

***Public Service Guide  
Challenging Interactions  
Module 2***



**National Contact Center  
New Hire Challenge Training**

OTED Training

### Instructor Preparation

**Visual:**

This lesson is accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation.

**Instructor Preparation:**

- Be able to access all references.
- Post PowerPoint presentation in the online training platform used.
- Ensure that platform has sufficient capacity for all trainees.
- If training is conducted in person, ensure that the room has the necessary projector and audio guidelines.

**Materials accompanying this lesson include:**

PowerPoint Presentation

Participant Guide

### Lesson Plan

#### PG 1

**Duration:** 3 hours

**Audience:** This lesson is intended for newly hired Public Contact Representatives (PCRs) within VBA's National Call Centers (NCCs) however, it is also suitable for any new or experienced VA employee desiring information on this subject.

**Purpose:** This lesson provides VA employees assisting the public an opportunity to refresh their knowledge on this topic. It fulfills the training requirement for experienced Public Contact Representatives.

#### slide 2

**Objectives:** Review the lesson objectives and assure students they will have opportunities to practice what they learn.

Upon completing this lesson, trainees will be able to:

- Understand the nature of difficult conversations and what it takes to handle them.
- Identify seven stages of handling difficult conversations.
- Use empathy in a way that minimizes negative responses and strengthens relationships.
- Apply best practices for preparing, initiating, and delivering conversation.

#### slide 3

- Discover how to generate solutions and bring the conversation to a close.
- Understand how to cope with responses.
- Identify and use different call control techniques.
- Understand and identify callers.
- Recognize and use different types of call center agent traits.

### Lesson Content

slide 4 | PG 2

## Introduction to Difficult Conversations

Difficult conversations are inevitable in any workplace. These types of conversations can create unhappiness, stress, and tension. It is impossible to avoid these kinds of conversations, but you can learn how to handle them more effectively.

slide 3

## Conversations You May Find Difficult

- Delivering bad news, such as discussing a previously denied claim for benefits or payment reductions due to debt.
- Supporting a Survivor when they are reporting the death of a Veteran
- Giving people negative feedback
- Saying “no” when people ask you to do something you are unable or unwilling to do
- Asking people to do something unpleasant, difficult, or outside the scope of their responsibility
- Acknowledging mistakes, you have made.

slide 6

## Why These Conversations Are Difficult

- Fear of hurting people's feelings, making them angry or upset, disappointing them, not being liked, or not being respected.
- Feeling of being powerless or not being in control of the situation
- Fear of being unable to provide the necessary emotional support during an interaction.
- Fear of embarrassing yourself or being seen to fall short in terms of your responsibilities or in some other way.

- A reluctance to engage in conflict.

### slide 7

#### **Tips to Handle Difficult Conversations**

- Prepare yourself.
- Offer empathy, as appropriate.
- Make sure you know what you want to achieve.
- Deliver the message promptly and clearly.
- Focus on the facts and tell the truth.

### slide 8

- Ask questions and try to see the situation from the other person's point of view.
- Listen actively, empathize, and acknowledge, respect, and validate the other person's feelings.
- Don't take people's reactions personally.
- Stay calm and manage your own feelings.

### slide 9 | PG 3

#### **Stages of a Difficult Conversation**

There are six stages to handling a difficult conversation:

- Stage 1: Prepare for the Conversation
- Stage 2: Initiate the Conversation
- Stage 3: Deliver the Message
- Stage 4: Listen and Respond
- Stage 5: Explore alternatives and solutions, if appropriate
- Stage 6: Close the Conversation

### slide 10

#### **Preparing for the Difficult Conversation**

Difficult conversations nearly always go better when you take the time to prepare. Preparation can be focused on individual, high-impact situations, or can be used to be prepared for the various types of difficult conversations you will have in your role as a PCR. Preparing helps you:

- Feel less stress and tension.
- Provide support to your callers.
- Get the message across clearly and tactfully.

- Cope with your emotions
- Be ready for possible responses.

### slide 11

#### **Questions to Prepare for a Difficult Conversation**

Preparing for a difficult conversation requires careful thinking about questions such as these:

- What's the situation? Do you have enough information to understand it fully?
- What are the facts? What assumptions are you making?
- What are the stakes for you and the other person?
- What do you think the other person's point of view might be?

### slide 12

#### **Knowledge Check**

### slide 13

*List some of the tips discussed regarding how to handle difficult conversations.*

- Prepare yourself.
- Offer empathy, as appropriate.
- Make sure you know what you want to achieve.
- Deliver the message promptly and clearly.
- Focus on the facts and tell the truth.
- Ask questions and try to see the situation from the other person's point of view.
- Listen actively, empathize, and acknowledge, respect, and validate the other person's feelings.
- Don't take people's reactions personally.
- Stay calm and manage your own feelings.

### slide 14

*What are the six stages of difficult conversations?*

- Prepare for the Conversation
- Initiate the Conversation
- Deliver the Message

- Listen and Respond
- Explore alternatives and solutions, if appropriate
- Close the Conversation

### slide 15

*Provide the five ways preparing for a difficult conversation can help.*

- Feel less stress and tension.
- Provide support to your callers.
- Get the message across clearly and tactfully.
- Cope with your emotions
- Be ready for possible responses.

### slide 16| PG 4

## Introduction to Empathy

Empathy is the experience of understanding another person's condition from their perspective. You place yourself in their shoes and feel what they are feeling. Empathy helps develop the trust and understanding needed to make difficult conversations more productive and helpful to both parties.

### slide 17

## Advantages of Empathy

There are many benefits to expressing empathy which directly contribute to a more positive experience for all callers. There are five advantages of empathy.

- A Better Understanding of People
- Noticing Things that are Unsaid.
- Dealing Easily with Conflict
- Invoking Empathy
- Predicting Action and Reaction

### slide 18

## A Better Understanding of People

Customer Service is all about people. If you better understand the people you support, you can provide a higher level of support and service. Practicing empathy every day will help you do that.

### slide 19

## Noticing Things that are Unsaid.

Callers may not always clearly communicate their needs and feelings. Based on their situation, voice, and tone, you should be able to utilize probing questions and support to determine what motivated them to call and how you can help.

### slide 20

#### ***Dealing Easily with Conflict***

When you understand what is unsaid, you can address it and make callers feel heard – which is the first step towards resolving conflict.

### slide 21

#### ***Invoking Empathy***

There are a lot of hard conversations in customer service. Lack of empathy will make the caller mistrust your intentions.

When you can understand their motivation and point of view, it gets much easier to gain their trust and convince them of yours.

### slide 22

#### ***Predicting Action and Reaction***

You will be able to predict a caller's follow up questions and proactively answer them. You will be able to predict what they will feel when you provide your answer. You will also be able to understand what is holding them back from implementing an alternate solution. Knowing these things will make the conversation much easier.

### slide 23

#### **Empathy within Customer Service**

Customer service professionals can struggle with appropriately using empathy to support their callers, which can greatly impact the experience of those they serve.

### slide 24 | PG 5

#### **Empathetic Positivity**

Being empathetic to the first customer of the day is easy. But to treat the last customer of the day in the same way you treated the first customer, you need to remain positive and motivated.

### slide 26

#### **Maintaining Empathetic Positivity**

- Observe yourself for a week noting time you feel a positive or negative emotion.
- What even triggers the emotion? What were you able to do to move past these feelings?

By doing this, it will give you a clear idea of what to avoid and how to better manage your emotions.

### slide 27

## Understand Your Customer Base

When you don't understand or respect the thoughts and views of your callers, it's easy to think that they are overreacting to a simple problem. It's hard to mask those thoughts and act as if you are empathetic – your callers will recognize this is occurring and will lose trust in you. It is critical that you view each interaction with callers from the appropriate perspective. Veterans, Survivors, and their families are reaching out to us for support in accessing the benefits and services that were earned due to the Veteran's service to this country. It is our honor and responsibility to provide the necessary support and service to assist these individuals.

### slide 28

## Get Feedback from Your Peers

If you are struggling with specific interactions, it may be helpful to connect with a peer who has more experience and can provide you with suggestions for ways to improve how you communicate with callers.

The important thing to remember here is to receive the feedback with an open mind.

### slide 29

## Actively Listen

- Let your customers talk and actively listen to what they are saying.
- Do not jump to conclusions.
- Do not offer a solution before they can finish telling you about the problem.

### slide 30| PG 6

## Keep Your Attitude in Check

Your job is not to be right. Your job is to help the caller – regardless of how the issue was created. It is important to never place blame for an issue. Instead, focus on the necessary actions to resolve the issue or concern, and acknowledge the impact the issue is having on the caller. This approach will help to create an environment where you and your caller can work together to find a solution.



### slide 31

#### **Give People the Benefit of the Doubt**

- Remember it's not personal.
- They may have recently experienced the loss of a loved one.
- Maybe they are having a bad day.
- Maybe they have a personal problem.

Approach each call with the goal of meeting the needs of the caller while providing a positive experience.

### slide 32

#### **Make Callers a Part of the Solution**

There will be times you think the customer is being unreasonable.

In such cases, ask them what they think the right solution is and for their recommendations on how we can provide support. This will give them a chance to put themselves in your shoes instead of being against you. Once you have this information, you can have a conversation about what is possible, how you can assist, and the next steps to reach resolution.

Many times, callers will suggest solutions that may not seem possible, i.e., my claim needs to be done today. While this statement seems unreasonable at first glance, you must determine if there are extenuating circumstances that should be considered. For example, maybe the individual is in danger of becoming homeless unless their claim is resolved today. To ensure a successful interaction, you must acknowledge the caller's expectations and engage them in the solution of their issue concern. Forging ahead based on assumptions, without effectively communicating with the caller, will lead to unsuccessful interactions and negative experiences for the caller.

### slide 33

#### **Be Curious about Your Customer**

Customers hate being treated like they have been figured out when they never had a chance to explain.

Once they go from being on the offensive to revealing helpful information, they become much easier to talk to.

### slide 34

#### **Always be Respectful.**

Always greet the customer with their name. It's easy to forget manners when the conversation is taking a bad turn and has been going on for a long time.

### slide 35

#### **When there is a Language Barrier**

When talking to someone who comes from a different culture or country, things can be lost in translation.

Be careful in these situations and try to make yourself as clear as possible, while remaining respectful.

### slide 36

#### **Respond to Customers Tone**

Always respond to the customer's tone while maintaining a professional demeanor.

Matching the customer's tone can be very helpful in building trust and acceptance during an interaction.

### slide 37 | PG 7

#### **Do not assume, ask.**

Do not assume that callers would not know the simplest solution.

If you assume, not only will the resolution be delayed, but the caller will also feel like they are being rushed.

### slide 38

#### **Take Their Side when they are right.**

Don't be afraid to take their side and identify issues when they are presented. Callers will respect and trust you more if you are willing to acknowledge when errors have been identified. This will provide more support for the approach you are recommending for resolution.

### slide 39

#### **Utilize Empathy Appropriately**

The most important thing to remember when you are expressing empathy is ensure your comments are appropriate based on the situation. When someone is very upset about a situation or issue, using the appropriate empathetic statement can go a long way to improving the interaction.

Changes in the way you express empathy can go a long way in making the customer feel valued.

slide 40

### Knowledge Check

slide 41

*What are the advantages to empathy?*

- **A Better Understanding of People**
- **Noticing Things that are Unsaid.**
- **Dealing Easily with Conflict**
- **Invoking Empathy**
- **Predicting Action and Reaction**

slide 42

*True or False:*

*Being empathetic to the first customer of the day is easy. But maintaining that can be difficult.*

**TRUE**

Being empathetic to the first customer of the day is easy. But to treat the last customer in the same way you treated the first customer, you need to remain positive and motivated.

slide 43

### Introduction to Conversation

A conversation is an interactive communication between two or more people. The development of conversational skills and etiquette is an important part of socialization.

slide 44

### Best Practices for Building a Collaborative Conversation

- Let the person know you want to talk and are happy to provide support.
- Set the stage—approach the conversation in a collaborative and open manner, reducing conflict and stress.
- Engage with the caller throughout the conversation avoiding dead airtime and lack of response to information and questions raised by the caller.

slide 45| **PG 8**

### Best Practices for Delivering Difficult Messages

- Be clear and specific and focus on the facts.
- Give examples when possible.
- Be sincere, tell the truth, and provide accurate information.
- If you need more information about the situation, ask questions.
- Allow the other person the chance to ask questions; answer them honestly and briefly, and if you are not able to disclose the information, explain why.

#### slide 46

- Take responsibility when warranted: don't blame others or try to justify your actions.
- Reframe the situation in a positive light, if appropriate, but don't lie.

#### slide 47

##### ***Staying Focused***

- Clear your mind.
- Remain engaged in the conversation.
- Focus on one idea.
- Ignore distractions—other conversations, ringing phones, unrelated concerns, etc.

#### slide 48

##### ***Capturing the Message***

- Be aware of the caller's tone.
- Be open-minded—respect the caller's feelings and point of view, even if you think they may be wrong.
- Avoid making assumptions about what the caller thinks, wants, or feels.
- Seek to understand the person's perspective on and feelings about the situation.
- Avoid telling the person what you think they should do—you want to help them come to their own conclusions.
- Extract the main ideas.

#### slide 49

##### ***Helping the Caller***

- Encourage the caller by acknowledging their comments/statements
- Help a caller who's lost their train of thought by saying "You were just saying..." or "I think you also wanted to say something about..."
- Avoid interrupting the caller.

- Allow for moments of silence—remember that it can be difficult for someone to get their message across.
- Stay calm; be aware of your own feelings—if you feel angry or upset, take a deep breath to relax and get your emotions under control.
- Avoid over-explaining, over-apologizing, and arguing.

slide 50 | PG 9

### **Best Practices for Listening and Responding**

The key to listening and responding in a difficult conversation is to pay attention, focus on the speaker, show that you are interested and sincerely care, and keep an open mind.

slide 51

### **Knowledge Check**

slide 52

**Provide the four ways to stay focused.**

- Clear your mind.
- Make eye contact but be careful not to stare or appear menacing.
- Focus on one idea.
- Ignore distractions—other conversations, ringing phones, unrelated concerns, etc.

slide 53

*The key to listening and responding in a difficult conversation is to pay attention, focus on the speaker, show that you are interested and sincerely care, and keep an open mind is?*

Best Practices for Listening and Responding

slide 54

**Provide at least three ways of capturing the message.**

- Be aware of the caller's tone.
- Be open-minded—respect the caller's feelings and point of view, even if you think they may be wrong.
- Avoid making assumptions about what the caller thinks, wants, or feels.

- Seek to understand the person's perspective on and feelings about the situation.
- Avoid telling the person what you think they should do—you want to help them come to their own conclusions.
- Extract the main ideas.

### slide 55

#### **Tips for Coping with Responses**

Many difficult conversations include a discussion of alternatives and solutions for resolving an issue or problem. Let's look at how you can make those discussions as productive as possible.

### slide 56

#### **General Strategies**

- Stay calm, take a deep breath, and manage your own emotions.
- Acknowledge and respect the person's feelings.
- Let the person express his or her feelings, opinions, and ideas.
- Show empathy.

### slide 57

#### **Specific Strategies**

- *If the person is angry:* Allow them to "vent," and let him or her know that it's okay to be angry.
- *If the person is in tears:* Wait quietly until they are ready to continue the conversation and acknowledge their feelings: "I can see that you're upset...."
- *If the person is frustrated:* Acknowledge and empathize with their feelings: "This must be very frustrating for you...."

### slide 58

- *If the person shows resistance:* Empathize, focus on facts, and offer evidence. "I understand you would like to have your claim completed today, but let me explain what additional actions are needed before we are ready to make a decision..."
- *If the person is passive:* Ask questions: "Would you like to tell me how this situation is impacting you so I can ensure we are addressing all aspects of the problem?"

### slide 59 | PG 10

#### **Tips for Exploring Alternatives**

- Make sure that you and the other person have the same understanding of the issue or problem.
- Try to see the situation from the other person's point of view and identify his or her interests, needs, concerns, positions, and objectives.
- Show empathy—let the person know you understand why resolving the issue is important to him or her.
- Be aware of your feelings about the situation. If you feel angry, resentful, or upset, take a deep breath, step back, and look at the facts.

### slide 60

- Identify what's important to you and what is non-negotiable.
- Have a collaborative attitude and seek a mutually satisfactory resolution.
- Work with the other person to generate possible alternatives and solutions.

### slide 61

#### **Best Practices for Closing the Conversation**

- Avoid letting the conversation drag out: Look for signs of a natural ending where the message has been delivered and received.
- Clarify next steps and actions that each of you can agree to take.
- Look for ways to end on a positive note.
- Offer the person the chance to add anything that may have been missed.

### slide 62

#### **Knowledge Check**

### slide 63

#### ***Provide the General Strategies Discussed.***

- Stay calm, take a deep breath, and manage your own emotions.
- Acknowledge and respect the person's feelings.
- Let the person express his or her feelings, opinions, and ideas.
- Show empathy.

### slide 64

What were the best practices discussed for closing the conversation?

- Avoid letting the conversation drag out: Look for signs of a natural ending where the message has been delivered and received.
- Clarify next steps and actions that each of you can agree to take.
- Look for ways to end on a positive note.
- Offer the person the chance to add anything that may have been missed

slide 65| PG 11

### Introduction to Call Control

While it's important to be sensitive to the needs of the caller, it's also important that calls are handled in an efficient and effective manner to ensure all callers receive timely support. Taking control of a customer service call while remaining polite is one of the trickier skills a good customer service representative should have in his or her arsenal. It requires finding the right balance between honoring time management concerns and making sure an upset, overly talkative customer feels taken care of.

slide 66

### Start the Call Right

- Take every opportunity to keep the conversation focused on finding and implementing a solution.
- Make sure to keep your end of the conversation brief and to the point.
- Once the problem, solution, and needed actions are determined, start wrapping up the call.

slide 67

### Overly Persistent Caller

For overly persistent callers, be sure to put the caller on hold. This provides a few moments to organize thoughts and figure out the best way to approach wrapping up the call effectively. It also provides a second opportunity to re-establish the tone of the call and assert greater control over the situation.

As a customer service representative, it's useful to approach most situations with an accommodating demeanor, but it's just as important to have the capability to shift into a more take control attitude from time to time, steer the conversation in the right direction, and take control of the conversation to resolve issues efficiently.

slide 68



### 7 Tips for Better Call Control

- Make sure the caller's problem and desired solution are stated as early in the call as possible.
- Have specific questions prepared for callers who have issues explaining the problem.
- Use close-ended questions — questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no".
- Always wait for a pause in the conversation to redirect the conversation, don't interrupt the caller.
- Be sure to stay on topic and have the end solution in mind. This will set the tone for the entire phone call.
- Maintain a positive and professional demeanor, offering clear and concise responses.
- Quickly wrap up calls in a pleasant tone.

slide 69

### Knowledge Check

slide 70

*Provide three ways on how to start the call off right.*

- Take every opportunity to keep the conversation focused on finding and implementing a solution.
- Make sure to keep your end of the conversation brief and to the point.
- Once the problem, solution, and needed actions are determined, start wrapping up the call.

slide 71

*Provide the 7 tips for better call control.*

- Make sure the caller's problem and desired solution are stated as early in the call as possible.
- Have specific questions prepared for callers who have issues explaining the problem.
- Use close-ended questions — questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no".
- Always wait for a pause in the conversation to redirect the conversation, don't interrupt the caller.
- Be sure to stay on topic and have the end solution in mind. This will set the tone for the entire phone call.

- Maintain a positive and professional demeanor, offering clear and concise responses.
- Quickly wrap up calls in a pleasant tone.

slide 72| PG 12

### Introduction to Identifying Caller Types

Typically, customer service agents are responsible for managing telephone interactions for hours per day five days a week. This task can be exhausting, especially because every interaction you handle comes with unique challenges. Call center agents must therefore know how to identify each customer and adapt accordingly to ensure a smooth interaction.

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### 5 Types of Callers

- The irate caller
- The talkative caller
- The mistaken caller
- The elitist caller
- The positive caller

slide 74

#### ***The Irate Caller***

- Known for their anger that explodes as soon as you pick up the phone. Some of them may be fuming even before they begin their interaction with your call center.
- Some may only be annoyed at the start of the call but get increasingly aggravated with every unanswered inquiry, unnecessarily long hold times, and call transfers.
- The key to interacting with this kind of customer is to be calm throughout the call. The trouble will only escalate if you let your own irritation and impatience take over the conversation.

### slide 75| PG 13

#### ***The Talkative Caller***

Talkative customers can be very challenging to manage while maintaining a high level of performance and customer experience. These customers tend bring up topics unrelated to the issue they're discussing with agents or bring up excessive personal information that can lead to unnecessarily long calls.

To maintain control over the conversation with a chatty caller, focus on the reason for the call and the resolution of the issue/concern. Should the conversation digress from the topic, politely redirect the discussion back to the main issue.

### slide 76

#### ***The Mistaken Caller***

This type of customer insists that they know more than you do, but in fact, they may be misinformed. So, when given a solution, they might not believe you immediately. This may make it difficult for agents to work in a collaborative manner to find a resolution.

Telling them outright that they're wrong can easily anger them, so you must navigate the conversation in a manner that provides the correct information while respecting their viewpoint. Be careful not to come off as high and mighty. Be polite as you explain to customers how the solutions you recommend can help them better.

### slide 77

#### ***The Elitist Caller***

Elitist callers don't like dealing with frontline agents, as they think that the problem, they're facing is too special or too complex for employees to handle. Thus, they will either ask for a supervisor immediately or, after explaining things to them, you may hear them say, "I want to talk to your supervisor" instead of giving your recommended solutions a shot.

When handling this type of customer, assert that you are qualified to fix their issues, but do so in a polite manner. If the problem can be solved without a manager's intervention, inform them that it's not advisable to escalate the call to a supervisor. Make sure, however, that you can thoroughly address their issues. If the caller continues to demand a supervisor after completing the necessary de-escalation activities, transfer the caller to the supervisor queue for additional support.

### slide 78

#### ***The Positive Caller***

This type of customer is the best one there is. They are friendly customers who just want to get their problems fixed.

### slide 79

#### **Knowing Your Caller**

It's important for call center representatives to know how to handle callers with varying personalities to ensure that interactions will go smoothly. Be intuitive and adapt an effective strategy in handling different types of callers. That way, you can keep all callers happy and confident in you.

### slide 80 | PG 14

#### **Talking to a Grieving Caller**

Grief can feel incredibly lonely and overwhelming. The passing of someone is difficult to talk about and using kind words and a compassionate response tone can help the Survivor feel heard and valued during these conversations.

Although you may not have gone through the same circumstances your caller is dealing with, you can still empathize with them. Do your best to see the situation and interaction from the Survivor's perspective.

### slide 81

#### **Tips on Talking to a Grieving Caller**

- Acknowledge the death and offer an empathetic statement to the caller.
- Don't simply say you are sorry. Acknowledge the loss and provide support to the Survivor with all related issues/questions.
- Always use a respectful and compassionate tone and be attentive to the needs of the Survivor.
- If the Survivor needs additional time to prepare for benefits discussions, offer to mail them information for review and a call back later.
- Allow the Survivor to speak at their pace and in their time to discuss their needs. They may want to talk about their lost loved one or ask questions about what benefits might be available. It is important that agents allow time for these conversations to occur, and that support be provided throughout the interaction.

You will have additional opportunities throughout your training to practice interacting with Survivors across a variety of interaction types. These role play activities will help to ensure you are ready to support Survivors.

### slide 82

#### Knowledge Check

### slide 83

#### *List the 5 Types of Callers*

- The irate caller
- The talkative caller
- The mistaken caller
- The elitist caller
- The positive caller

### slide 84

#### *What are the tips provided for dealing with a grieving customer?*

- Acknowledge the death and offer an empathetic statement to the caller.
- Don't simply say you are sorry. Acknowledge the loss and provide support to the Survivor with all related issues/questions.
- Always use a respectful and compassionate tone and be attentive to the needs of the Survivor.
- If the Survivor needs additional time to prepare for benefits discussions, offer to mail them information for review and a call back later.
- Allow the Survivor to speak at their pace and in their time to discuss their needs. They may want to talk about their lost loved one or ask questions about what benefits might be available. It is important that agents allow time for these conversations to occur, and that support be provided throughout the interaction.

### slide 85

#### **Top Call Center Agent Traits**

- Stay Calm Under Pressure/Emotional Stability
- Critical Thinking/Creativity
- Empathy/Friendliness
- Effective Communication Skills
- Personality: Attitude/Customer Service/Positivity/Patience
- Organization/Coordination
- Speed and Accuracy
- Team Player

### slide 86 | PG 15

#### ***Stay Calm Under Pressure/Emotional Stability***

Most outstanding customer service representatives exhibit an ability to remain calm and emotionally stable during stressful interactions. An agent should be able to stay calm under the different pressures encountered during the course of their work and interact with callers in a consistent and respectful manner.

Possessing great listening skills is a great asset as it is the right of a customer to be heard and have their request/issues attended. Hence, it is essential that contact center agents remain detached while actively participating in the conversation and do not take things personally.

### slide 87

#### ***Critical Thinking and Creativity***

An exceptional contact center agent should have the ability to think critically and creatively to identify acceptable solutions for the resolution of caller issues.

Hence, the second top call center agent trait is the ability to examine situations and come up with solutions that best fit.

### slide 88

#### ***Empathy and Friendliness***

An exceptional customer service agent must reflect genuine interest and empathy when dealing with callers. Our PCRs are the face of the VA and must radiate warmth, genuine interest, concern and understanding of callers and their issues.

### slide 89

#### ***Effective Communication Skills***

Excellent communication skills really make a difference to the quality of customer service. Communication skills include not just good diction and speaking skills but also good listening abilities.

### slide 90

#### ***Attitude/Customer Service/Positivity/Patience***

A positive attitude helps in reassuring callers and keeping them motivated; a patient attitude helps in preventing escalation of caller hostility and frustration when issues are taking too long to be resolved.

### slide 91 | PG 16

#### **Organization/Coordination**

An effective contact center agent must be organized in all that he or she does. This includes ability to multitask and to manage multiple activities like managing conversations while detailing records and carrying out post-call duties.

### slide 93

#### **Speed and Accuracy**

A good quality contact center agent must demonstrate speed and skill in handling calls and other tasks and have the ability to effectively resolve caller's concerns.

### slide 94

#### **Team Player**

A team player attitude is critical to ensure smooth coordination of management of customer issues. Different members with different skill sets are best suited to certain situations.

### slide 95 | PG 18

## Knowledge Check

### slide 96

#### **What are the Top Call Center Agent Traits?**

- Stay Calm Under Pressure/Emotional Stability
- Critical Thinking/Creativity
- Empathy/Friendliness
- Effective Communication Skills
- Personality: Attitude/Customer Service/Positivity/Patience
- Organization/Coordination
- Speed and Accuracy
- Team Player

### slide 97

#### **What does it mean to be a team player?**

A team player attitude is critical to ensure smooth coordination of management of customer issues. Different members with different skill sets are best suited to certain situations.

### slide 98

#### Summary

Trainees have now been provided with:

- Understand the nature of difficult conversations and what it takes to handle them.
- Identify seven stages of handling difficult conversations.
- Use empathy in a way that minimizes negative responses and strengthens relationships.
- Apply best practices for preparing, initiating, and delivering conversation.
- Discover how to generate solutions and bring the conversation to a close.
- Understand how to cope with responses.
- Identify and use different call control techniques.
- Understand and identify callers.
- Recognize and use different types of call center agent traits.

### slide 99

#### Questions and TMS Survey

**Display** slide(s) for questions & TMS.

**Ask** students if they have any questions about the lesson and provide answers.

**Remind** the students to complete the TMS survey; provide TMS number