that's what I'll do.'</i>
<b>Passive-aggressive</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Often hide how they are really feeling but then take it out on others</li> <li>Body language may show that they are not really happy even if they say they are feel angry about something you have done (or not done), but not tell you. They might tell someone else later.</li> </ul>	<i>To you: 'Fine, well I suppose I'll have to join that class then.' Later to their friend: 'She was hopeless. I thought I had explained what I wanted but she just didn't seem to get it.'</i>



## OTHER BEHAVIOURS

Have you ever heard someone say ‘He’s a real extrovert.’  
‘He is always the life of the party?’

- An **extrovert** (*ex-tro-vert*) is outgoing and sociable. They get their energy from being with other people.
- An **introvert** (*in-tro-vert*) has a quieter personality. They get their energy from inside themselves.

You probably have both introverts and extroverts among your customers. A person who is an introvert might like more privacy, being spoken to more quietly or listened to more carefully while they explain their needs.

An extrovert might be happy to laugh and joke loudly, talk in a room full of people and not worry so much about their privacy.

If you know what sort of personality each customer has you can work with them more effectively.

## YOUR OWN BEHAVIOURAL STYLE

It is also useful to think about your own behavioural style. Which style from the table on the previous page do you think fits you best?

Think about how you behave when everything is going well and you are in control of the situation. Then think about how you behave when you are stressed, under pressure or not in control.

Most people behave differently when they feel stressed or under pressure.

If you feel stressed because you are worried about something at home, or are under pressure at work, or don’t feel well, this may affect the way you behave towards your customers.

## EXAMPLE

Cody is a personal trainer. He is usually quite passive and doesn’t show his emotions. He is calm and quiet with his customers.

However, Cody had a big argument with his girlfriend before he came to work this morning and is still feeling angry. This makes him quite aggressive. He speaks loudly and impatiently to one of his customers, and she complains to Cody’s manager about his rudeness and lack of concern for her needs.

Cody explains why he behaved this way and his manager says, ‘However we feel about stuff going on in our lives, we never take it out on customers.’

They expect us to stay professional. Aggressive behaviour towards customers is not acceptable.’



## DEALING WITH DIFFERENT TYPES OF BEHAVIOUR

### What works and what doesn’t

Whatever type of customer behaviour you are dealing with, think about:

#### Your language:

- ✓ Are you being polite?
- ✓ Are your words having the effect that you want?
- ✓ Is the customer responding well to what you are saying (are they nodding, smiling, staying focused on you)?

#### Your listening skills:

- ✓ Are you really hearing what the customer is trying to say?
- ✓ Are you giving them all the time they need to speak, and not interrupting?

#### Your body language:

- ✓ Is your body showing that you are relaxed and interested?
- ✓ Can the customer tell that you are really focused on them (such as eye contact, smiling, nodding, leaning towards them)?

#### Your sense of humour:

- ✓ Would the customer appreciate you having a joke with them or would it make them angry? For example, it is often not a good idea to joke with aggressive people – they might think that you are not taking them seriously.

#### How you can avoid conflict:

- ✓ Put the customer first – adapt your own behaviour if necessary
- ✓ Stay calm and polite always
- ✓ Be patient if someone is slow to explain what they want
- ✓ If a customer is angry or aggressive, listen without interrupting, then ask what you can do to help.



A customer's normal behaviour can sometimes change. For example, someone who is usually quiet and laid back (passive) may become defensive and angry (aggressive or passive-aggressive) if they feel that you don't understand what they are trying to explain.

See if you can find out why they are stressed, and try to help them relax. Be patient.

Here are some tips to improve communication between you and your customers:

Behavioural style	How they act
<b>Assertive</b>	Match the customer's behaviour – be open and honest like they are Use clear, direct questions to quickly understand their needs Give them all the information they need as fully and quickly as possible
<b>Aggressive</b>	Stay calm even if the customer is threatening, angry or impatient Use active and reflective questioning and listening skills to give them a chance to say everything they want to Listen, paraphrase and find a solution Ask for management help if you feel that you cannot cope with the customer's behaviour
<b>Passive</b>	Use open-ended questions to keep the customer talking so you can fully understand what they want Be animated and assertive yourself – even try joking – to encourage them to 'open up' but don't overdo it
<b>Passive-aggressive</b>	Use your listening and questioning skills to make sure you find out everything the customer wants to say. It is better that they say it to your face than behind your back! If the customer seems upset or concerned, find out why they are upset, then act quickly to fix the situation. Remain positive and friendly

It is important to provide great service even if you have customers who are slow at making decisions, angry, confused, impatient or just too friendly. Your job is to stay professional and polite no matter how a customer behaves.

Type of customer	What you can do
<b>Slow</b>	Stay calm and patient. Ask questions to find out why they are taking time to make a decision. Give them time alone – say you will be back in 2 minutes to see how they are getting on. This will give you to a chance to deal with other customers.
<b>Confused</b>	Stay calm and patient. Tell them they can take information away and make a decision when they are ready. Ask if they need more information to help them make up their mind.
<b>Angry</b>	Stay calm and patient – don't get angry like the customer. Ask open questions to try and find out what the problem is. Keep your body language relaxed so they might copy you. If you feel threatened, ask a senior staff member to deal with the customer.
<b>Impatient</b>	Use open body language to calm them down. Show that you are focused on helping meet their need. Work as quickly and efficiently as you can. Explain what you are doing so they understand how long something might take.
<b>Too friendly</b>	Keep your personal space comfortable for you – move away if a customer feels too close. Remain professional – only talk about the customer's needs and your work, not personal matters. Never give out personal details such as your phone number or email address.



## KEY POINTS

- A person's behavioural style means the way they act
- When you can recognise the behavioural style of each customer, you can adapt your own behaviour and create a good relationship with them
- If you know what sort of personality each customer has you can work with them more effectively
- Every customer is an individual. Don't judge their behaviour and personality until you have found out a little about them. A person you label as 'aggressive' may just be having a bad day – they may usually be very calm and easygoing (relaxed)
- If you are having a bad day, customers should not be able to see that you are stressed, however you might feel on the inside.

## WORDS TO REMEMBER

**Similar** *Alike, related*

**Behavioural** (bee-hayv-yor-ill) *Actions, ways of behaving*

**Assertive** *Clear and confident*

**Prompt** *Quick, without delay*

**Aggressive** *Forceful, pushy, angry*

**Passive** *Not active, quiet*

**Emotions** *Feelings*

**Situation** (sit-yu-ay-shin) *Place, time, condition*

**Conflict** *Argument, disagreement, clash*

**Animated** *Lively, active, energetic*

**Defensive** *Distrustful, suspicious of what you are saying*

How do **you** change with stress? This activity will help you think more about yourself and how you behave when you are stressed.

Write down three things that your manager or a workmate might notice about your behaviour at work if you are under stress. For example, When I am stressed I can't be bothered smiling at customers.

If you are not sure, ask a workmate what they notice is different about you when you are stressed, then write down what they say. Once you know how you behave when you are stressed, you can make sure you address it.

### When I am stressed I:

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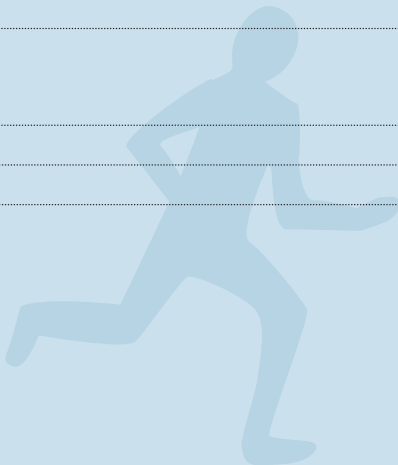
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This fact sheet will be useful when you are being assessed for: **Unit Standard 376** *Employ customer service techniques to accommodate customer behavioural styles in a workplace* (Level 3, 2 credits), or in any workplace where you have regular contact with customers.

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