


Enhancing Public Service with Customer Service




Enhancing Public Safety with Customer Service

Based on *Inspector Skills*,
by Stephen Van Note




Introduction

- Why are we doing this Workshop?
 - *Inspector Skills* book – new from ICC
- What do you hope to take away from class today?




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What is the Role of a Code Official?

First Activity:

- Small working groups
- Create a list of roles and responsibilities




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Responsibilities

Code official responsibilities

- ✓ Public safety advocate – community risk reduction
- ✓ *Administration* of construction and fire safety codes
- ✓ Knowledge of the codes – the letter of the code and the *intent* of the code
- ✓ Fair & consistent application of all codes – “AHJ Abuse”
- ✓ Effectively working with all stakeholders
- ✓ Prioritization of tasks based on community risks and available resources (personnel and budget)
- ✓ Obtaining code compliance by educating and changing behavior



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Community Risk Reduction

An “all-risks” approach to:

- Mitigation (codes and standards)
- Prevention (Enforcement)
- Response
- Recovery



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Community Risk Reduction

The 5 Es of Community Risk Reduction:

- Engineering
- Education
- Enforcement
- Economic Incentive
- Emergency Response

Where does the code official fit in?



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Political Environment

- Public desire for “less government”
 - Public desire for “less regulation”
 - “Cost” versus “Investment”
 - Public apathy about safety codes
 - Elected officials need to be educated about the value code officials bring
- ✓ *You need to tell your story and promote your value!*



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Prioritization of duties

- How do you prioritize tasks/work assignments?
- How do you maximize work/staff efficiency?
- Do you have a formal plan? Is it dynamic?




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DISCUSSION




Mission Statement

- Do you have an agency or department *Mission Statement*?
- Do you have a personal *Mission Statement*?
- Do you perform periodic self-assessments and situation assessments (lessons learned)?




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DISCUSSION




ICC's Mission Statement

To provide the highest quality codes, standards, products and services for all concerned with the safety and performance of the built environment.




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DISCUSSION




Personal Mission Statement

To seek continuous self-improvement and enhancement of knowledge through on-going professional development activities, peer networking, self-assessment and reading of contemporary professional articles. My core values include: integrity, competency, compassion, commitment, responsiveness and follow-through.



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Code Official Skills



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ACTIVITY



Requisite skills


- Review code official skills activity, what was on your list.
- Let's list some desirable code official skills.


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Definitions

Hard Skills:


Specific, teachable abilities that can be defined, observed, quantified and measured. For a code official, these are the technical skills required to perform the job.


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Definitions


- Soft Skills
 - Personal qualities, habits, attitudes and social graces that enhance an individual's interactions and job performance.
- In our list of code official skills, which are soft skills?


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Code Official Skills – Purpose

- To raise awareness of the importance of soft skills
- Provide guidance on recognizing and improving soft skills
- Reinforce positive behaviors
- Identify some pitfalls

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Job Description

- Employers recognize importance of soft skills
 - Interaction with public
 - Provide service to the public
- Are any soft skills listed in your job description?
 - Customer service
 - Communication



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Building a Positive Relationship With Your Boss

- Elected official or employee?
- Understanding their priorities
- Explaining your role and responsibilities
- Regular communication and reporting
- Create trust and mutual respect



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Foundation

- Solid technical knowledge
 - Construction methods and materials
 - Hazards to the built environment and occupant safety
 - Technical code provisions and intent – Code Commentary or Handbook
- The codes serve as the basis for the decisions and actions of the code official.



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Soft Skills

- Equally important to hard skills
- Elevate inspector from good to excellent
- Accomplish goal of safe buildings
 - Public acceptance of department mission
 - Inspections benefit community
- Success depends on buy-in from the public.



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Ambassador

- Who is the first point of contact?
- The code official is often first point of contact
- The code official is an ambassador for their department
 - Gain public trust and support
 - Gain code compliance (*the three Es*)



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Educator

- Skilled code official committed to public education
- Outreach efforts of department (*BSM and FPM opportunities, Ready Campaign, etc.*)
- Informational handouts/application guides
- Website
- Plan review and constructive feedback
- At jobsite with GC and sub-contractors



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Facilitator

Facilitate:
To make easier, to help bring about.



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Facilitator (continued)

- Change public's perception
- Facilitator rather than regulator
- Resource rather than adversary
- Work to find solutions
- Beyond a simple duty of enforcing rigid rules
- And be nice!



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Attitude

Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.

– Winston Churchill



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Attitude (continued)

- Positive approach
- Respect, courtesy and diplomacy
- Raise bar of professionalism
- Improve image of the code official
- Makes life easier all around



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Public Trust and Acceptance

- Promotes adoption and use of codes
- Improves public safety and first responder safety



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Support from Jurisdiction

- Builds confidence in decision making
- Code official able to work independently
- Signals the code official's work is
 - Worthwhile
 - Beneficial to the community



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Gaining Support From

- Managers
- Director
- Chief
- Commissioner
- City Manager
- Elected officials



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Methods of Support

- Training - *Networking!*
- Staff Meetings – *Networking!*
- Mentoring - *Networking!*
- Encouragement
- Recognition
- Engaging work
- Incentives (Certifications)
- Chapter and Regional/National Meetings



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Technical Skills

- Code Administration – Chapter 1
 - Minimum requirements
 - Interpretation
 - Alternatives



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Minimum Requirements

- Intent
- Consensus
- Balance
- Practical limits
 - **Feasibility**
 - **Affordability**



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Code Interpretation

- Responsibility and authority
- Performance provisions
- Multiple solutions
- Conflicts
- Meaning and intent



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Code Interpretation (Continued)

- Interpretation and applying intent requires developing skills in:
 - Critical thinking
 - Independent decision making
 - Problem solving
 - Conflict resolution



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Alternatives

- Flexibility in codes
- Obligation to approve alternatives
- Open mind on new technology and different methods
- *Remember, the goal is achieving an acceptable, minimal level of safety – there may be many paths to that end goal!*



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Decision Making

- Checklist?
 - Much more than a checklist
- Challenging and complex
- Within framework and spirit of code
- Code is basis for decisions
- Keep an open mind



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Perspective

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Inspector Skills

Perspective

Flexibility <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Explores alternatives •Intent of the code •Meets minimum standards •Open mind 	Boundaries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •What is required? •Where does the code end? •Don't ask for more than code requires
Precision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Level of precision varies •Not an exact science 	Consistency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Consistent and fair

Problem or Issue

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Perspective

Flexibility	Boundaries
Is 3.75 inches good enough for a house number...the code requires 4 inches	
Precision	Consistency

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Inspector Skills

Perspective

Flexibility	Boundaries
Measuring fire separation distance from lot line	
Precision	Consistency

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Communication



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Communication

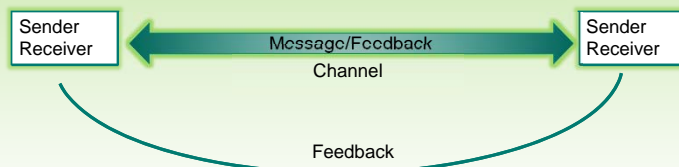
- Communication Model
- Written and verbal communication
- Non-verbal communication
- Delivering bad news



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Communication Model



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Plan Your Communication

- Understand your objective
- Understand your audience
- Plan what you want to say
- Plan when best to say it



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Creating a Clear Message

- Understand what you need & want to say
- Anticipate the other person's reaction
- Choose words that allow the other person to really hear what you're saying



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Written Communication Tips

- State the message clearly & briefly
- Follow with clear direction
- Be respectful
- Written communication can be read by anyone
- FAQ's



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Written Communication Tips

Shouting, condescending

EGRESS WINDOWS ARE REQUIRED IN **ALL** BASEMENTS, **NOT** JUST BASEMENTS WITH HABITABLE SPACE!!!!!!

Respectful, sticks to facts and reason.

... The code changed several years ago to require at least one emergency escape and rescue opening in every basement to improve the level of safety ...



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Written Communication Tips

Unprofessional

Jason - not receiving truss dwg so I can check trsses btw not at job either :-(\n r u sending over soon????\n ;-)

Professional, courteous

This is just a reminder that we haven't received the truss design drawings yet.

Please have the supplier send us a set so we can check ... and not hold you up.



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Written Communication Tips

Critical, judgmental, imposing personal preference, fortune telling.

Yes, the code says you can do it that way, but everybody gets this wrong and so will you. ...

Accurate, respectful, helpful.

You are correct. Please see the attached information for the specific requirement and example of a correct installation. Let me know if you have any questions.



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Positive ways to say "No"

Trigger Words (to avoid):

"You should"

"You can't"

"I can't"

"No"

"If only"

"But"

"Bug" or "glitch"

"That's our policy"

Collaborative words (more effective):

"We can do this together"

"One alternative for you could be..."

"What I can do is"

"I'm sorry, that is not possible, because..."

"Let me show you what to do in the future..."

"And"

"issue" or "situation"

"In order to provide you with great service..."



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E-mail Communication Tips

- Never assume privacy exists in e-mail
- Use e-mail when appropriate
- Capture the e-mail's objective in the subject line
- Fill in the "to" box at last



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Tips to Managing your E-mail

- Turnoff e-mail notification
- Review/respond to e-mail 1 or 2x daily
- Don't handle e-mail multiple times
- Procrastination
- Paperwork/achieve
- Use flags
- Avoid indecision



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Communication Model



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Choosing the Right Channel

- The sensitivity & emotional content of the subject
- How easy it is to communicate detail
- The receiver's preferences
- Time constraints
- The need to ask and answer questions



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Communication Model



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Receiving the Message

- Look at the person
- Pay attention to his or her body language
- Nod and smile to acknowledge points
- Allow the person to speak
- Don't interrupt



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Reasons for not Listening

- Already made up mind
- Hearing only what you want to hear
- Jumping to conclusions
- Lack of interest
- Being angry, upset, or worried about other things



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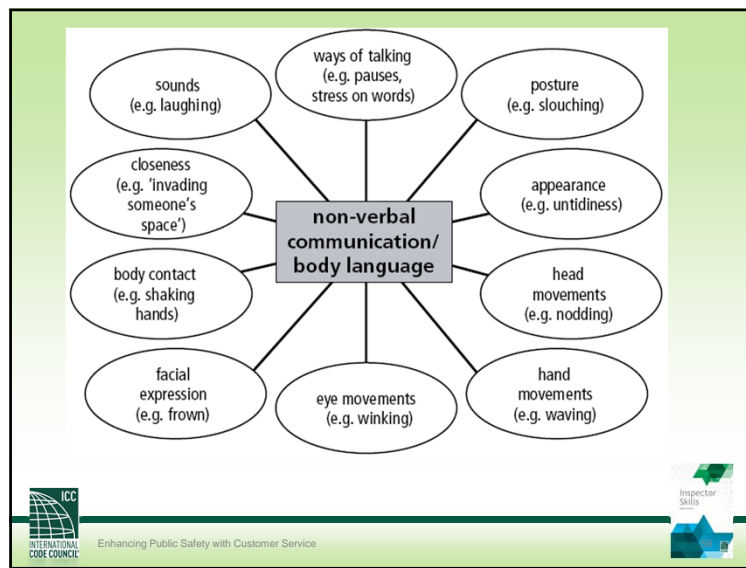


Body Language-Informal Feedback

- Defensiveness
- Agreement
- Comprehension (or lack of understanding)
- Level of interest
- Level of engagement with the message
- Truthfulness



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Hands on hips

Aggression, readiness




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Touching, rubbing nose



Rejection,
doubt, lying





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Rubbing with eyes closed

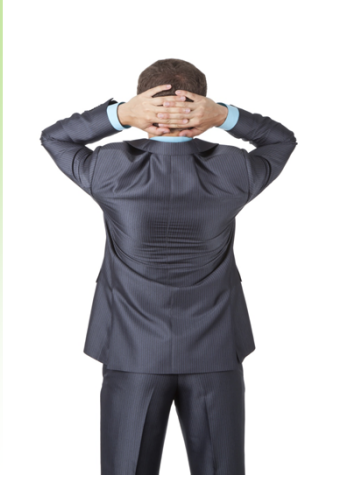
Negative evaluation




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Hands clasp behind head/back




Anger,
frustration,
apprehension




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Head resting on hand



Boredom



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Biting nails

Insecurity, nervousness



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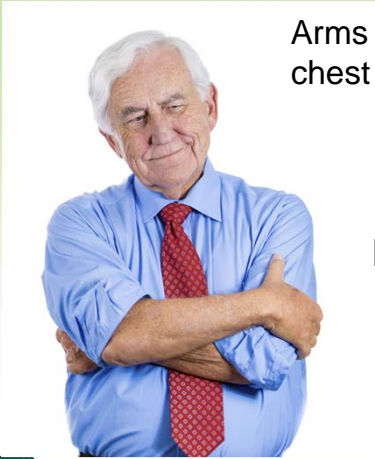
Smiling, expressive, open arms



Excited

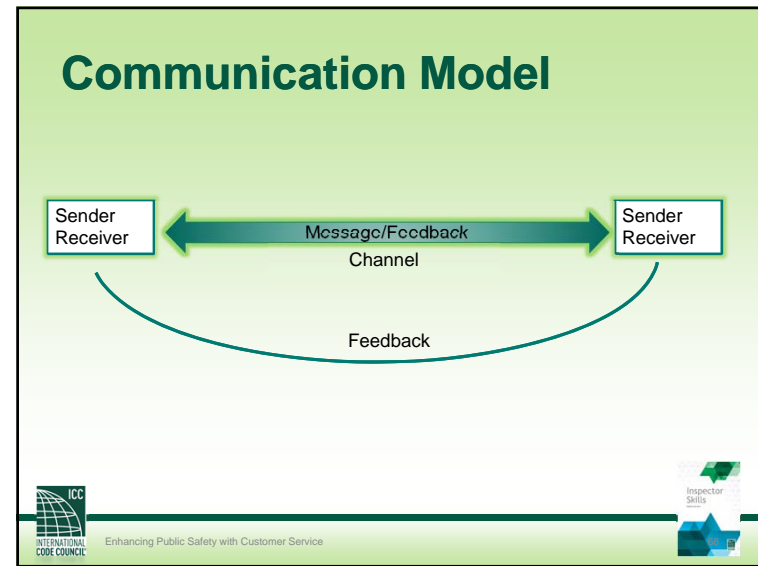
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Arms crossed on chest



Defensiveness

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The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn't being said.

Peter Drucker



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Difficult Conversations

- Giving bad news
 - Empathy
- Difficult people
 - Exception rather than the rule



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Difficult Conversations

- Prepare
 - Gather your thoughts
 - Know what you want to say
 - Choose the right time and setting
 - How you want to open the conversation
- Begin and end on a positive note



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Difficult Conversations

- Deliver focused and clear instruction
- Invite comment
- Listen
- Thank the customer for listening



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Let's take a break!



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Difficult request from your Boss

- Asked to “look the other way”
- Asked to “come down hard”
- Asked to “just approve the plans”
- Asked to “just issue the C of O or Permit”



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Angry People

- Counting to 10
- ABC
 - Ask
 - Breathe
 - Choose



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Avoid “I” and “You”

I want you to do this.

The code requires this.
And provide a reason or explanation, if possible



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Avoid “I” and “You”

You always do this. OR
You don't understand.

This department handout will
be helpful in understanding
the code requirements



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Avoid “I” and “You”

Why didn't you do it this
way? OR That's for you to
figure out.

There are a number of
ways that would satisfy
the code requirements.
Let me suggest some
options.



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E-mail Communication Tips

- Turnoff e-mail notification
- Use descriptive subject line
- Review/respond to e-mail 1 or 2x daily
- Don't handle e-mail multiple times
- Procrastination
- Paperwork
- Indecision



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Communications Recap

- Model
 - Plan your communication
 - Create the message
 - Choose the right channel
- Feedback
 - Body language
 - Questions



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Communications Recap

- Difficult conversations
- Prepare, prepare, prepare
- Things to avoid



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Code Official Challenges



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Let's review the Challenges

Recap of the challenges of the



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Staffing and Budgets

- **Enhancing the Profile of Code Officials**
 - ✓ Staffing
 - ✓ Training
 - ✓ Support
 - ✓ Education
 - ✓ Certification



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DISCUSSION

Staffing and Budgets

- Funding Sources and Revenue Generation

- ✓ Grants
- ✓ Sponsorships
- ✓ Permit Fees
- ✓ Provide Fee-Based Services


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DISCUSSION

Staffing and Budgets

- **Doing More with Less**

- ✓ Third-party plan review and/or inspections
- ✓ Fire suppression company inspections
- ✓ Inter-municipal agreements
- ✓ Flexible work assignments
- ✓ Co-operative purchasing agreements
- ✓ Use technology

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DISCUSSION

Staffing and Budgets

- **Code Administration Mutual Aid**

- ✓ Inter-municipal agreements for special servicers, expertise
- ✓ Potential to reduce overtime for vacations, holidays


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DISCUSSION


Staffing and Budgets

- **Technology and Code Administration**

- ✓ Improve customer service – reduce turn-a-round time/inspection lead time
- ✓ Reduce paperwork and wasted time
- ✓ Improve data collection
- ✓ Improve accuracy of inspections
- ✓ Increase personnel effectiveness

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 **Discussions**


Consolidations

Headache or Opportunity ?

- ❖ Building Departments under Fire Service
- ❖ Fire Prevention under Department of Buildings
- ❖ Fire Prevention/Building Dept. under Public Safety

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Customer Service

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Who are our Customers?

Technicians

Associates Property owners

Installers Homebuilders

Public & First Responders

Designers Contractors

Home owners Coworkers

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Customer Service

- **First Impressions**
- Expectations
- Listening
- Choosing words carefully
- Complaints
- Honesty

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First Impressions

- Make a personable greeting – *remember, they already know you have “authority”*
- Identify yourself
- Have a positive attitude
- Be courteous and respectful
- Be cheerful and friendly



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First Impressions

- Be helpful
- Be fair
- Be consistent
- Keep an open mind
- Be punctual
- Smile



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Customer Service

- First Impressions
- **Expectations**
- Listening
- Choosing words carefully
- Obstacles
- Complaints
- Dealing with difficult people



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Expectations

- Accurate information
- Answers to inquiries
- Follow-up when promised
- Punctuality
- Courteous behavior



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Meeting Customer's Expectations

- Be courteous and punctual
- Follow through
- Research and preparation
- Be accurate and honest
- Return phone calls and e-mails promptly
- Under-promise and over-deliver



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Expectations

“Customers don't expect you to be perfect. They do expect you to fix things when they go wrong.”

Donald Porter, VP with British Airways



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Customer Service

- First Impressions
- Expectations
- **Listening**
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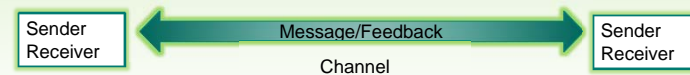


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Active Listening

- *Is simply part of the communication skills discussed earlier*



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Customer Service

- First Impressions
- Expectations
- Listening
- **Choosing words carefully**
- Complaints
- Dealing with difficult people



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Choose Words Carefully

Avoid—I don't know.

Better—That's a good question. Let me check and get back to you.

Comment—It's OK to not know the answer, follow up by researching and communicating to the customer.



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Choose Words Carefully

Avoid—You can't do that. You'll have to...

Better--There are a number of ways to accomplish this and meet the code requirements.

Comment—Keep an open mind, be flexible and look at alternatives or solutions. Make helpful suggestions.



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Choose Words Carefully

Avoid—NO!

Better--The code doesn't allow that because...but here is a suggestion.

Comment—Turn a negative into a positive



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Customer Service

- First Impressions
- Expectations
- Listening
- Choosing words carefully
- **Complaints**
- Dealing with difficult people



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Handling Complaints

- Listen
- Keep a good attitude
- Be open to suggestions
- Try to understand (put yourself in the customer's shoes)
- Restate what the customer said



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Handling Complaints

- Avoid arguing
- Offer a resolution
- Know when further discussion *will not* be beneficial
- Document and follow up



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Customer Service

- First Impressions
- Expectations
- Listening
- Choosing words carefully
- Complaints
- **Dealing with difficult people**



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Why are People Difficult?

- People feel
 - Rushed – not enough time
 - Insecure
 - Angry
 - Have some need or interest
 - Stressed



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A Difficult Person can be

- Hostile-Aggressive
- Know-it-all
- Yes person
- Whiner
- Never say a word
- Indecisive staller
- No



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Hostile aka “The Tank”

- Bullies their way
- Belittles you
- Tries to convince you that you are doing a bad job
- “I pay your salary”
- “I know your boss”



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Dealing with “The Tank”

- If possible, get them to sit down
- Don’t back down
- Let them vent
- Identify the issue....the facts
- Explain the benefits of your point
- Allow aggressor to “save face” – look for a “win-win” solution.



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The Know-It-All

- Controls people and events by dominating
- Tries to find flaws in everything



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Dealing with the Know-It-All

- Know your facts....be prepared
- Listen carefully and paraphrase the main points
- Use questions to raise issues



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Yes Person

- Answers “yes” to everything
- Seeks approval and avoids disapproval



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Dealing with the Yes Person

- Work to get to the underlying issue
- Tell how much you value their opinion
- Listen for hidden messages



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No Person

- Able to defeat big ideas with a single syllable-----NO
- Deadly to morale



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Dealing with the No Person

- Work to get to the underlying issues
- Find out the reason for disagreement
- Show the other side
- Show the benefits



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Whiner

- Avoids taking responsibility
- Wants sympathy
- Has negative view of the world
- If you ignore them, they increase protests



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Dealing with the Whiner

- Don't respond if they are blaming you
- Make sure facts are correct
- Ask them propose solutions



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Never says a word aka “The Clam”

- Timid, uncomfortable and uncertain
- Wants to avoid conflict
- Feels angry because “the wrong decision was made”
- Some can’t relate authentically



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Dealing with the Clam

- Discuss non-threatening topics
- Ask open-ended questions
- Wait for a response.....calmly



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Coping Techniques

- Don’t take it personally
- Write down details of what annoys you
- Think about why it annoys you
- Which of your buttons does this person push
- Why do you respond to them the way you do?



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Coping (continued)

- How would you like to respond
- Monitor yourself
- Give yourself positive feedback
- Quit Taking It Personally
- You are not going to change someone else



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Ethics



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Doing the Right Thing

Whenever you do a thing, act as if all the world were watching.

- Thomas Jefferson

And today, they probably are!



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Doing the Right Thing *For the Right Reason*

- Job subject to public scrutiny
- Good code officials welcome that scrutiny
- Embrace ethical principles of honesty and lawfulness
- To benefit society, community and profession
- Apply rules fairly and objectively with no vested interest



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Conflict of Interest

- Any situation where the inspector is in a position to benefit personally from a decision.
- Causes the public to lose trust in the objectivity and fairness of the inspector.
- Regulations must be applied consistently and equitably.



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Ethical Decisions

- Butterfly Test
- Authority Test
- Public Scrutiny Test



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What would you do?

You inspect what you consider to be poor quality work by a local contractor. You call the homeowner to report that there were an unusual number of deficiencies, that you've had problems with this contractor in the past and you just wanted the homeowner to be aware of some workmanship issues. ***Is that appropriate?***



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What would you do?

You discover a \$500 error in your paycheck, in your favor. ***Would you call it to payroll team's attention immediately or wait for payroll personnel to discover it?***



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What would you do?

You have a little side business unrelated to your position. You need copies made now and then so you use the copier at work. ***Is this ethical?***




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CASE STUDY




What would you do?

During a rental housing inspection you find violations. You give the building owner your personal business card and let them know that you do work on the side, to just call and you would be happy to fix the violations. ***Is there an issue?***




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CASE STUDY




What would you do?

- You have just completed the acceptance test for all the fire protection systems in a new restaurant. The owner is excited about his upcoming grand opening and hands you a \$150 gift certificate “for all your help” and suggest you bring your spouse for dinner. ***Is this an issue?***




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DISCUSSION




Fact or Myth?

- The codes serve as the basis for the actions of the code official.
- Inspection is following a checklist
- The general public enthusiastically values the work of code officials




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DISCUSSION



Fact or Myth?


- Success of a code enforcement department depends on buy-in from the public.
- The code official is an ambassador for their department in gaining the public trust.



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DISCUSSION




Fact or Myth?

- Customer service does not apply to code administration.
- The success of an inspection can be measured by the number of violations identified.




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DISCUSSION




Fact or Myth?

- Code officials are educators.
- The code official needs to make reasonable decisions in following the intent of the code.




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DISCUSSION




Fact or Myth?

Soft skills are specific, teachable abilities that can be defined, observed, quantified and measured.




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FINAL REFLECTION



Expectations?

Did the course meet your expectations?



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QUESTION & ANSWER

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Questions?



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Thank you for participating

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