Customers learn behaviors as children and often repeat them as adults. As a service provider, you cannot control how they act; however, you can control how you act and respond to them.

**KEY CONCEPTS**

After reading this chapter and when applying concepts learned, you will be able to:

1. Explain how the economic conditions in the world have impacted customer service.
2. Describe how consumer behavior has changed and what organizations are doing to address those shifts in today’s global economy.
3. Define some of the factors that are influencing customer service today.
4. Discuss the impact of customer loyalty on you and your organization.
5. Identify ways to manage customer needs, wants, and expectations.
6. Use knowledge of behavioral styles to establish and maintain more powerful customer-provider relationships.
7. Exhibit the core elements of positive customer service when dealing with people inside and outside your organization.

As the world continues to change politically, economically, technologically, and in many other ways, so do the people you serve. Values and beliefs are evolving in various cultures, and that is affecting what people want. Customer perceptions about when and how products and services should be delivered are also changing. The impact of this shift can be seen in the way that companies attempt to address customer expectations and the advertisements they use. For example, in past advertisements FedEx stressed, “When it absolutely, positively has to get there overnight, call FedEx,” Burger King touts that you can “Have It Your Way,” and Enterprise Car Rental emphasizes that “We’ll pick you up.”

With the proliferation of the Internet and the millions of Web sites now online, service is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year. All this feeds the goal of customer satisfaction and provides a vehicle for organizations to be more competitive in a global marketplace. There is virtually nothing that a customer might want that isn’t a mouse click away.

THE IMPACT OF THE ECONOMY ON SERVICE

A number of economists have estimated that the global recession took hold at the end of 2007. In reality, there were underpinnings of the problem at the beginning of the new century and earlier. These economic changes have brought worldwide financial havoc with them and caused many consumers to severely curtail buying and change their saving and spending habits, perhaps forever. Unemployment has skyrocketed around the world, and entire governments have been brought to the edge of financial collapse. Couple these issues with dramatically changing world demographics, changing cultural values, and many other political, lifestyle, and ecological
shifts and you have a prescription for organizations to revamp the way that their products and services are delivered to customers.

Why individuals and certain consumer groups buy, and what they buy, has been studied by marketing experts for years, with the goal of trying to more accurately predict patterns and needs that can be addressed by manufacturers and service providers. Each demographic entity has its own special patterns of behavior and spending which you should be aware of in order to better handle customer needs and wants.

Because of changing demographics and consumer behavior patterns, many organizations are continually adapting and refocusing their approach to serving customers and marketing their products and services. Organizations are keenly interested in many things related to customer behavior. Among other things, they want to know:

- Who is buying?
- What are they buying?
- What triggers their buying habits?
- When are they buying?
- How much they are buying?
- Why do they buy one product or service over another?
- How are they making purchases and buying decisions?
- What are they doing with the products they purchase?

All this information allows organizations to better target and serve current and potential customers and can assist you and other front-line service providers in better addressing the needs and wants of your customers. The reality is that your customers do not stop needing and wanting products and services just because the economy slows down or jobs start going away. They still make purchases, but they do it in a more cautious manner by selecting things that are most important and in many cases more affordable. Because of that, brand loyalty often goes by the wayside as customers seek out products and services that address their needs and perform as well at a lower cost. This is where your product knowledge and service skills come in handy. By being able to effectively discuss the differences and value added by your organization’s offerings, you can often persuade customers to switch from their preferred brand or vendor and buy from you.
SHIFTS IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Overall, the buying power of various ethnic groups in the United States has grown. According to one study by the University of Georgia’s Selig Center, “Over the 18-year period (1990–2008), the percentage gains in minority buying power vary considerably by race, from a gain of 337 percent for Asians to 213 percent for American Indians to 187 percent for blacks. All of these target markets will grow much faster than the white market, where buying power will increase by 139 percent.” Other sources contend that women are also a force to be reckoned with in the retail environment. Female consumers account for a majority of buying decisions on consumer products and services in many areas, including everything from automobiles to health care. Many of the increases described are due to more representation of these groups in the workplace and at higher professional levels (e.g., management), higher education levels, and better access to workplace opportunities for minorities (e.g., training, promotions, and transfers).

Other diverse groups are also having a major impact on global markets, especially in the United States, where one marketing firm “estimated the buying power of gays and lesbians [to] exceed $835 billion and projected the gay and lesbian population to exceed 16.3 million people by 2011.” In addition, people with disabilities spend billions of dollars on goods and services. Some estimates for online spending by this group alone top $10 billion a year. Add to these numbers the demographic of the newest generation of shoppers—Generation Y (also known as Millennials, teens, tweeners, and twenty-somethings), born between 1978 and 2000 with nearly 84 million members in the United States alone. According to Kit Yarrow and Jayne O’Donnell in their eye-opening book Gen Buy: How Tweens, Teens and Twenty-Somethings Are Revolutionizing Retail, this demographic group spends over $200 billion a year, and it is estimated that in their lifetime, their consumption will top $10 trillion.

Obviously the recession slowed the amount of sales being made worldwide. Even so, with the types of economic power being wielded by various ethnic, age, and other diverse groups, service providers should plan accordingly and be prepared to meet the needs of each group of customers. That means gaining knowledge about values, beliefs, motivators,
history, and other factors that can influence someone’s behavior and perceptions, especially related to those of diverse categories. For example, there is a potential for distrust when some people of different cultures or groups with a history of negative relations (e.g., Caucasian and African American or North American Indian, Chinese and Japanese, Israeli and Palestinian, Christian and Muslim) come together. As a service provider, if you are aware of potential negative perceptions, you might modify your approach to a given situation.

**POSITIVE GLOBAL SERVICE ACTION TIP**

Spend time researching spending habits for the various customer groups that you most often serve so that you can identify potential patterns of consumer behavior. Once you have done this, work to create an atmosphere where all customers feel comfortable with you and recognize that you are striving to address their unique needs and wants while serving them.

**FACTORS INFLUENCING CUSTOMER SERVICE**

There is no doubt that the world population and workplaces are changing. Unlike the past, there are now likely to be a higher number of older customers with whom you will interact in the course of your daily job activities. Depending on the country and method in which you deliver service, there is also more opportunity for you to encounter more consumers than ever before who are female, disabled, or non-native language speakers; who are from different socioeconomic backgrounds; or who possess a variety of other diverse characteristics from societies around the world. Add to this mix the constantly changing technological innovations being made and adopted in organizations to aid customer service professionals, and your job has gotten more complex than ever before. All these shifts are having a profound impact on the way that you deal with your customers.

Successful companies develop and implement proactive, strategic approaches for providing customer service that takes into account all the changes taking place. They train employees in effective service and include strategies for interacting with customers who have diverse backgrounds.
If you work for such an organization, you have probably seen such changes. Various forms of technology have likely been embraced, updated approaches for dealing with all types of customers and their needs and preferences have been instituted, and partnerships with other groups (e.g., customers, vendors, complementing organizations, and, in some cases, competitors) have been formed in order to add assets, products, and services that can strengthen the organization and add value for customers. Additionally, such a visionary organization has made adjustments in the way that it does business and delivers products and services. For example, instead of having a help desk, which traditionally only provided reactive service when something broke down or the customer had a problem using your products or services, you now have a service desk that anticipates potential customer issues and needs. Such planning helps to inform and show customers that your organization does care about meeting their needs. To also help to prepare you and your peers, the organization likely invests in new technology and trains you how to effectively use the features of the system and software. It also provides you with training on various aspects of dealing with customers appropriately and efficiently (e.g., on policies and procedures, customer service topics, interpersonal communication, diversity, conflict resolution, time management, and behavioral styles) and on product knowledge and skills that allow you to ask pertinent questions or offer suggestions during each interaction with customers or potential customers.

**IMPACT ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY**

As the economic condition of the world continues to shift, it has many implications for your customers. One major issue is that many customers are no longer attached to the idea of using one organization to meet their needs. In addition to seeking higher value, they want personalized service that addresses their needs and expectations.

*Customer loyalty* is an emotional rather than a rational thing. It is often based on how effectively you and your coworkers deliver positive
global customer service and is supported by sound service policies and procedures and solid-quality products and services backed by a customer-friendly guarantee.

For any organization to be successful in gaining and retaining customers in today’s competitive global business environment, the organization must project a customer-centric approach to service. It must also be perceived as having the best interests of its customers at heart; not just its own bottom line. Going back to what you read in Chapter 1, people must trust an organization and its service representatives before they will do business with it, especially if they are from countries in which relationships play a big role in doing business. This can often be the deciding factor when a customer has a concern or question about an organization or its products or services.

A key point for you to remember in serving others is that today’s consumers are far more educated and informed than at any point in history. They are also more selective, have more choices, and are more demanding than their predecessors. With the proliferation of the Internet and social media, people can access information almost instantly from virtually anywhere. As a result, customers are savvier and better prepared to make buying decisions. Gone are the days when consumers got most of their information from an advertisement or had to depend on a salesperson to educate them. According to Forrester Research, “Over the past three years, [consumers] have become more likely to research products online and less likely to be influenced by advertising. Even worse . . . the percentage of consumers who think price is more important than brand name has steadily increased.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF CUSTOMER LOYALTY

For almost four decades, the research firm Technical Assistance Research Program (TARP) in Arlington, Virginia, has conducted various studies to determine the impact of customer service. The following extracts from a number of their studies have revealed that:
• It will cost an organization five times more to acquire a new customer as it will to keep an existing one.
• On average, 50 percent of consumers will complain about a problem to a front-line person. In business-to-business environments, this jumps to 75 percent.
• For small-ticket items, 96 percent of consumers do not complain or they complain to the retailer from whom they bought an item. For large-ticket items, 50 percent complain to front-line employees, and 5 to 10 percent escalate the problem to local managers or corporate headquarters.
• At least 50 percent of your customers who experience problems will not complain or contact your organization for help; they will simply go elsewhere.
• Customers who are dissatisfied will tell as many as 16 friends or acquaintances about a negative experience with your organization.
• The average business loses 10 to 15 percent of its customers per year because of bad customer service.


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**FOCUS ON POSITIVE GLOBAL SERVICE:
RETURN POLICIES MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

Take a look at the following return policies from actual online booksellers, and then answer the questions that follow.

**COMPANY A**

Returns must meet the following criteria:

a. Books must be received within thirty (30) days of the invoice date. Please allow one week for shipping.
b. Books must be received in salable condition. Damaged books will not be accepted for credit.
c. Refunds will not be made on videotapes and software unless they are defective at the time of purchase. Please notify [organization’s name] of any such defects within ten (10) days of the invoice date.
Return Shipping Information
Returns must be shipped to [organization's name and full address].
   Any returns not shipped to the above address will not be credited and FULL
   PAYMENT for shipping will be the responsibility of the shipper.
   All charges incurred in returning materials, including customer's charges, if
   any, are the responsibility of the shipper.
   Ensure that your returns are not lost or damaged.

Comments and Feedback
We value your opinion! If you need to return any of the enclosed material, please
take a minute to let us know why. Your comments and suggestions will help us
better meet your needs in the future.

COMPANY B
To err is human; to return is just fine . . .
   Already read the book? Pages printed upside down? The package arrived
bruised, battered, and otherwise weary from the trip? Actually, the only reason
you need to return an item bought from us is this: You’re not satisfied . . .
   Having a chance to talk with our customer helps us learn and improve our
service. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate the [organization's name]
customer policy: YOU’RE RIGHT!

What do you feel is the goal of the first policy example? Explain.
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What do you feel is the goal of the second policy example? Explain.
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Which company do you feel really had its customers’ best interests in mind when it developed the policy? Explain.

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**MANAGING CUSTOMER NEEDS, WANTS, AND EXPECTATIONS**

Many people often confuse needs with wants. A *need* is an internal motivator or driver that someone requires and that typically can be categorized as either primary (things vital for survival, such as food) or secondary (a specific type of food). In addition to the things that people must have, there are many things that they desire (e.g., jewelry). These are called *wants* and are often generated through advertising, peer pressure, or an internal motivator that makes people feel that they must have something. Marketers prey on this feeling of “must have” to sell their products and services. There is also a gray area between needs and wants that relates to items that people rely on heavily to obtain their needs. An example of this might be transportation (e.g., car, bus, or subway) that allows them to get to work to make the money to satisfy their needs and wants. As a service provider, it is important for you to understand how cultural and individual values impact needs and wants and to know the difference so that you can better assist your customers in fulfilling what is important to them. If you are familiar with Dr. Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy-of-needs theory of motivation (see Figure 2-1), you can relate it to the service experience and recognize that until people have met their basic (biological and physiological) needs, they cannot focus on higher levels of need.
Coupled with needs and wants are customer *expectations*, which are preconceived ideas about your organization, products, or services. Cultural background, beliefs, advertising, and publicity are just a few of the many factors that influence a customer’s expectations. The interesting thing about expectations is that they are like an ocean—they ebb and flow, continually changing. For example, if someone reads an article about the newest smart phone with all the latest applications or the newest trendy toy for children at Christmas time, he or she might expect to have to stand in a long line to purchase it, pay more for the item because it hasn’t been discounted, or perhaps even find it difficult to get one. On the other hand, a year after the release of such items, the customer would expect ease of accessibility and a much reduced cost, especially for the technical items because they become obsolete quickly.

Related to expectations about service, customers (and many service representatives) have been conditioned through books, articles, training, news reports, and experience that “The customer is always right.” For that
reason, many people feel that if they raise their voices, curse, and demand to see a manager or conduct themselves in some similar manner, they will ultimately get what they want. In such instances, you may have to call upon all your training, patience, and professionalism to avoid becoming emotionally charged and responding inappropriately. The reality is that while you should treat all customers as the most important thing in your day while interacting with them, there are some instances when their behavior and expectations might dictate that you cannot adequately serve them to their level of expectation because of your lack of skills or due to a policy that prohibits a requested action. In such instances, the assistance of a coworker or supervisor may be required. Your coworker or supervisor may have additional knowledge or authority to help resolve the situation. The key is to let customers know what you can do—and not what you can’t do. And if you have to say no, do so in a manner that allows them to feel that they were a part of the decision process and got something that they wanted, even if it was only a rational explanation of why they did not get what they requested.

You will read some strategies for handling such situations in Chapter 4. Below you'll find some common customer expectations that you might encounter.

**POSITIVE GLOBAL SERVICE ACTION TIP**

Be conscientious and prepared to think like customers in order to satisfy their needs, wants, and expectations. The easiest way to find out what customers want, need, or expect is to ask them.

**Anticipating Customer Needs**

Providing products and services that your customers do not value or appreciate is bad business. That is why you should strive to better understand consumer behavior and what customers want and need. To achieve this, organizations use a variety of information-gathering strategies. Some of the more common include:
• Asking customers to describe their service experiences through the use of on-site feedback forms or online or mailed surveys.
• Doing an on-the-spot survey following a sale or transaction, in which you ask a customer how well the product or service received met his or her needs and expectations. Follow-up surveys are useful as well.
• Employing focus groups, made up of a sampling of customers, where you gather information in response to specific product-and service-related questions.
• Analyzing sales, marketing, service, and other types of reports to help spot trends and make adjustments to policies and procedures.
• Keeping track of all bids or proposals to determine the acceptance and sales percentages and analyzing them to determine if there are patterns for the ones that were not successful.
• Reviewing marketing data that have been collected through interviews and research to help determine shopping and buying patterns for your customer demographics.

COMMON CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS
On any given day, you may have customers contact you in regard to your products or services. Many of these customers do not have extreme expectations and can be satisfied in a relatively quick and easy manner. Some of the expectations are addressed by service providers, while others are handled by the organization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpersonal Expectations</th>
<th>Strategies for Addressing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To feel welcome</td>
<td>Enthusiastically greet customers in a positive manner with a smile (whether face-to-face or on the telephone) and use your customers’ names several times.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To feel comfortable

Take the time to allow customers to talk about nonbusiness-related topics without pressuring them. Help relieve anxiety by smiling and communicating in a calm, nonthreatening manner. When customers have to wait, provide them with an inviting service environment that includes a comfortable place to sit, reading material, and refreshments, if possible.

To feel appreciated

Treat customers as if they are the most important people in the world. Go beyond what might be expected, provide special offers, and remember any special details, such as family members’ names that they’ve previously told you. Thank the customers at the end of their transactions and follow up to ensure you met their expectations.

To feel understood

Listen actively and carefully—do not interrupt when customers are speaking. Ask pertinent questions, provide regular feedback, and be empathetic to their needs.

To feel important

Remember and use their names from memory, elicit their opinions about service improvements, and generally show that you value their business and ideas.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Product and Service Expectations</strong></th>
<th><strong>Strategies for Addressing</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Easy access</strong></td>
<td>Ensure that customers know how they can get in touch with service providers, place orders, get information, and provide feedback—and that they are able to do so without difficulty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality products and service</strong></td>
<td>Provide only the best-possible items and support to customers by using reputable suppliers and training employees to offer above-average service and product knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Safety</strong></td>
<td>Ensure that all products have been tested for safety and that any potential problems are rectified quickly and effectively before customers encounter them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Delivery as promised</strong></td>
<td>Ensure that you provide what you advertise and promise, delivering it when you promise it and in the manner in which you promise it. Customers do not like unpleasant surprises. Make sure that your products match the images and descriptions in your advertising and on your Web site.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competitive pricing</strong></td>
<td>Comparison-shop for comparable products and services to make sure that what you charge customers is reasonable and equitable. Have a policy for price matching, if necessary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Professional problem solving

Put the mechanisms in place to help quickly identify and resolve issues related to products and services. This process should empower frontline employees to handle issues without having to contact a supervisor and should be seamless to customers.

THE ROLE OF BEHAVIORAL-STYLE PREFERENCES IN CUSTOMER SERVICE

One major factor that often determines the outcome of any customer-provider service interaction is the behavioral-style preferences of both you and your customer. Behavioral styles are observable actions that you and other people exhibit when dealing with tasks or people. As people grow from infancy, their personalities form based on their life experiences and the environments in which they are reared. These become the basis of their behavioral-style preference(s). Some researchers believe that by the time people reach the first grade, their behavior is formed for life.

For you to be effective as a service professional, you will need to understand human behavioral-style characteristics. By becoming more proficient at identifying your own behavioral characteristics and those of others, you will better be able to create and maintain positive relationships with your customers. Self-knowledge is the starting point.

Just because customers say or do something differently from the way that you would doesn’t mean that they are wrong. It simply means that they approach situations from a different perspective. Positive relationships are built on accepting the characteristics of others. Since many people won’t always act the way you want them to, in order to provide positive global service, you need to adapt. This does not mean that you must make all the concessions when behaviors do not mesh. It simply means that although you do not have control over the behavior of others, you can control your own behavior to deal more effectively with your customers.

Many self-assessment questionnaires and much research related to behavioral styles are based on the work begun by psychiatrist Carl Jung.
Identifying and Addressing Consumer Behavior

and others in the earlier part of the twentieth century. Jung explored human personality and behavior. He divided behavior into two “attitudes” (introvert and extrovert) and four “functions” (thinking, feeling, sensing, and intuitive). These attitudes and functions can intermingle to form eight psychological types; knowledge of these types is useful in defining and describing human behavioral characteristics.

From Jung’s complex research (and that of others) have come many variations, additional studies, and a variety of behavioral-style self-assessment questionnaires and models for explaining personal behavior. Examples of these questionnaires are the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the Personal Profile System. Several organizations allow you to complete free surveys online.

Although everyone typically has a primary behavioral pattern to which he or she reverts in stressful situations, people also have other characteristics in common and regularly demonstrate similar behavioral patterns. Identifying your own style preferences helps you identify similar ones in others.

FOCUS ON POSITIVE GLOBAL SERVICE:
IDENTIFYING YOUR BEHAVIORAL STYLE(S)

As a quick strategy for identifying your primary and any secondary behavioral styles, make a copy of this page and then complete a brief informal assessment of your style(s).

Step 1. Read the following words and phrases and rate yourself by placing a number (from 1 to 5) next to each item. A 5 means that the word accurately describes you in most situations, and a 1 means that the word doesn't describe your behavior well. Before you begin, refer to the completed sample assessment that follows.

- Consistent
- Detail-oriented
- Competitive
- Optimistic
- Relaxed
- Nonaggressive (avoids conflict)
- Practical
- Fun loving
- Loyal
- Quality-focused
- Decisive
- Enthusiastic
- Sincere
- Accurate
- Calculating
- Popular
- Patient
- Logical
- Objective
- Talkative
Step 2. Once you have rated each word or phrase, start with the first word and put the letter R to the right of it. Place an I to the right of the second word, a D to the right of the third word, and an E to the right of the fourth word. Then start over with the fifth word and repeat the “RIDE” pattern until all words have a letter at their right.

Step 3. Next, go through the list and count point values for all words that have an R beside them. Put the total at the bottom of the list, as shown in the completed sample assessment below. Do the same for the other letters. Once you have finished, one letter will probably have the highest total score. Each letter describes a primary style preference, and the one with your highest total score is your natural style tendency.

If R has the highest score, your primary style preference is rational. If I has the highest score, you exhibit more inquisitive behavior. D indicates decisive, and E is an expressive style preference.

If two or more of your scores have the same high totals, you likely put forth similar amounts of effort in both these style areas.

Most people have a primary and at least one alternate style of behavior. Keep in mind that this is only a quick indicator. A more thorough assessment, using a formal instrument such as a questionnaire, will be better at predicting your style preferences.


### SAMPLE COMPLETED BEHAVIORAL-STYLE ASSESSMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Consistent</th>
<th>R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Detail-oriented</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Relaxed</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nonaggressive (avoids conflict)</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Practical</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Loyal</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Quality-focused</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Decisive</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Enthusiastic</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Human behavior is complex. For that reason, you would be doing yourself and your customers a disservice if you attempt to use your interpretation of behavioral characteristics and cues as absolute indicators of the type of person with whom you are dealing. While everyone shares some of the characteristics listed for all four behavioral-style categories, both your experience and your comfort levels with others help you better understand and adapt to the behavioral style of your customers. Generally, most people are adaptable and can shift style categories or exhibit different characteristics depending on the situation, if they so desire. For example, if you are more introverted [high inquisitive (I) style] and are more comfortable working alone or with tasks, you can still interact well for a short period of time with an internal or external customer who is very outgoing and personable. Similarly, if you are more of an extrovert [high expressive (E) style] who enjoys talking to anyone about virtually any topic, you are able to control that behavior and focus on specific detailed tasks when the occasion calls for it.

### POSITIVE GLOBAL SERVICE ACTION TIP

Learn more about your behavioral style and your customers’ styles by taking the time to obtain one or more of the commercial self-assessment surveys available on the Internet (e.g., Personal Profile System or Myers-Briggs Type Indicator).
Each person should be valued for his or her strengths and not be looked down upon because of what you perceive as a shortcoming. In a customer environment, each contact has the potential for contributing to your success and that of your organization. By appreciating the behavioral characteristics of people with whom you interact, you can avoid bias or prejudice and better serve your customers. An important point to remember is that there is no “best” or “worst” style.

Remember when dealing with your customers that even though they have a primary style, they may demonstrate other style behaviors too. If you become familiar with all style characteristics, recognize them in yourself, and observe how others display them, you can begin to learn how to better adapt to various behaviors. When interacting with others, remind yourself to watch their overall actions and behavior in order to get a better perception of their style preferences rather than react to one or two actions. Also, keep in mind that these characteristics are generalities and not absolutes when dealing with others. People can and do adapt and change behavior depending on a variety of circumstances.

The following lists of characteristics can help you become familiar with some behaviors displayed by people with each primary behavioral style.

R: Rational Behavioral Style

People who have a preference for the rational behavioral style may tend to:

• Avoid conflict and anger.
• Avoid situations that draw a lot of attention.
• Wear conservative clothing with muted colors and accessories.
• Wait in one place for periods of time without complaining, no matter how irritating it is.
• Exhibit congenial eye contact and facial expressions.
• Seek specific or complete explanations to questions (“That’s our policy” does not work well with an R customer).
• Employ brief, businesslike handshakes.
• Phrase opinions as questions rather than statements (e.g., “Do you think this would be a better choice?”).
Choose small-group or solitary activities over large-group or interactive ones.
Like to be on a first-name basis with others.
Listen and observe more than talk.
Communicate more in writing than face-to-face.

I: Inquisitive Behavioral Style
People who have a preference for the inquisitive behavioral style may tend to:

- Rely heavily on facts, times, dates, and practical information to make their point.
- Use formal titles and last names as opposed to first names. They may also stress the use of full names for themselves, not nicknames.
- Prefer to communicate via e-mail rather than face-to-face or on the telephone.
- Ask specific, pertinent questions rather than make statements of their feelings.
- Be very punctual and time conscious.
- Use cool, brief handshakes, often without a smile.
- Keep their personal life separate from business.
- Wear well-coordinated but conservative clothing and accessories.
- Carry on brief conversations.
- Use closed-ended questions (e.g., “Did you know that . . . ?” or “Have you checked . . . ?”).
- Be diplomatic with others.
- Prefer solitary leisure activities (e.g., reading or listening to relaxing music).

D: Decisive Behavioral Style
People who have a preference for the decisive behavioral style may tend to:

- Be assertive and direct in their approach (sometimes overly so).
- Display a seemingly overconfident or arrogant demeanor.
• Say what they think, often without considering the implications or impact.
• Ask specific, sometimes blunt questions and give short, straight answers.
• Talk rather than write about something.
• Be in motion a lot and move quickly.
• Prefer active, competitive leisure activities.
• Display symbols of power to demonstrate their own importance.
• Wear clothing that tends to be very stylish and professional. Image is important to the decisives.
• Work consistently toward finding solutions to problems or issues.
• Have functionally decorated but seemingly disorganized offices (all items have a purpose and are not there to make the environment more attractive).
• Be solemn and use closed, nonverbal body cues (e.g., crossed arms or hands on hips).
• Have firm handshakes and strong, direct eye contact.

E: Expressive Behavioral Style

People who have a preference for the expressive behavioral style may tend to:

• Display an outwardly friendly, positive attitude.
• Use animated, free-flowing gestures when talking.
• Speak loudly and expressively with a wide range of emotion.
• Use direct eye contact and an assertive, warm (often two-handed) handshake.
• Smile and use open body language (e.g., hands waist high or higher and lots of gestures).
• Stand close when talking face-to-face.
• Share feelings and express ideas easily with anyone who will listen.
• Talk rather than write about something.
• Change topics or get distracted when talking.
• Use informal nicknames and first names when communicating.
• Seek out excuses to socialize or talk with others.
• Avoid boredom or routine.
• Miss deadlines and dislike timelines.
• Create or propose projects.
• Like action-oriented, people-centered, or group-oriented leisure activities.
• Wear trendy, bright, or unusual clothes and jewelry.

The important thing to remember about the different style categories is that there is no right or wrong style. No one style is better than another. We all have all four style preferences to some degree; however, we exhibit or revert to our primary style when in stressful or pressure situations. By recognizing the behaviors, you can start to identify them when others exhibit them, and you can then potentially adapt to their behavioral needs. But like any other aspect of diversity, do not stereotype and treat someone exhibiting certain behaviors in a predetermined manner. This is a formula for a service and relationship breakdown.

**CORE ELEMENTS OF POSITIVE GLOBAL CUSTOMER SERVICE**

No matter what behavioral style or demographic group you are dealing with, there are specific strategies that you can use to ensure customer satisfaction. Often the approaches you use to service delivery will be based on your customer, the industry, organizational values, and your own personal training and experience. The important thing to remember is that most people react well to some core elements of positive global customer service. These components help customers achieve what they want and need. Figure 2-2 shows how some of the core elements can impact your customer.

**Empathy**

Customers want to have their needs and wants understood, and they want you and your organization to take a proactive approach to fulfilling their
expectations. This is especially true when something goes wrong with products or services in the mind of a customer. It does not matter what you think about a perceived breakdown. If a customer believes something did or did not occur, either positively or negatively, then it happened and you will have to address the customer’s perception and emotions and the accompanying issues. The last thing you want to do is get into the old schoolyard game of “did not–did too” with a customer who has a perceived problem. You will not win in such situations and risk angering the customer, losing business, and generating negative word-of-mouth publicity as the story of the event is shared with others later.
When you empathize with your customers, you attempt to understand what they are going through emotionally by pulling from your own experiences and background and then responding appropriately. In a global world, empathy may be difficult sometimes. The challenge is that people bring with them cultural or personal experiences or backgrounds. In such instances, you may have no frame of reference from which you can relate to what a customer is feeling or experiencing. Even so, there are some standard things that you can do or say when service breaks down or customer expectations are not met. If you listen intently and if you use positive, open nonverbal cues and offer empathetic comments, you can help create an atmosphere of understanding and assistance. Treating each customer and each situation as unique will make your life and your customer’s a lot easier.

**POSITIVE GLOBAL SERVICE ACTION TIP**

Do not confuse empathy with sympathy when dealing with customers. The first is your attempt to put yourself mentally in your customers’ position and try to imagine how they might be feeling or why they are acting in a specific fashion. The ultimate goal is to show that you understand their issue or where they are coming from emotionally. Sympathy implies feeling sorry or having pity or concern and can cause a negative reaction from customers if they perceive you are exhibiting sympathy.

**Courtesy**

Many people have been taught that it is nice to say “please” and “thank you” when interacting with others. Having good manners indicates respect, which goes a long way in sending positive interpersonal messages and setting an amiable tone when interacting with customers. Even though customers may not really always be right, you should treat them as if they are crucial to your success . . . because they are. While it may sometimes be difficult to remember to be courteous when situations become tense or emotionally charged, you should go out of your way to maintain your composure and be polite when dealing with customers. If you feel that you cannot maintain your composure, simply excuse yourself and get a coworker or supervisor to step in, if that is possible.
Courtesy can be a powerful tool in any situation, but especially in those in which tensions, stress, or emotions are potentially high (e.g., medical facilities, town meetings, some government offices, customer service desks, courtrooms, or car impound lots). Remember the old adage to “kill them with kindness” when things start getting out of control or you feel your blood pressure rising.

**Respect**

Respect is a deeply rooted personal value for many people, taught at a very young age. Depending on where people were born and grew up, they often receive guidance on the importance of respect for the elderly, property, and authority. Such values drive how people deal with others and the situations in which they find themselves throughout any given day. Think about how you react when someone cuts you off in traffic. Your thoughts or reactions are often based on your values, just as the thoughts and actions of others are based on their value systems and life experiences.

As a service provider, it is crucial that you value and respect your customers and their points of view whenever interacting with them. Use patience and empathy and work toward negotiated win-win situations in which customers get what they need from their encounters and so do you and your organization. Take ownership of situations and act in a professional manner. Some common indications of respect include:

- Keeping an open mind
- Taking time to listen to your customer without interrupting
- Attempting to empathize and understand the customer’s true issue or point of view
- Negotiating to a win-win situation so that neither side feels it “lost”
- Being honest and sharing what you can do for the customer, not what you cannot do
- Trusting that your customer is not out to cheat your organization
- Communicating in an assertive but nonthreatening and open manner
Identifying and Addressing Consumer Behavior

- Creating a feeling of collaboration versus competition with your customer
- Avoiding intimidation or coercion to get your way

**Professional Attitude**

When you come into contact with a customer at what Jan Carlzon, CEO of SAS Airways, years ago called a *moment of truth* (the point where the customer and service provider first come into contact either face-to-face or on the telephone), it is crucial that the instant be a pleasant and memorable experience for the customer. Anything less is courting disaster from a service standpoint. Simple efforts like smiling, listening, using a customer’s name, and projecting a “can-do” attitude make a world of difference in setting a win-win environment where the customer gets what he or she wants, needs, and expects, and you and your organization get what you need from the encounter—current and future business.

**Attention to Detail**

Positive global customer service is based on your having the necessary product and service knowledge and your then making the effort to prepare and deliver service right the first time. It is sometimes the little things that make a difference in how a customer perceives service. Your customers should not have to spend additional time contacting you or returning to your place of business to correct a problem that your organization created. For example, consider what might happen if you worked for a bank and keyed in improper amounts for deposits that customers made. Some officials from the bank’s main office would then later have to call or visit your branch to research the error and get it resolved. Chances are good that the bank would not be happy. In addition to just the time it takes to resolve the issue with your bank, cascading issues could develop in such an instance. Customers might end up with overdraft fees from your bank, while other issues could develop with their creditors. Any secondary issues would take time to resolve, and your customers would become very frustrated and angry with your organization. All this can often be
avoided if you and other service providers focus on each job task and do not allow things like e-mail, other customers, or coworkers to distract your attention.

**Equitable Treatment**

Have you ever stood in line or at a service counter only to have someone else walk up to ask a “quick question” that turns into an entire conversation? Have you ever found out that someone else got a better deal than you did from an organization? How did these situations make you feel? Probably not valued, respected, or equal. These are the types of events that can turn a current or potential customer against an organization. That’s why it’s important to exhibit fairness when dealing with all customers. In most situations, it would be appropriate to ask the interrupting customer to wait his or her turn; or direct the customer to another service representative for assistance; or perhaps listen until you realize the issue is not simple, then ask the person to take a number or wait in line out of fairness. Of course, all these should be done politely, with a smile, and in a professional manner.

If you are like many people, one big area of irritation is having a service provider stop helping you to answer a ringing telephone while you wait. When dealing with a customer, the service provider should typically let any incoming calls go to voice mail, barring special circumstances. Out of fairness, if someone has waited his or her turn for service, the person should not be “put on hold” while you attend to someone who called rather than came in for service. Every organization should have a policy on how to handle ringing phones when servicing other customers. You must know how to handle such situations before they occur rather than risk alienating customers. If you are unsure, speak to your supervisor.

**Qualified and Trained Staff**

As author Jim Collins stressed in his bestselling book *Good to Great,* it is important that organizations hire the right people, put them in the correct jobs, and train them in order for the employees and the organization to
Customers should have to expect no less than a competently trained workforce when they contact your organization. After all, they are spending their time, effort, and money to patronize your business, so they should receive value for their investment.

While many organizations are generally scaling back on employee training, sales and customer service training sessions are often still being provided. This is because most managers realize that service is not “nice to do”; it’s actually a key strategic initiative that must be delivered by highly motivated, knowledgeable, trained service representatives. Anything less is an invitation to lost business and revenue and ultimately to failure.

Employees should consider volunteering for any professional development training that will add to their knowledge and skill base. If your organization provides educational assistance, it is also wise to consider college courses that add academic credentials to your background. At the very least, go to the library to check out books and conduct Internet research on topics related to key terms highlighted in this chapter. For example, if you searched the phrase customer service on YouTube.com, you would find dozens of short videos that deal with various customer service situations and topics.

The important thing to keep in mind is that while all the techniques available can help, each customer is unique and requires specialized care. Use the basics of listening to your customers to determine their needs, wants, and expectations and then use an appropriate service strategy to satisfy them.

**Efficient and Effective Service**

Customers are no different from you in the way that they value their time. In some cultures in the Middle East, a delay is often anticipated because of the way that people view time. In many Westernized cultures, though, time is equated to money. There is often little patience for missed deadlines and delays.

While most people expect that there might be a slight delay in getting service during business hours or at a busy business location, they often do not tolerate what they consider undue delays. They recognize that most
organizations have scaled back staff in today’s economy and are trying to do more with fewer human resources. Still, that does not excuse negligence or lengthy waiting periods.

Your challenge as a service provider is to recognize each customer in a timely manner and provide service to the customer as quickly and efficiently as possible. Face-to-face, this might mean holding up one finger and smiling to indicate that you see the customer and will attempt to be with him or her shortly, or it might mean answering all calls within four rings or having an answering system to take a message. If these goals should become a regular problem, you might truly be understaffed, and the issue should be brought to your supervisor’s attention immediately.

When waits are obvious or necessary, share the reason with your customers as soon as it’s known so that they feel respected and informed and can make a decision on whether they care to wait. For example, if you work in a restaurant and there is a water pipe break that shuts down kitchen operations, give your customers an option to reschedule and then compensate them for their inconvenience by offering a discount on their current or future visits. Unless there will be a lengthy delay, most people will opt to wait and will appreciate the discount. They will also appreciate the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process, which can have a soothing effect and reduce the chance that you will soon have to deal with an irate customer. If you are not certain of your level of empowerment related to what you can offer in such instances, speak with your supervisor in advance so that you are prepared should the need arise.

POSITIVE GLOBAL SERVICE ACTION TIP

When approaching your supervisor with a service-related problem, have one or two suggestions for resolving the issue in mind. This shows that you are a professional who sincerely cares about your job and customers and are not just complaining.
Effective Complaint Resolution

Most effective service organizations have policies and procedures for dealing with customers when things go wrong. If yours does not, suggest to your supervisor that it become a subject for discussion at your next team or departmental meeting. An important point to consider when customers complain is that they are helping you and your organization to identify an area that is not meeting their needs, wants, or expectations. In effect, they are providing you with an opportunity to fix something that is broken and to salvage the customer-provider relationship. Seize such opportunities to practice your courtesy by thanking them and then listen carefully as they explain the issue. Once you are certain that you fully understand what went wrong, set out to apply sound problem-solving strategies to resolve the issue as quickly as possible. Don’t forget to ask your customers if the action(s) you took to rectify a problem following a service breakdown resolved it to their satisfaction and what else you can do to assist them. Also, make sure to thank them for bringing the situation to your attention and for giving you the opportunity to fix the issue.

THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY

In addition to the personal element of positive global customer service, organizations have discovered that there are many opportunities to enhance service delivery through the use of technology. No one piece of equipment has done more to revolutionize customer service than the personal computer. Coupled with the Internet, it has revolutionized the way people communicate and do business. Future possibilities are limitless. According to the Web site Internet World Stats, as of June 30, 2010, there were almost 2 billion (27.6 percent of the world population) Internet users around the globe (see next page).7 Think about the potential if only 1 percent of those people did business with an organization and spent only $10 a year . . . that is $2 million in sales! No wonder many organizations are investing time and money into technology-based systems and hiring and training people to deliver service via technology.
With a computer and a network, organizations of all sizes have been able to reach out and capture customers who were not attainable in the past. Through the Internet, any business can now let people all over the world know of its products and services. Small companies can appear larger and compete with bigger organizations that have more staff and resources. Often the deciding factor in the success level of an organization comes down to the quality of the service that its staff provides.

Many organizations have realized the power of the Internet and have rushed to capitalize on ways to attract and hold customers through technology. This venture into electronically delivered service and sales has been termed e-commerce. According to the Web site Whois Source, as of August 1, 2010, there were over 121 million active domain names. Many of those belong to organizations and businesses that sell products and services to individuals (business-to-consumer, or B2C) and other organizations and businesses (business-to-business, or B2B) all the time. As a result, e-commerce sales in the first quarter of 2010 amounted to 4.0 percent (over $38 billion) of total retail sales of $960 billion.\(^8\)

From a service standpoint, using technology often means that an organization needs to take a multifaceted approach to attending to customers. In addition to face-to-face service, customers often have a variety of options, such as toll-free numbers, fee-based 900 numbers, and fax, texting, Web site, and e-mail systems, all of which are staffed by representatives in a customer care center. These people should be available around the clock to answer questions, take orders, solve problems, and provide various services or support to people who call, write, or fax.
With all the technological advances available to support customer service, it is still important to remember that many customers appreciate old-fashioned, personalized, face-to-face customer service. Contrary to what many service providers believe, though, it’s not just older customers. Factors such as the ages of your customers, their educational and socio-economic backgrounds, their comfort levels with technology, and their behavioral-style preferences can influence whether or not they would rather deal with a person or technology. Some people are high touch (preferring assistance), while others are low touch (preferring to serve themselves); therefore, offering a variety of service delivery systems is smart business. Successful service organizations realize that each customer is unique, and so they provide flexibility in offering service and support through a variety of means. Whether service is delivered face-to-face or via technology, there is often no substitute for a dedicated, knowledgeable, and well-trained employee to assist when needed. You and your peers are the lifeline of your organization and have to take responsibility for quality service in order to help make it successful and satisfy your customers.

**POSITIVE GLOBAL SERVICE ACTION TIP**

When connecting with customers via technology, do not forget that projecting a positive attitude in your written or spoken words is just as important as when you are dealing with them face-to-face. It’s more so in many cases, because when your customers do not see you, they can only draw conclusions about you based on their interpretations of your words or tone of voice.

**SUMMARY**

In this chapter, you have read about many of the changes that are impacting consumer behavior as well as techniques and strategies for enhancing customer-provider relationships. Some of the key concepts that you investigated include:

- Women, teens, gays, lesbians, and various minority groups have become virtual financial powerhouses in the area of consumer spending.
• It is estimated that in their lifetimes, members of the Generation Y consumers group will spend over $10 trillion on goods and services.
• Successful companies develop and implement a proactive, strategic approach to providing customer service in order to react to all the changes taking place.
• Customer loyalty is an emotional rather than a rational thing.
• A need is an internal motivator or driver that someone requires; wants are things that customers desire.
• Expectations are preconceived ideas about your organization, products, or services.
• Common interpersonal expectations include feeling welcome, comfortable, understood, respected, and important to the service provider and his or her organization.
• Common product and service expectations include easy access, quality, safety, competitive pricing, professional problem solving, and an effortless return policy.
• Behavioral styles are observable tendencies (actions that you can see or experience) that you and other people exhibit when dealing with tasks or people.
• The four categories of behavioral-style preference are rational, inquisitive, decisive, and expressive.
• Just because customers say or do something, or react, differently from the way that you would, doesn’t mean that they are wrong. It simply means that they are different.
• Although everyone typically has a primary behavior pattern, people also have other characteristics in common and regularly demonstrate similar behavioral patterns.
• Often the approaches you use to service delivery will be based on your customer, industry, organizational values, and personal training and experience.
• Core elements of positive global customer service include empathy, courtesy, respect, professional attitude, attention to detail, equitable treatment, qualified and trained staff, efficient and effective service, and effective complaint resolution.
• In addition to the personal element of positive global customer service, organizations have discovered that there are many opportunities to enhance service delivery through the use of technology.

• No one piece of equipment has done more to revolutionize customer service than the personal computer. Coupled with the Internet, it has revolutionized the way people communicate and do business.

• From a service standpoint, using technology often means that an organization needs to take a multifaceted approach to attending to customers.

• With all the technological advances available to support customer service, it’s still important to remember that many customers appreciate old-fashioned, personalized, face-to-face customer service.