

Chapter 6

EMS SUPERVISOR

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

Customer Service

Objectives

- Explain the importance of quality customer service.
- Describe how to create a customer service plan.
- Describe the importance of, and methods for, following up on customer issues.
- Describe how to evaluate a customer service plan once it is implemented.

Introduction

- The most important factor in an organization's success is satisfied customers.
- Without customers, a business organization would fail.
- Customer service must be at the very core of the organization's culture of quality.
- Your organization must exceed customer expectations.

Introduction

- There are two types of customers: external customers and internal customers.
 - External customers are the traditional customers to whom your organization provides goods and services.
 - Internal customers work for your organization and depend on your support to ensure that they have the necessary tools to better serve the external customers.

Introduction

- In emergency medical services (EMS), it can be difficult to think of patients as customers, or even clients.
- Patients are one kind of customer with whom EMS professionals interact.
- The use of the term customer allows us to look at the patient from another perspective, from a wider angle.

- The rank structure and the roles assigned to members will differ among EMS organizations.
- There is nothing more frustrating to customers than poor customer service.
- Customer satisfaction will be affected by:
 - Inefficient processes
 - Poor employee attitudes
 - Poor-quality products and services
 - A failure to exceed customer expectations

- Employees must embrace the organization's core commitment to customers if the organization is to succeed.
- As the EMS officer, you must create, implement, and evaluate a plan within your organization that embodies the attitude of exceeding customer expectations for your internal and external customers.

- Before you tackle the challenge of creating a customer service plan, ask yourself:
 - Why having a customer service plan is important
 - What you are trying to accomplish by developing one

- Having a customer service plan is critical because it helps differentiate your organization from its competitors.
- As the EMS officer, you will need to ensure that quality customer service goals, objectives, strategy, and tactics are included within the organization's (or functional workgroup's) strategic planning process.

- A customer service plan is commonly created either by an employee project team with customer service experience or by the leadership team.
- Once the plan is completed, it must be:
 - Shared with the organization's members
 - Supported by the organization's leadership team
 - Routinely evaluated

- The first step in creating a customer service plan is to determine who will be responsible for overseeing the process and ensuring that a customer service plan is created.
- The organization's leadership team must also determine who will be responsible for managing the customer service initiative once it becomes part of the organization's strategic plan.

- The next matter to consider when creating a customer-centric plan is who your customers are and what they expect from your organization.
- This understanding is instrumental both in creating a customer service plan and in continually reevaluating that plan.

- After identifying the organization's internal and external customers, it may be beneficial to categorize customers further into primary, secondary, and tertiary rankings; for example:
 - A patient would be considered an external primary customer.
 - The patient's husband or wife would be considered an external secondary customer.
 - A neighbor may be considered an external tertiary customer.

- When working with internal organizational customers:
 - Any individual with whom you interact on a regular basis (e.g., finance manager, fleet manager, supply manager) would be an internal primary customer.
 - Members within those functional units would be the internal secondary and tertiary customers.

- Each customer will have slightly different requirements from the organization.
- Consequently, the plan developed should be:
 - Specific enough to ensure quality customer service is delivered
 - Flexible enough to address nontraditional customer requests, if at all possible

- The customer service strategic plan must:
 - Identify the organization's various types of customers
 - Include what those customers expect from the organization and the organizational resources available to meet their requirements
 - Be routinely evaluated to ensure adjustments are made when necessary



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The customers in your jurisdiction will have differing needs and expectations.

External Customers

- Although it is critical to know how best to treat your patients from a medical emergency standpoint, it is also important to know what customers expect from your organization during nonmedical situations.
- The organization must have a customer segmentation plan to ensure that as many customer demands are met as possible.

- External Customers
 - Customer segments might include:
 - Geriatric customers
 - Pediatric customers
 - Young adults
 - Customers of different cultures
 - Customers speaking different languages

- External Customers
 - Organizations identify customer segments as part of their quest to discover what customers want and/or need.
 - They then use this information to direct their delivery of key products or services.

- External Customers
 - Segmenting customers in EMS:
 - Establishes a baseline in understanding the customers' expectations
 - Establishes a partnership between the organization and each of the customer segments
 - Helps the organization adjust its strategic planning regarding its customer service goals

- External Customers
 - When attempting to define customer segments, the EMS officer must gather data to determine the customers' characteristics.
 - These data can help the organizational leaders determine goals for serving the various customer segments and strategies for interacting with them.

- External Customers
 - Understanding customer needs prior to receiving a request for service is beneficial.
 - For example, the EMS organization servicing a nursing home should know whether the customers residing there:
 - Require specific interventions
 - Need to be transported to a specialty facility
 - Are able to communicate effectively

- External Customers
 - After identifying those individuals who would most likely use the organization's services, you must determine what they expect from the organization.
 - This can be done by:
 - Conducting customer surveys
 - Meeting with homeowners' organizations
 - Having town hall meetings hosted by the department
 - Participating in community events
 - Using social media to get feedback

- External Customers
 - Once you know what your customers expect from the organization, then the organization can begin to align the customers' requirements with the organization's resources.

External Customers

- An additional consideration, however, is that customers' expectations may not always be reasonable.
- In such cases, personnel must continue to do the best they can to care for the patient with the resources they have available, but if possible, personnel should explain to the customer why certain decisions are being made.

- Internal Customers
 - Internal customers are those individuals and groups within your organization to whom you provide services.
 - They also require consideration when developing a customer service plan for the organization.

- Internal Customers
 - A key strategy in working with internal customers is earning their trust and demonstrating that they can rely on you in your position, regardless of whether their position is above or below yours.
 - Consider how you will earn that trust and motivate your employees.

- Internal Customers
 - Many elements in the work environment serve to support all members of the organization.
 - Some individual employees may have additional needs, however.
 - When you understand what your employees need to keep them active and effective members of the organization:
 - Employee relations will run much more smoothly.
 - It becomes easier to retain employees.

- Internal Customers
 - Interaction with the officers and managers above you, or officers of other divisions with whom you interact, must also be considered.
 - Open, clear communication among these individuals and departments facilitates interactions and cooperation.
 - Ask these officers what they need, share your own and your department's needs, and work together to ensure these needs are met.

- In the book Creating Magic, author Lee Cockerell, a former executive with the Walt Disney World Resort, speaks about the importance of creating magic for all of that organization's guests.
- Imagine customer service as embodying this philosophy.

- Some EMS professionals believe customers have no choice among EMS organizations, because they call for assistance and the one provider for that jurisdiction is dispatched to assist them.
- Not only is this the wrong attitude to have, but it is also an erroneous assumption.

 Just because an EMS organization is the only provider in town today, it does not mean the organization cannot be replaced by another EMS department in the future.

- Adopting a customer-centric attitude within any public safety organization is critical for:
 - Maintaining the organization
 - Building trust in the customers/patients whom you are there to assist during their emergencies

- Although there are citizens who may not use the town's EMS system, they may get involved when it comes time to vote on:
 - Keeping the current EMS provider or replacing it
 - Raising taxes to support city, township, or county public service initiatives (including EMS)
 - Approving the purchase of a new ambulance unit or equipment
 - Providing raises for your personnel

- If your organization is providing an unacceptable level of service, rest assured that one or several citizens will express their displeasure about the service being provided to the town's leadership.
- This may lead to a change in department leadership or to the city, town, or county commissioner replacing the current organization with a new vendor.

- If a patient requests to be transported to a hospital that is a bit farther away than the closest hospital, what should the paramedic do?
- If the patient is stable, consider taking the patient to his or her hospital of choice if the system allows it.

 Asking the patient, family members, and friends if there is anything that you can do for them or any questions that you can answer will go a long way toward building trust between customers and your organization.

- The mindset of serving customers and exceeding their expectations needs to be part of the organization's core mission.
- Every member of the organization must understand that exceeding a customer's expectations:
 - Is a priority within the organization
 - Must become part of the organization's culture

- Leadership Buy-In
 - Exceeding customer expectations must be a company-wide initiative supported by all members of the organization.
 - This priority must be a core value that is both deeply rooted within the organization and continuously promoted.

- Customer Service Training and Development
 - Your team members must understand what the organization expects from them in every aspect of their jobs, especially when serving customers.
 - Customer service problems tend to arise when members of the organization who interact with customers do not clearly understand what is expected of them.

- Customer Service Training and Development
 - Many organizations have an internal training and development program specifically designed to address customer service.
 - If your organization does not have such a program for employees at all levels of the organization, now is the time to consider creating one.

- Empowering Employees
 - To better serve customers, employees must be fully empowered to do their jobs.
 - They must be able to:
 - Respond to customers' needs
 - Follow up on customer requests or organizational promises
 - Deliver a quality product or service that will exceed customer expectations

- Empowering Employees
 - Employees must also be empowered to admit that the organization has made a mistake when it has and to correct the problem.
 - A culture of customer service is deeply rooted in a culture of quality and depends on all members of the organization, not just the leadership.

- Empowering Employees
 - If:
 - Employees are not empowered to resolve customer issues
 - The leadership team has not embraced a culture of exceeding customer expectations
 - Then:
 - The customer will not get the results he or she is seeking.
 - The organization will fall short of its goal.

- Empowering Employees
 - As an EMS officer, you must clearly state your expectations of empowerment to those reporting to you.
 - They must understand what empowerment means to them and what they can do with it.

- Organizational Branding
 - The commitment to exceed customer expectations will serve as the foundation for creating a positive organizational brand.
 - A brand is built on the value, perception, and feel of a product or service after a customer experience.
 - The organization's brand image can be either positive or negative.

- Organizational Branding
 - A customer, whether by personal experience or by word of mouth, may immediately form an opinion of the organization.
 - Thus the leadership team must establish a branding strategy.
 - Everyone in the organization must be part of this initiative.

- Organizational Branding
 - Besides exceeding customer expectations and delivering quality service, the organization should take other steps to create a positive brand.
 - Providing additional services may strengthen the organization's brand and could include:
 - Conducting home health visits
 - Holding fall prevention seminars and home inspections
 - Providing outreach programs
 - Aligning customer needs with the appropriate resources

- Organizational Branding
 - A brand requires at least two key factors: a product or service and an evaluator.
 - The brand evaluation is conducted by customers who have used the EMS organization's services or have had some interaction with the organization.

- Organizational Branding
 - In establishing a brand image, the organization must be consistent in its service delivery.
 - The customers need to know what to expect when they request emergency medical services.
 - The goal is to ensure positive brand recognition and to have a community that values your organization above the rest.

- Organizational Branding
 - The members of the organization must determine which organizational brand they desire to project.
 - If they make no effort to establish a brand, the customer will not know what to expect from the organization.

- Organizational Branding
 - Some important steps that an organization can take to establish its brand:
 - Introduce your organization to the customer.
 - Make sure the customer can distinguish your organization from the competition.
 - Let customers know how well you will take care of them and what they can expect when they call on the organization.
 - Deliver quality service.
 - Exceed customer expectations.

- Organizational Branding
 - The organization's brand will serve as the organization's public face regardless of whether customers have actually used its services.
 - Ensuring quality service delivery and focusing on being a customer-centric organization will pave the way for establishing a positive brand image.

- Regardless of the industry, customers can become very frustrated when:
 - Their concerns are not resolved.
 - They face a long wait before they are helped.
 - They are passed from one department to another without being helped.

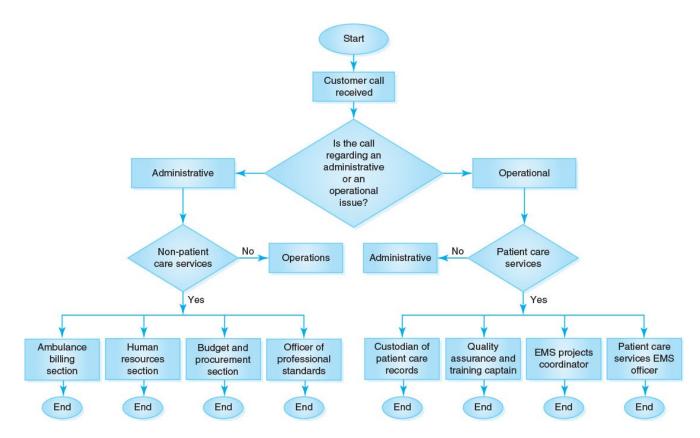
- Every organization must implement and maintain a customer-friendly process to meet the customers' needs.
- A customer-friendly process will:
 - Ensure that you deal with customer issues when they arise
 - Show customers that you are well prepared to address their concerns

- A customer service plan will consist of several components that differ among organizations.
- Examples of such components include:
 - A central location where customer questions or concerns are managed and tracked for resolution
 - A customer survey distribution protocol
 - Review of customer surveys
 - Follow-up with customers to ensure that their questions or concerns have been addressed

- Establish a Central Location for Customer Issues
 - To ensure that an individual does have to wait a long time on the telephone or in a lobby, the organization needs a central customer receiving site where customer questions or issues can be resolved thoroughly and quickly.
 - The customer information center must be clearly identified.

- Specify a Functional Unit to Address Customer Issues
 - Although every member of the organization must be prepared to address and remedy customer issues, the organization must have a single answering point for all customer requests.
 - This will ensure that questions are answered and problems are resolved quickly.
 - This may be a receptionist or a designated team.

- Specify a Functional Unit to Address Customer Issues
 - If the organization's customer service representative is not able to answer the customer's question or resolve the customer's issue, he or she must be knowledgeable enough to forward the query to the correct individual or functional workgroup in the organization.



A process flow chart can help ensure customers are receiving quality and consistent service.

- Specify a Functional Unit to Address Customer Issues
 - Regardless of which functional unit is responsible for addressing the initial customer service exchange, the following should be done:
 - The customer's call must be logged.
 - The incident must be tracked to ensure that it has been addressed.
 - If it is determined that a current organizational process is adversely affecting customer service, that process must be examined immediately.

- Put the Plan in Writing
 - After the customer service strategic planning team or the organization's leadership team have determined the goals, objectives, strategies, and tactics for exceeding customer expectations and addressing customer concerns, the plan must be shared with the entire organization.
 - The plan can be rolled out in a variety of ways.

- Put the Plan in Writing
 - The written guidelines and protocols regarding customer service should cover most, if not all, of the general customer concerns the organization expects to face.
 - With all employees on the same page, the customer will receive consistent service and any issues with the plan will be easier to fix.

Following Up on Customer Issues

- External Customers
 - Every organization must have a customer follow-up system.
 - For external customers, after a service has been provided, the organization should attempt to ascertain the customer's level of satisfaction with the service rendered.
 - This is especially true in the case of negative experiences.

Following Up on Customer Issues

- Internal Customers
 - You must seek feedback from your internal customers.
 - Understanding what your internal customers want and need will assist you in being an effective managerial leader.

Following Up on Customer Issues

- Internal Customers
 - If you want your team to exceed the customer's expectations, then you as the EMS officer must exceed the team's expectations.
 - As the EMS officer, it is up to you to ensure that team members have everything they need to perform their jobs.

- Evaluating a customer service plan is no different than reviewing the organization's or a functional-level workgroup's strategic plan.
- Both plans must be evaluated routinely and adjustments made as needed.

- One helpful step in evaluating the current plan is to place yourself in the customer's shoes and go through the organization's customer service system.
- This will allow you to see firsthand whether the organization is falling short in resolving customer requests.

- Compare your system's performance to that of other organizations.
 - This can be done by conducting customer surveys.
 - Ask customers to rate your organization's services in comparison to those offered by your competitors or other organizations they have used in the past.
 - The goal is to get as much information as possible and to identify opportunities to make improvements.

- As an organizational leader, it is as important to gather information from your internal customers as it is to gather information from external customers.
- Both customer groups deserve attention to ensure they continue to support the organization.

- It is important not to wait for annual reviews to determine:
 - What an internal customer needs to do his or her job
 - How that person feels about the organization
 - What input or feedback he or she has

Evaluating the Customer Service Plan

- The organizational leader must spend time in the trenches with the employees and continuously seek their feedback.
- An organization may also develop functional workgroup surveys.
- Never stop asking for feedback.

- Surveys are good tools for capturing customer feedback and measuring your organization's ability to meet patient expectations.
- Surveying your customers demonstrates that the organization cares about them.

- To obtain feedback, a survey card can be left with the patient or family member to be completed and mailed back at a later date.
- Surveys can also be mailed to each customer several days after the service was delivered.
- The downside of this type of survey is that the customer has no obligation to complete the survey and return it.

- If the survey is web-based, some customers may find the process too complicated, and others may not have Internet access.
- Additionally, customers who were highly satisfied or highly dissatisfied would be the most likely to complete a survey.
- Thus, the organization may not know where it stands with the majority of its customers.

 The organization must make it easy for its customers to complete the surveys and return them.

Brevard County Fire Rescue Patient Satisfaction Survey 1. What was the location of your incident (city)?								
3.	What is your age? 18 to 24 25 to 34 35 to 44 45 to 54 55 to 64 65 to 74 75 or older							
4.	What language do you mainly speak at home? English Spanish Chinese Russian Vietnamese Other (please specify)							
5.	What is the account number and date of service listed on your statement (optional)?							
	May we contact you with questions regarding your service? Yes, via telephone Yes, via e-mail No lephone number and/or e-mail address							

(continues)

Mail surveys should be easy to read, with plenty of space for responses, and should be accompanied by a prepaid return envelope.

7. Please indicate whether you agree	e or disa	agree with	the follo	wing sta	tements:				
	Strongl Agree	y Agree	Somew Agree	hat [Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A		
A. The Brevard County Fire Rescue Team encouraged me to be transported to the hospital.									
B. The Brevard County Fire Rescue Team treated me with courtesy and respect.									
 The Brevard County Fire Rescue team showed concern for my safety and comfort during transport. 									
 Brevard County Fire Rescue responded to my emergency in a prompt, timely fashion. 									
E. Based on my experience, I would recommend Brevard County Fire Rescue to my friends and family.									
8. Please read the following statements regarding your recent experience with Brevard County Fire Rescue. Choose the answer that best describes your experience.									
334.1.5		Excellent	Very Good	Good	Fair	1 1	N/A		
A. Please rate your overall level of satisfaction with Brevard County Fire Rescue.									
B. Please rate your opinion of the emergency medical care provided by Brevard County Fire Rescue.									
C. Please rate the appearance of the Brevard County Fire Rescue team.									
Comments (optional):									
9. If you could change any aspect of Brevard County Fire Rescue, what would you change?									

- Surveys that can be completed electronically should have step-by-step instructions.
- To reach customers who do not have a computer, the organization must have a system in which the customer can provide feedback to a human representative.

- Before submitting any survey to customers, answer the following questions:
 - What will the organization gain by investing in surveys?
 - Will the data be accurate?
 - Will the sample of all the collected surveys be large enough to ensure statistical significance?
 - Which survey medium will be used to gather the data?
 - What will the organization do once it has analyzed the data?

- Surveys can be used to elicit suggestions for service improvements and to ensure that current or proposed services are relevant to your customers and exceed their expectations.
- When creating a survey, it is important to determine the purpose for conducting the survey.

- To collect as much feedback from the customers as possible, select a survey medium that works best for the customer.
- Gathering information from a large sample is paramount.
- It increases the likelihood that the feedback received will be truly reflective of most of the customers' experiences.

- A variety of media can be utilized, but each medium comes with its own benefits and drawbacks.
- Surveys can be conducted through:
 - Face-to-face interviews
 - Telephone (live or automated) contacts
 - Written (in-person) surveys
 - Mailed questionnaires
 - Online media

- When using a customer survey to capture information about a service or product, it is important to take into consideration the medium being used.
- When creating a survey you must keep the customer in mind and create a survey that will not discourage customers from completing it.

- Knowing what to do with survey information once it is obtained is just as important as gathering the data.
- It is not uncommon to review surveys, analyze the information, determine areas that need improving, and then neglect to create initiatives to make the necessary adjustments.

- When creating a survey:
 - Keep it simple.
 - Ask pertinent questions.
 - Avoid long surveys.
 - Explain why completing the survey is important and how the participant's feedback will help improve the EMS organization and service delivery.

- Guidelines for Creating a Survey
 - First, every effort must be made to prevent the survey from becoming too complicated.
 - Second, the questions must center on the service provided to the customer and must consider demographics.
 - Third, avoid creating surveys that are too long.
 - Fourth, customers may choose not to complete a survey because it adds no value to them personally.

- Do not conduct a one-time patient survey and then stop your data-gathering efforts.
- Rather, continuously measure the organization's customer service performance by:
 - Attempting to expand the survey sample size
 - Reevaluating the survey medium being used
 - Taking the necessary action once the data (information) have been collected

- You should make every effort to gather customer feedback and thereby improve the organization.
- When asked to create a survey for the first time:
 - Confer with others who have created similar surveys in the past.
 - Do your own research into how to write an effective survey.
- Check with your organization's leadership team.
 - There may be specific requirements you must follow or certain questions you should avoid.

- A website can be a powerful tool for conveying information about the organization.
- Moreover, the website can be used to acquire information from customers.



Reproduced from Boston EMS

EMS organizations can use their websites to keep customers informed and elicit their feedback.

- The EMS organization's website can also include a mechanism that allows community members to join a focus group for the organization.
- The members of the focus group may then be given access to a page that contains questions of particular interest to the organization.

- An organization may provide customer service cards that include the unit number and the name of the crew members who treated the patient.
- Or these cards can be used during a customer—organization business exchange.
- Such business cards typically include the department's website address.
- They may also have a quick response (QR) code that will link the customer to the website.

- The website must be monitored and updated regularly to ensure that customer requests, suggestions, and concerns are addressed promptly.
- Obtaining input from customers is not enough.
- Customers must know that the organization received the message.
- They also must be assured of how the organization plans to address the customer's message.

- The organization must ensure that no personal (protected) information is posted on the organization's website or on social media.
- A website that is not secured for privacy should not be used to convey sensitive and protected patient information.

- Social media can be a powerful tool for communication between an organization and its customers.
- To maximize its effectiveness in reaching customers through social media, the organization must identify the social media that are being used by its customers.

- Social media can prove a valuable tool in disseminating information, such as if the organization:
 - Is holding an open house for community members
 - Plans to purchase a new piece of equipment
 - Wants to warn customers of potentially hazardous conditions
 - Needs to provide shelter information during a disaster

- Adept use of social media tools, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, Instagram, and Google+, can:
 - Increase the organization's exposure
 - Promote the organization's brand
 - Keep customers informed
 - Collect customer feedback

- Social media are just one means through which to engage with customers, however.
- It should be used in conjunction with other informational tools such as media releases and media interviews.

- As part of effective customer service, it is critical to find ways to improve your organization's process for addressing and resolving customer issues.
- To start, the organization must make every attempt to capture the voice of the customer before and after service delivery.

- As an EMS officer, you must routinely:
 - Review the service being delivered by your business unit
 - Identify what is working and what is not
 - Listen to customer experiences
 - Make adjustments as needed to meet customer expectations

- After compiling data on customer experience, consider creating a process flow chart to create a visual map of the ideal customer service delivery process.
- You may consider creating process flow charts for individual scenarios.
- Focus on the areas in which your organization or department may be struggling.

- A process flow chart can be helpful, especially for new employees and for getting all employees on the same page.
- Set processes like these are especially helpful if:
 - The process is related to a sensitive topic
 - Or the situation requiring the process does not crop up often but consistency in process is still required