



Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of The University of Kansas Transportation Center for Rural Transit Providers

Tips on Improving Dispatching

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Now more than ever, efficiency in operations is being equated with cost savings. Efforts to improve operations can also help retain your agency's loyal customer base and attract additional riders. Efficiency can be improved by training the dispatcher to provide quality customer service to the passenger and by establishing an organized system of communication between the dispatcher and driver. This will ultimately contribute to accuracy in scheduling as well as prompt pick-ups and deliveries.

Quality customer service

Although the term "customer service" is a popular buzz word in the business community, what exactly does it mean to provide quality customer service? Ultimately, it means that the service scheduler/dispatcher communicates with customers directly to better understand their needs. This can be accomplished through active listening, employing effective telephone techniques, and knowing how to work through difficult customer situations. Taken together, quality customer service can become multiple daily actions as opposed to a mere idea.

S.M.I.L.E. before answering a customer's call

An effective communication technique is to have the dispatcher S.M.I.L.E. before he/she answers the telephone. This acronym entails adjusting the sound of voice, managing behavior, ignoring interruptions, using appropriate language, and approaching the discussion with a high level of enthusiasm.

Additional considerations include answering the telephone promptly and allowing the customer to be the first to



hang up, learning the customer's name and using it, avoiding use of the "hold" button as much as possible, and having a friendly and professional attitude at all times.

Prepare for difficult situations

Another consideration to improving customer service skills is to identify key phrases that can be used in difficult situations. Although there are times when company policy, technical difficulties, or logistical problems make it difficult or even impossible to effectively help a customer, appropriate communication of those issues is essential in retaining that customer for future service. Later in this article you will see some examples of appropriate statements that can be used in difficult situations.

Another important to improving customer service skills is to train the dispatcher on how to better communicate with passengers through active listening. See below for attributes of an "active" listener.

Driver communication

After a dispatcher masters the art of quality customer service, implementation of this service is vital. This is done, for the most part, through effective communication between the dispatcher and the driver. While there are many types of communication devices—two-way radios, mobile data terminals,

telephones, and beepers—what is most important for effective communication is transmission respect and airtime usage, for which both the driver and the dispatcher are responsible. Transmission respect refers to etiquette between the dispatcher and driver while "on air."

First, only relevant information should be discussed; personal conversations require too much time and could potentially interfere with an emergency situation of another driver.

Second, dispatchers should not interrupt drivers when they are calling in. Third, when responding, dispatchers should speak into the microphone clearly, confidently, and in a normal tone; dispatchers should take special effort to remain calm during emergency situations.

Finally, driver calls should be prioritized by the dispatcher by order of initial contact, except in emergency situations when the dispatcher should announce that the air be cleared for the vehicle with the problem.

Airtime usage should be kept to a minimum. Only information relevant to the passenger's pick-up, drop-off, or special instructions should be shared. Additional types of information drivers might convey to the dispatcher include changing weather and road conditions and emergency situations.

In conveying popular phrases, the use of codes can reduce the amount of airtime substantially. For example, using "10-4" can be used instead of "Yes, I heard you," "10-20" can be used instead of "What is your location?" and "10-9" can be used instead of "Repeat your last transmission." For more information on "10"-codes and how and when they can be used on-air, go to <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ten-code>.

Conclusion

Improving customer service skills as well as dispatcher/driver communication will help your agency attract and retain loyal customers through continued provision of quality service. Customer service skills are not innate; they are learned through understanding appropriate phrases to use in difficult situations and employing active listening techniques. Effective dispatcher/driver communication can be improved through the use of efficient airtime codes and displaying a high level of respect through transmission. Ultimately, the product of these considerations is an agency that is a model of efficiency and service.

Source

• Community Transportation Association of America, CTAA Training Manual: Professional Dispatching and Scheduling, 2002. Visit <http://web1.ctaa.org/webmodules/webarticles/anmviewer.asp?a=36> for more information.

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Active listening... What makes a good listener?

Untrained Listeners...

- Tune out the other person at the beginning and prejudge without giving the customer a chance.
- Are quick to mentally criticize grammar, appearance or speaking style.
- Spend more time getting ready to talk when they should be listening. This becomes apparent and is felt by the customer.
- Tend to consider only the facts, give attention to errors, and attempt to prove the customer wrong.
- Stop listening after getting the minimum information and disregard the rest of the conversation.
- Tend to get distracted by emotional words used by the customer and respond similarly.
- Are not aware of the talking and listening "speed limits."
- Try to take in and reply to everything, especially exaggerations and errors.

Trained Listeners...

- Defer their judgment, are more controlled, and listen for the customers' feelings.
- Pay most attention to the content rather than unimportant issues.
- Listen completely, trying to get every nuance of the meaning of what is being said by the customer.
- Are more mature in their listening habits; they listen to the main points and disregard the minor points.
- Listen carefully, sort what is being said, ask for confirmation, and give feedback.
- Might feel honest anger about what is said, but control it; they do not allow their emotions to govern their behavior.
- Maintain patience and concentration while listening and speaking.
- Refrain from replying to everything and avoid sidetracking remarks, especially those that seem sarcastic.

Source: CTAA Training Manual: Professional Dispatching and Scheduling, 2002.

Examples of phone etiquette that will assist in providing quality customer service

Don't Say...

Do Say...

We can't help you.	We are unable to provide a trip at that time, but let's look at our options.
You are not eligible.	I cannot find your name on our list; have you filled out an eligibility form? If not, let's do that.
You are not in our service area.	Our service does not currently serve that area, but let's take a look at what kind of transportation is available.
We can't take you on that day; we don't go there on that day.	We don't have service to your area on that day, but I may be able to help you reschedule your trip for a day that we do serve your area.
There's nothing I can do about it; it's company policy.	Our company policy will not allow me to do that, but let's see if we can find some alternatives.
The computer is down now; could you call me back in about 15 minutes?	I am unable to put your trip into the computer right now, so I will write down the information and ask that you call back later to confirm your request.

Source: CTAA Training Manual: Professional Dispatching and Scheduling, 2002.