

STANDARDS AND PRINCIPLES OF THE CUSTOMER SERVICE

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ABSTRACT

Standards and principles of the customer service, their working out and implementing in the Power Plant in Częstochowa, both while it functioned as the independent entity i.e. joint-stock company and also after the consolidation as the Enion S.A. branch, were one of more essential actions being aimed at a completion of the company policy in order to get the satisfying level of the electrical energy consumers' service in the Częstochowa region.

1. INTRODUCTION

The rules and procedures of acting in contacts with customers were worked out with the participation of specialist companies such as Office of Examinations and Public Analyses in Lublin. Trainings and workshops are being organized systematically with their help for individual groups of the Czestochowa Power Plant employees considering the specificity of their work e.g. by dividing it for the customer service in the field - in their flats, houses, companies and those visiting our offices. The extensive manuals of acting in various situations appearing every day in the relation between Czestochowa Power Plant employees and customers arose as well as some sets of principles and standards as a result of those trainings and workshops.

Till 2004 the system for customer service in the Czestochowa Power Plant was based on the principle of fitting the service to competence structure of appropriate departments of Energy Areas. It was undoubtedly comfortable for existing organizational structures, but not very legible and not very comfortable for the customers. In the end various categories of customers had to find their way to different departments of the Area in order to settle their matters. It made them get to know the of competence structure

of the Plant and „walks” around different rooms of the Areas. Moreover the existence of the Energy Trade Offices caused the additional confusion. Independently of their name these offices were noticed by enquirers as offices of the customer service. In the situation when they weren't able to serve of peculiar needs, they could be perceived as ineffective and bureaucratic structures (sending out customers to different rooms).

As a result an idea of creating the Customer Service Office (BOK) - one structure serving front office function i.e. the office acting as “interface” between Area and various categories of customers. The idea was to create one place where appropriately prepared staff have competence and possibilities to answer all (or of almost all) issues the customers are questioning the Area.

BOKs came into existence in all Czestochowa Power Plant Areas at the beginning of 2004 and those in the fundamental way influenced settling properly the issues of the customers who question our branches.

The following scope of the service carried out in the Customer Service Office was accepted.

- all causes connected with accounting for the amount due for the electric energy (issuing bills, accepting states of meters, accepting customer complaints concerning bills etc)
- accepting and the service (in the meaning of the contact with the customer) of technical complaints (including complaints which concern functioning of measuring devices)
- concluding (and „transferring”) contracts for the selling the electric energy
- giving and accepting applications for technical conditions of connecting, accepting conditions
- concluding contracts for connecting and taking appropriate fees due

- accepting letters and applications from customers
- if necessary: direct customer service in the range of the vindication of the amounts due

Accepted organizational answers were a result of not only reflections of participants of workshops and trainings the staff but also the practice action of many different power plants. From now all customers are being waited on at distinguished and specially marked rooms without the necessity of “walking” over different rooms and floors of Areas.

BOKs became the separate organizational structure within the Energy Area with their own staff and the manager. BOK workers constitute the homogeneous team specialized in supporting all issues the customers are coming with to the Area.

In order to concentrate the whole customer service in BOK, certain competences were transferred to their staff in the scope of representing the Plant. That refers in particular to two spheres:

- contracts for the selling the energy - are being signed e.g. by the serving worker and the BOK manager
- contracts for connecting - unless they involve the expansion of the network (execution by the Plant) – they are also being signed by both the BOK worker and manager and then in more compound cases (and of higher intrinsic value) - by the BOK manager and the right person from the management of the Area.

BOK functioning in this form required fitting processes of settling of concrete matters to the proposed model of the service. That referred first of all to building effective systems of the information flow between BOK workers and those who are responsible for the accomplishment of determined problems of departments of the Area. An accurate definition of the classification and competence of the staff for the customer service was also important; they would be wide enough so the other departments did not have to copy contacts with the customer carried out already into the BOKs.

At present convenience of the customer got in the case is an essential criterion of the efficiency of the system. Systematic trainings improving the quality level of the customer service also help that. They concern both the organization of the service itself and its psychological aspects.

The idea of professional customer service is among others need that the staff understand themselves that is to make themselves aware what features of the personality support the efficient and professional service. BOK workers were explained that a positive thinking, a faith in their own abilities and also an assertiveness are extremely useful in their work. From the other side understanding the customer by the serving staff is essential. They must know the principles of the effective interpersonal communication (verbal communication - the identification of main obstacles in the verbal communication, the ability of the presentation in the contact with the customer, test of understanding; – non-verbal communication; its meaning, the body language, essential standards of the transmission and interpretation of its content, the organization of physics working conditions and caring about the own appearance as important ways of building the impression of the professionalism up; listening skills), draw action which will let them identify and meet the customer needs.

Taking control of appropriate techniques of behaviours is a result of understanding basic human sources of behaviours.

A wide range of the training brought effects in the form of:

- understanding meaning of the customer service quality and their role in building the corporate image
- mastering practical abilities and the reactions connected with the professional customer service
- understanding psychological conditioning occurring in the process of the service

- understanding psychological sources of different behaviours of consumers
- self-reflection on their own conditioning in the contact with the customer
- understanding principles and mechanisms ruling the interpersonal communication
- taking control of mechanical abilities which help the communication with the customer

The effectiveness of these teaching processes and the service level were being checked among others through organizations of competitions for the best Office (BOK) or dispatcher in 2002-2006. Exquisitely important element testing the effectiveness of training both enforcing standards and principles of the customer service was examining carried out by the Pentor Institute of Examining the Opinion and the Market in December 2005 which studied the satisfaction of Enion Czestochowa branch customers. The final study from this examination clearly shows areas and the scope of actions which are necessary to improve the service level in concrete areas of contacts with customers.

E.g. in March 2004 the instruction was directed first of all to those workers who dealt with the direct customer service at the Czestochowa Power Plant offices. The consumers of the material were first of all those workers involved in the service of customers coming to a District Power Plant in such matters as: concluding a contract for selling the energy, complaints of bills, settlements, technical customer complaints or connecting. However at the same time many of presented contents concerned practically all the Czestochowa Power Plant workers who have anything to do with customers of the company.

2. INSTRUCTION

This instruction consists of two chapters.

Part I - Principles of the customer service - presents crucial values the workers of the customer service should be guided by. They are the base for building determined standards of behaviours.

These principles are presented in two presentations:

1. Essential rules of the customer service, building premises of the workers behaviours
2. Charter of the customer rights – determining the customer rights the company wants to obey and to subordinate the way of service to them .

Part II - Standards of behaviours of customer service staff - it described in detail required behaviours of the staff. They execution is a practical use of the principles determined in the previous part.

Standards of behaviours are described in three spheres:

- A. Standards of behaviours in the direct service process
- B. Standards of behaviours in the telephone service
- C. Standards of the organization and the appearance of a place of work

Patterns of behaviours concerning the customer service in so-called contingencies were also described. The contingency is understood as every event which differs from the routine customer service and is connected with grudges, reservations or expressing the different type of the displeasure of the customer at the course of the service.

Of course each such an event is different as it refers to different issue. It would be hard to build precise standards of the behaviour in these situations. Modus operandis describing the method of acting in difficult situations were given. E.g. recommended modus operandis were presented in the following situations being able to trigger the crisis (problems, conflicts) in the customer service:

- I. Service of proposed customer complaints and reservations concerning the quality of the service
- II. Service of the nervous or aggressive customer
- III. Customer service in the situation where the customer tries to use the bribery

IV. Service of the customer trying to manipulate emotions of the mercy and the moral fault of the staff.

A project to improve the service of the customer in our offices was one of prepared documents. Its purpose and main project guidelines was to improve the quality of customer service through appropriate preparing the staff of the direct contact with the customer and the study and enabling to enforce standardized and high standards of the customer service provided in BOKs. An essential advantage of this project was that it took root strongly in numerous development experiences in a few power plants. Training variants were realized in 8 power plants. Essential rules of the customer service were established

1. The customer is most important - there are no bad customers.
2. Treat every customer like the expected guest.
3. Propose favourable solutions, let the customer choose.
4. Respect the customer time - fulfil obligations.
5. Listen to the customer actively.
6. Understand the customer point of view
7. Give the information to the customer.
8. Admit to mistakes, apologise.
9. Act on behalf of the company; take the responsibility for it.
10. Do more than the customer expects, promise less, do more

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