

Caroline County



July 27, 2010

Customer Service Program

**Committed to Service,
Dedicated to the People**

Caroline County

Virginia

Customer Service Program

March 30, 2010

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“Committed to Service, Dedicated to the People”

The basic premise of government is to serve the people. That concept is as real today as it was for the founding fathers of the constitution.

Today’s rapidly changing environment has made both the private and public sectors re-evaluate customer service delivery to ensure they are providing for the needs of their customer/citizens. The Board of Supervisors has made customer service one of their top priorities and holds every employee accountable for being the best in providing those services.

Caroline County government believes good customer service generates satisfied and/or delighted citizens. Satisfied citizens lead to increased compliance, improved information exchange, improved relationships, increased trust, and potentially decreased workloads or costs.

Citizen’s satisfaction is achieved by providing valued services where value is the positive difference between citizen’s actual experiences and their service delivery expectations. The Board of Supervisors understands that the customer service culture must be supported by leadership that emphasizes the importance of each citizen and employee. These leaders must be creative and energetic, particular, and caring, be a coach, teacher and listener. They must set the example for their subordinates to follow.

Caroline County government realizes customer service is not just words printed on paper but what our citizen’s experience when interacting with our employees. The Board of Supervisors wants the rules to be simple and few while allowing staff to remain flexible to meet our citizen’s needs. Nobody enjoys dealing with a high volume of red tape generally associated with government offices.

Finally, citizen feedback and accountability of our actions is critical in providing the finest customer service our citizen’s deserve. We are committed to treating everyone with dignity, respect, honesty, and courtesy and practicing the old adage of “Treating people how we wish to be treated.”

County Administration looks forward to the continued implementation of this program and shares the vision for all County residents to reassure confidence in their government and a higher quality of life for our citizen’s.

Percy C. Ashcraft
County Administrator

Employee Readiness

It is essential that the employees of Caroline County be fully prepared to respond to the daily needs of their customers. This readiness requires training, departmental planning and cooperation among all employees.

Customers don't care what the chain of command is or who is the one that should be serving their needs. They want their concern addressed in a timely fashion and to be able to go about their business.

Caroline County must initiate an internal system that is efficient. That system begins and ends with the employees, who are on the front line for resolving issues.

Goal: Caroline County will Prepare its Employees to Succeed in Every Situation to Meet the Needs of the Customers!

Walk in the customers shoes – have empathy. Be a leader by doing the right thing, not just doing things right. Maintain objectivity and be nonjudgmental.

1. Continuing education must be provided to all employees thru accredited classes and correspondences.
2. Embrace change and persistently strive for improvement.
3. Harvest the power of information.
4. Be pleasant and positive with the citizens.
5. Be a good listener.
6. Strive to do the job right the first time.
7. Be accountable.
8. Treat people fairly. Bear in mind that the citizen's perception of reality are their reality.
9. Be consistent.
10. Don't be afraid to admit mistakes.
11. Have fun.

Supervisors/Department Heads

Objective: Department heads will be encouraged to appoint teams to solve problems to enhance public confidence and increase learning among employees.

1. Set the example for your subordinates to follow.
2. Remember loyalty is a two way street.
3. Facilitate open lines of communication up and down the chain of command.
4. Make customer service an integral part of performance evaluations.
5. Make sure customer service is a requirement, not an option.
6. Listen to employee's complaints (without interruption) and have trust in your employees. They are an extension of your leadership.

Communication

The heart of any customer service program is communication. Caroline County employees will attempt to strengthen its efforts through a variety of ways by using telephone, mail, fax, face-to-face, e-mail, word of mouth and the media. It is essential that communication be improved on all levels.

Goal: Improve Communication with all Customers

Objective: Improve telephone communication and conversations:

1. All telephones to main offices should be answered by the 3rd ring by a person.
2. Employees will answer the phone by stating their name and saying “How may I help you?”

Objective: Transfer calls only when you can't serve the customer yourself:

1. Ask questions and listen through the customer's inquiry before transferring to another department. Many times the answer can be given at the first point of contact if employee shows patience in listening.
2. Stay on the line when the call is transferred and inform the employee who has picked up the call who is on the line and the nature of the transfer.
3. Don't transfer a call until the customer has been given the phone number of the department the call is being transferred to.
4. If you receive a transferred call, take the number and then try to find out how to help the customer, even if it is not in your area of government.

Objective: Improve telephone decorum:

1. Discourage placing people on hold unless it is absolutely necessary.
2. Concentrate on the customer being served and not other employees in the room.
3. Always let the customer hang up first because they may forget something and be forced to call you back.
4. Never eat while talking to customers on the telephone, or even in their presence.
5. Maintain a cordial demeanor during the entire conversation.

Objective: Develop good habits in returning messages:

1. Take complete messages (date, time, number, name) in order to give the person returning the message as much information as possible.
2. Return message the same day, even if you don't have the answer. This gives the customer the understanding that you are working on the matter and the inquiry is being considered.
3. Inform colleagues and receptionists when you will be away from your desk or out of the office.
4. Develop an office schedule to receive incoming calls to accommodate sick leave and vacation schedules.

Objective: Handle external (snail) mail in a timely manner:

1. Stamp the date on each piece of mail received.
2. Mail should be delivered to each individual or department the day it is received.
3. Mail should be opened and responded to within three business days, unless immediate attention is required by phone, e-mail, or fax.

Objective: Everyone who interacts on a regular basis with the public should have access to e-mail:

1. All employees should be properly trained to use e-mail.
2. E-mail should be checked at least three times per day.
3. E-mail messages should be responded to on the same day even if the answer is not immediately available.
4. Forward e-mail messages to the proper person who can find the answer, making it necessary to know the e-mail addresses of all colleagues in government.
5. E-mail messages should be returned as if the customer is receiving a letter.
6. Invite follow-up by telephone or in person when responding to e-mail.
7. Forward your e-mail responses to other employees who might need to know the information you have sent to a customer.
8. Accumulate a database of regular customers in order to stay in touch with as issues come before the government.
9. Utilize e-mail over the telephone whenever possible to keep lines open for external customers to use.
10. **NEVER HIDE BEHIND E-MAIL.**

Objective: Maintain a County website that is customer friendly:

1. Include all government forms that may be downloaded or printed by the customer.
2. Advertise e-mail and website addresses as often as possible on all business cards, stationary, stamps, labels and all written materials such as displays, search engines and departmental signs.

Objective: Tie offices together through use of technology:

1. Provide ways to cross information among departments.
2. Provide full use of e-mail and cell telephone accessibility to employees who can use them most effectively for customer service.
3. Establish common hours so customers can get their business taken care of at one time.
4. Update forms in all offices and make them easily readable and explainable.

Objective: Develop professional, but friendly corresponding materials:

1. Stationary.
2. Labels.
3. Envelopes.
4. Brochures.
5. Business Cards

Objective: Develop a Facebook page to improve County government's communication with the public.

Responsiveness

It is natural for anyone making a request to want it immediately. The general consensus on government services is that it takes too long to get the information that is requested.

Although knowing full well there are certain processes that must be adhered to, including state law and County ordinances, our employees will focus on being more responsive to customer needs and fulfilling every request in a timely and efficient manner.

Goal: Address Every Customer Request Like it is the Only One You will Receive That Day!

Objective: Provide immediate service to the customer:

1. Every customer visiting every office should sign in and state their purpose of business.
2. Every customer should receive a friendly greeting.
3. If requested, the customers should be taken to a private area to talk so others won't overhear their business.
4. Every customer request should be listened to thoroughly.
5. Customers should be shown to the proper personnel they need to see, not just pointed in that direction.
6. If proper personnel are not available, then a complete message needs to be taken and the customer needs to be responded to the same day. This also includes being more specific with the first call that is made.

Objective: Provide timely communication back to the customer:

1. Plan time and dates when you will get back to the customer or when request will be considered.
2. Schedule appointments off location of County offices whenever necessary.

Objective: Always acknowledge that the Customer will always think he/she is right and diplomacy is needed to convince them otherwise:

1. **Never** be confrontational with any customer. If the need should arise ask for assistance from a higher authority.
2. Listen first, speak second.
3. Employees are to show compassion for the situation and then deal with the facts accordingly.
4. Never let the customer leave without receiving all the information that is readily available to them.
5. Always show the customer to the door with a friendly send off.
6. Departments should cross-train as much as possible in order to assist customers when employees are off or out of the office.
7. Know the schedule of fellow employees in order to let the customer know for certain when they might be available to meet with them.
8. A customer should have to wait no longer than five minutes before someone begins to help them.
9. Customers who visit the office should have first priority over customers who communicate by telephone or e-mail.

Objective: Do whatever it takes to meet the customer's request:

1. Employees must be willing to do more than is expected of them even if it is outside of their job description.
2. Proper training will lead to responses being made by employees with more confidence.
3. Don't shuffle customers from person to person and office to office.

Objective: All employees should be trained in the areas of Behavior Management and Conflict Resolution.

Buildings, Grounds and Offices

Customer service actually begins before any customer interacts with a County employee. It begins with the decision to visit County property and discuss matters of interest to the public.

Thus, it is essential the County provide an atmosphere that is friendly to the customer and not intimidating. All County buildings, grounds and offices should be kept in a manner that is pleasing to the tax-paying public and make them feel proud of the government they pay to maintain.

Goal: Ensure that all County Buildings, Grounds and Offices are Kept in a Professional Manner that is Pleasing and Open for Public Interaction!

Objective: Provide adequate parking for all County offices:

1. Ensure parking lots are clearly marked and free of trash and debris.
2. Provide signage and clearly identify handicapped parking spaces.
3. Designate employee parking in areas that allow the public easy access to County facilities.
4. Park government vehicles away from public/visitors spaces.
5. Clear parking lots and sidewalks immediately after inclement weather.

Objective: Provide adequate signs for location of offices and departments:

1. Place legible signs in all offices that are ANSI compliant.
2. Ensure signs are visible and legible at playgrounds, animal shelters, convenience sites and out lying office spaces.

Objective: Provide a warm office atmosphere to greet customers:

1. Provide an adequate number of directional signs to help citizen's find their intentional destination.
2. Ensure waiting areas are kept neat, clean, well lit and equipped with County reading materials.
3. Ensure adequate seating for citizen's
4. Display appropriate wall hangings and/or photos in all waiting areas.
5. Maintain green areas around offices.

Objective: Employees should make sure their general work area is organized with necessary supplies and materials to be effective:

1. Always have something to write with and write on.
2. Have available supplies such as maps, calculators, and source documents if they are used on a regular basis.
3. Have available brochures, code books and ordinances for customers who may need them.

Objective: Personal offices maintained by employees should always be neat and without clutter:

1. Always consider what customers might think of your office when they enter into it.
2. The office should always be available to have a sit-down conversation with a customer to resolve a problem.
3. Employee work spaces should flatter their personality and also that of the County.
4. An office in disarray does not instill confidence in citizens. They're going to wonder how fast you will lose their documents.

Public Feedback

TELL US HOW WE ARE DOING

The success of Caroline County's customer service will be judged by the satisfaction of the citizens that are served. Accordingly, all feedback will be evaluated and used to further strengthen customer relations.

Goal: Develop a System for Customer Feedback and Evaluation of Responses!

Objective: Acquire the name (optional), date, reason and employee contacted during visit at the county office.

Objective: Place names and addresses in department database and follow-up each visit with a letter and response card for customer to fill out. (See Attachment)

Objective: County Administrator, or appropriate Constitutional Officer, will review responses and discuss them periodically with department heads and/or employees.



Caroline County Customer Service Survey

Our goal is to ensure your visit to our office(s) was productive, enjoyable and provided you satisfaction with your needs. We are always seeking ways to improve the services we provide to our citizens and would appreciate your comments concerning your visit and any suggestions you might have to help us provide better service. Please take a few moments and complete this survey to help us meet any needs that you may have that were not offered during your visit. Our employees take pride in their performance and any commendatory comments would also be appreciated.

Date: _____

Reason for Visit: _____

Department Visited: _____

Employee Contacted: _____

	Excellent	Good	Average	Fair	Poor
Staff was available in a timely manner.					
Staff greeted you and offered to help you.					
Staff was friendly and cheerful throughout.					
Staff answered your questions.					
Staff showed knowledge of the products/services.					
Staff offered pertinent advice.					
Staff was courteous throughout.					
Overall, how would you rate our customer service?					

Additional Comments: _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete our customer service survey.
Please mail complete survey to Caroline County Administration, P.O. Box 447,
Bowling Green, Virginia 22427