**Part 1. Customer Service Lite Training-20220907\_130045-Meeting Recording**

0:02  
We really appreciate Y'all letting us join you today.

0:06  
My name is Jennifer Wiles and I'm a program analyst with the within Central Office and we do focus on public contact teams and the national contact centers.

0:17  
And I have my coworker here as well.

0:20  
Megan and I believe our Chief might be joining us a little bit later.

0:26  
So just wanted to say welcome, welcome to customer service training.

0:30  
We're so excited to spend this time with you today.

0:35  
A couple housekeeping tips before we get started.

0:39  
I am going to put a participant guide in the chat for you, so that way you can follow along or look back at this a little bit later on.

0:49  
So let me go ahead and drop that in there and this can just be a really kind of laid back training.

0:59  
If you have a question feel free to come off mute or put your question in the chat box.

1:05  
We're happy to to answer any questions you have or if you think of a question you know after training is complete, just feel free to message us.

1:15  
We're more than happy to assist in any way that we can. So you should be seeing that Public Service Guide.

1:25  
It's SPMO Public Service Guide.

1:28  
PG stands for Participant Guide and you can save that to your desktop.

1:36  
And like I said, refer back to it later if you'd like.

1:47  
Are you all able to see my screen?

1:50  
Should be a PowerPoint presentation.

1:53  
Thank you.

1:56  
All right.

1:56  
So welcome to customer service training.

1:59  
Like I said, we're so glad to get to spend this time with you today.

2:04  
What today will be this next hour is going to be just an overview of the public service guide.

2:10  
The public service guide has historically been used for employees in the national call centers to help guide them through customer service and interactions.

2:20  
But for today's training, we took our guide and we tailored it to try to help you give you materials that's going to help you go through customer service strategies or interactions that you may encounter, navigate through some of the key factors of customer service and talk through some of the VA core characteristics.

2:40  
And we also hope to have some time at the end to do some group discussion on a scenario.

2:48  
So during this training, I do want to note that we will refer to the customer as the Veteran.

2:55  
But just to note, we understand there may be times when you're speaking with a surviving spouse or a non Veteran beneficiary or a VSO, anyone that could be a potential client or customer.

3:07  
But just throughout this training, just to kind of make things a little bit easier, we refer to the customer as the Veteran and then we refer to someone in your role as the responder.

3:19  
So with the understanding that you would be responding to a survey.

3:24  
So contacting the person who completed the survey and answering any concerns that they have. All right, was everyone able to pull up or access the participant guide?

3:46  
You could just give me a thumbs up or come off mute.

3:48  
OK, Steven says he was all right.

4:01  
So before we just jump right into the content, I kind of want to get a little bit of background on you because like I said, Megan and I are with the central office focusing on national call center and public contact teams.

4:14  
We create training materials, give training.

4:18  
We both worked in the national call Center for a number of years, but I'm a little curious of what your experience level is with customer service because I understand that we're all from different backgrounds and so we may all have kind of a different level of expertise there.

4:33  
So if you would, would you let me know in the chat box if you've either worked in customer service for one or more years or if you've worked in customer service for one year or less, or if you have never worked in customer service.

4:52  
So I would like to hear from everyone.

4:53  
If you are able to put your message in the chat, I would greatly appreciate that, right.

5:38  
I see several people responding.

5:40  
So thank you so much for your participation.

5:44  
Really appreciate that.

5:47  
We give a few more moments to let everyone respond.

5:57  
It looks like most of our responders are saying over one year, Jennifer.

6:00  
Yeah, that's great, right.

6:09  
And then Daniel says a number of years, so that's great.

6:13  
So I'm really hopeful that everyone can add something to this.

6:17  
You probably have your own customer service stories and experiences.

6:22  
So really looking forward to your feedback and maybe some of your insight into some of these scenarios.

6:31  
So what we're wanting you to take away from this training, the goal here is a reminder about VA core characteristics.

6:40  
Also be able to recognize and incorporate some strategies for customer service.

6:45  
We're going to touch on active listening and critical thinking skills.

6:49  
We're also going to touch on empathy.

6:52  
We also have some best practices for some conversation control.

6:57  
We're also going to talk about assertive communication techniques.

7:02  
We're also gonna touch on some problem solving processes that we can go through to kinda help us navigate some of those situations where it's not very clear what exactly should happen.

7:15  
We also have some techniques for closing a conversation.

7:19  
So wrapping that conversation up and closing out that interaction and then we have some top customer service traits that we've identified that you know, we kind of need to look into ourselves and see do we attain these traits, Do we already have these traits?

7:34  
How can we Polish these traits?

7:37  
So we'll get go ahead and get started with that first one.

7:43  
So with the VA core characteristics, these are just some reminders, you know, and depending on how long you've worked at VA, it might have been a while since you went through new higher training or maybe you talked about some of these characteristics.

7:59  
But we just wanted to touch on these because we really do believe that these are what we stand for within the VA.

8:06  
So of course we have the VA mission vision, goals, but we wanted to speak on the VA core characteristics today because they directly tie in with our customer service strategies.

8:21  
So the first one we have trustworthy, that means that VA earns the trust of those it serves every day through all of our actions.

8:30  
So that's us working together to try to build that trust because we do want veterans to trust us, that we want them to come to us for help no matter what type of service they need.

8:41  
If it's VA healthcare, if it's a claim, if it's a payment issue, if it's a loan guarantee issue, if they have questions about life insurance, we want them to trust us that we are going to give them correct information and take the appropriate actions.

8:58  
We also want to be accessible.

9:00  
So this means we're welcoming them to contact us and to visit us and for them to apply for benefits and obtain those benefits that they've earned.

9:11  
As a reminder, quality means that we strive for the highest standard of care, So care through the VA Medical Center, care within veteran veterans readiness and employment also within the public contact team when they're actually visiting with us.

9:27  
Facetoface quality when we're on a phone call with the veteran, making sure that we are remaining professional and that we are also being efficient stewards of the resources.

9:39  
So we're not being wasteful or we're not being negligent in any way.

9:44  
So making sure that we are using those resources wisely, the 4th characteristic is agile.

9:52  
And agile means that VA anticipates and adapts quickly to current challenges.

9:59  
And so we've seen this over the last several years.

10:01  
We've gone through a series of changes we've had to do.

10:05  
I kind of think of it as like that pivot on friends where they had to pivot the couch, right.

10:11  
They had to get the couch all the way up the stairs in the apartment building, and that's kind of where we come into play with Agile.

10:18  
We kind of have to be ready and willing to pivot or move at any moment to be able to meet the needs of our veterans #5.

10:29  
We have innovative and so this is where VA promotes curiosity and initiative.

10:35  
This is where if we have a an idea that could make a process easier or more streamlined, we want to know that so that we're making sure that we're staying at the forefront of knowledge proficiency and capability to deliver that highest standard of care.

10:56  
And then number six, we have integrated.

10:59  
So integrated means that this is where we link care and services across the VA as well as working with federal, state agencies.

11:08  
Vso's, we even have a relationship with Department of Defense where we work in unison with them to try to get benefits to those service members with a known separation date.

11:22  
So that's just again, kind of a recap.

11:25  
I'm sure we're probably all pretty aware of these core characteristics, but again, wanted to touch on it because these do play into the customer service role and the customer service strategy.

11:36  
And I think keeping these kind of the forefront of our mind can help us.

11:40  
When we're on, we're in those interactions, we're talking to veterans.

11:44  
Just as a reminder like, hey, I need to make sure that I'm gaining this person's trust.

11:48  
I need to make sure that this person has access to the benefits that they need.

11:57  
All right, so we have a question here and I'd like for you to put your answer in the chat box.

12:04  
We want to hear from you.

12:05  
What are some examples of how you've demonstrated VA score characteristics?

12:11  
You can give me a, you know, short scenario.

12:15  
You can say you can pick one of the characteristics and say how you demonstrate this in your everyday job or maybe even outside of your working hours.

12:26  
Maybe you see a veteran at the grocery store and you tell them about VA benefits so would like to hear from everyone.

12:33  
We'll take a couple minutes to put those in the chat box and while you're typing, I'll just kind of give you an example and maybe this will help jog your memory.

13:22  
The one that comes to mind for me that's that stands out more so than the others is I think the quality piece.

13:30  
I spent six years working in quality and so quality is just like a really big thing for me.

13:37  
And so something that Megan and I do a lot is we review our training materials, we review them for accuracy, we compare them to policy documents we go through.

13:49  
We triple, quadruple check them.

13:53  
I'll send them to Megan, she'll send them to me.

13:55  
And we're like, hey, what do you think of this wording?

13:57  
Hey, does this make sense?

13:59  
Is this easily understood?

14:02  
Is this the correct information?

14:03  
And so it's just kind of in our everyday job, but it's kind of become second nature where we have this like tag team where one of us is writing a document and we'll say, hey, can you double check this for me?

14:16  
And I think that just speaks to us having those core values with instilled within us that we wanna produce a quality product that we don't wanna put anything out there that you know, has spelling mistakes or grammar errors or you know, it has old information.

14:34  
So maybe that'll help kinda spark your memory on some of these.

14:40  
I'm reading through the chat here.

14:42  
So excellent communication skills, assisted vets through the VA.

14:49  
Every time I meet someone who's lost a loved one, asked if they were a veteran.

14:53  
Oh, that's really important, Drew.

14:55  
I really like that one because a lot of survivors don't know what.

14:59  
Drew was saying that every time they meet someone who's lost a loved one, they asked if they were a veteran and remind them there may be benefits available.

15:07  
That that holds a special place in my heart because there are so many veterans, family members that don't know about possible burial in a National Cemetery.

15:17  
They don't know about burial flag or military funeral honors or the funeral reimbursement or even transportation reimbursement.

15:27  
They don't know about the wide variety of benefits.

15:30  
So absolutely, I I really like that one.

15:35  
Yeah.

15:35  
Showing compassion.

15:36  
Yep.

15:37  
That's a good point, Robert.

15:40  
And especially in customer service on the phone or face to face in person, you can tell when someone does not, is not very compassionate right or just does not have a lot of empathy.

15:53  
It's almost like their heart's just not in it.

15:56  
It comes across.

15:57  
You can hear it in someone's voice, right?

16:01  
Active listening.

16:03  
Good.

16:08  
Hey, so thank you so much for the feedback.

16:11  
It sounds like y'all are using those core examples as well.

16:21  
Did anyone want to share maybe if it was not something you wanted to type, but if you wanted to come off mute and just share, maybe a brief example of how you demonstrate those core characteristics?

16:40  
Yeah.

16:40  
And I would love to hear, Daniel, maybe some examples of how you work to instill that trust.

16:47  
I like how you said that.

16:50  
Yes.

16:51  
Good afternoon.

16:51  
As I said, I would, you know, I respond a lot to the congressional White House inquiries that we receive some of these veterans, we get repeat inquiries.

17:04  
So I kind of know them from previous inquiries so they kind of you know they they they understand they try and get a good rapport with them and like I said you know I like to try and and gain their trust right away and and just you know present the facts that that that I have and let them know that you know I'm here.

17:29  
I'm here to assist you any way I can and present you know what I can do for them at that time.

17:37  
Whether you know it's something that we may have done an error that you know I I can remedy and say listen, you know this is, this is what I can do for you today.

17:46  
And what I want to do is just make sure that we touch on everything that they have concerns about and before you know, ending the call or finishing the inquiry that make sure that we've we've completed all their needs.

18:02  
You know that we've answered all their questions and they're satisfied with the service provided.

18:10  
So it's, you know, I try and try and think of them as a, you know, an uncle or a neighbor or or someone close who you know you want to give the best possible service to.

18:22  
You know what?

18:25  
You know they've fought for a country and they they deserve the best quality service.

18:28  
And you know, I'd like to think, you know, we we try and do that as best we can.

18:34  
Absolutely.

18:34  
And I wanted to pick out two things that you said, One, giving them the facts right.

18:40  
So being honest and but also educating them right.

18:44  
So giving them the facts to me means that sometimes we have to explain a process or explain why a decision was what it was, right.

18:53  
So educating, being honest, being open, being transparent.

18:57  
I I love all of those things and those are great.

19:01  
I also like something else you said about thinking about them as what if this was an uncle, an aunt, a neighbor.

19:08  
You could even go further like a parent or a child or you know, brother, sister, relative, whomever it may be.

19:14  
But making that person out to be someone that you would want to have the utmost care.

19:21  
So I used to think about if you know my dad called in or my grandpa called in, they were both veterans and how would I want them to be treated?

19:29  
What is the level of care and service that I would want for them?

19:34  
And so that would be the highest level of care, the best customer service, the friendliest person, but also most helpful person, right?

19:43  
Thank you so much for sharing, Daniel.

19:45  
Really appreciate that.

19:47  
You're welcome.

19:47  
Thank you.

19:51  
Right.

19:52  
So we wanna touch on how VA is different as far as VA customer service.

19:58  
So that VA customer service with our veterans, it is gonna be different than your standard customer relationship that's built within other businesses, right.

20:09  
So in a standard business you have the customer service relationship where the customer pays for a product or service.

20:18  
However, in the VA customer service relationship with veterans, they've already earned these benefits because of their service to our country.

20:27  
So how we interact with them is gonna be different than a standard business and customer relationship interaction because we're not selling a product, right.

20:39  
What we're doing is we're attempting to gain their trust and their satisfaction.

20:45  
So within that trust we want them to trust us that one we are going to give accurate information.

20:53  
We are going to say excuse me, we are going to do what we say we are going to do that we follow up, that we follow through.

21:02  
We also, as far as their trust, we need to be confident and reliable and then there's satisfaction knowing that they have gotten the benefits that are due to them.

21:17  
So I want you to think about this.

21:19  
I have another question here.

21:21  
So what can we do as VA employees to earn veterans trust and satisfaction?

21:28  
And you can put your answer in the chat box or come off mute, but kind of think of a couple things.

21:34  
What can we do as VA employees to earn veterans trust and satisfaction?

22:11  
While you're thinking about that, I was just going to share just a little something that I do so to earn trust.

22:21  
What I'll typically say is starting off the conversation, once I figure out what the issue at hand is, I will say, you know, I'm really glad that you got me today because I'm going to do every single thing I can to try to help you.

22:35  
I'm really glad that we're getting to speak today.

22:38  
That's just kind of the first step I think in that process is letting them know that you're glad that they are getting to speak with you and that you're getting to speak with them so that they know that they're not a burden, that you are happy to do your job, that you are willing to go above and beyond to take care of any of the issues that might be going on with their situation.

23:02  
Another thing that I typically would do is follow through.

23:06  
So if I say, OK I'm gonna research this this situation, you know can I give you a call back in an hour.

23:15  
Then I set my timer for an hour and I call them back on the dot, you know on the hour.

23:21  
Even if I don't have a resolution yet or the issue hasn't been resolved completely, I still give follow through.

23:29  
I do follow up.

23:30  
I do what I say I'm going to do and a lot of veterans are very appreciative of that and I see a couple people put that in the chat as well.

23:40  
If you promise a phone call, make sure to do that.

23:48  
That's good.

23:48  
Does anybody want to come off mute and share, I know Robert put explain the process.

23:58  
So Robert, what would that look like as far as explaining the process?

24:04  
Can you give us a little bit more details on that as far as what processes you might explain?

24:11  
Yes.

24:12  
You know I've worked with a lot of transitioning service members and veterans and one and even you know one of the things that they don't understand is what's going to happen next.

24:24  
So when we explain the process meaning what they have to explain to them completely what they have to do and then when when once they do what they have to do, what VA will then do.

24:35  
And once they understand that process clearly, then it relieves some of the stress and that they are dealing with.

24:42  
But then it's also more just as important or if not more once you they understand that process is that VA follows through with making sure that we do it is explained to them in the procedures in the manual.

24:56  
So the manual says they do this and we do this.

24:59  
Then we have to do our part after the veteran or service member has done his or her part.

25:05  
Yeah, great point.

25:06  
So explaining those processes, not necessarily going through, you know, every single detailed step, but giving them an idea of what to expect next.

25:18  
And that can go a long way.

25:20  
That's been my experience as well.

25:22  
Usually their question is, OK, well, what's going to happen next?

25:25  
What else am I going to need to do?

25:26  
How long is this going to take?

25:28  
Right.

25:29  
And so that does help build that trust because for one that shows that you're taking the time to explain this information to them, to educate them that you are also you understand the process.

25:42  
So you're building trust sometimes not even knowing that you're building trust because you're sharing information with them and you're educating them.

25:49  
And in doing that, you know, you have to speak confidently and clearly concisely to make sure that they trust you and know that you are a confident individual and you're doing you're, excuse me, you're giving the correct information.

26:05  
Yeah.

26:06  
And one of the things that I've noticed over here is that whenever a veteran or a a spouse or whoever calls into VA or they reach out to VA, they usually don't understand what's going to happen or what's how things are going.

26:21  
And that causes the confusion, that causes frustration with them, that causes their stress levels to rise.

26:27  
So the more we can, you know, work on our end to explain those things to them, it brings down the temperature in the room a lot.

26:35  
So it works.

26:38  
It does work.

26:39  
Thank you for sharing.

26:41  
We really appreciate that.

26:44  
All right.

26:45  
And thank you for the other several people said, if you're gonna follow up, then you need to make sure you do call them in at that time.

26:51  
That's a big one.

26:53  
Let's go ahead and move into some customer service strategies.

26:57  
And these customer service strategies are going to detail how you interact with a veteran.

27:04  
This interaction, a lot of times it's gonna set the tone and it's gonna impact the veterans attitude and perception from that first contact with the VA through the life of their relationship with VA.

27:17  
So we have 6 stages of a conversation.

27:22  
So this is kind of just a guide on how we can make sure that we are prepared for the conversation, what we do in the conversation, how we start that conversation, delivering the message, active listening, responding appropriately, some problem solving and closing the conversation.

27:45  
So let's take a look at the first one.

27:47  
So what we're looking at here is these are things you want to keep in mind when you're preparing for the conversation.

27:55  
Now you may not be able to answer all of these based on the information available available to you, and that's okay.

28:03  
But planning in advance and being as prepared as you can be for that conversation, that is the first step in a successful conversation.

28:15  
So some plans will also, in addition to asking these questions, it'll also ask you to kind of look inward and looking at yourself, making sure that you are taking care of yourself, making sure that your personal needs are met and that you're in the right place to offer assistance to someone.

28:34  
Because you know, we all have things going on in our life, but if you have some negative emotions that are kind of under the surface, those are going to show through.

28:43  
And so being able to make sure you know while you're planning for a conversation, also making sure that you're in the right mind space to do so.

28:55  
Stage #2 is going to be to actually initiate the conversation.

29:01  
So some of our highest performing customer service agents, they've developed what we call a call flow.

29:08  
A call flow is where you have an organized process for every call.

29:13  
So kind of like a structure of a call, a call flow is very helpful and a lot of times necessary to ensure that all of your topics are or actions are discussed or assessed during each interaction with a veteran.

29:30  
So when we're talking about a call flow, what I want you to think about here is just think about a time when you were the customer, so kind of reversing roles, right?

29:42  
And so you were the customer and you spoke with someone in customer service.

29:48  
Think about if you were greeted with a friendly and confident voice, or did it sound like the representative was clueless about how to assist you?

29:59  
I know for me, when I speak with a customer service representative who's confident, I immediately have more confidence in their ability to understand the issue I'm presenting to them, as well as their ability to resolve my issue.

30:17  
On the other hand, when I speak with a customer service representative that's not as confident, then I'm less likely to be confident that they understand the information I'm relaying to them and their ability to resolve my issue.

30:32  
So this call flow, having a call flow is going to help build your confidence because if you're doing the same actions essentially on every single call, then you're less likely to forget something.

30:45  
We also have some other benefits, so it comes across as much more professional and organized.

30:53  
You make sure that all tasks are completed.

30:56  
You also make sure that the same level of assistance is on every interaction.

31:01  
It does also help build rapport and build trust.

31:05  
So we're going to take a look at a call flow and this will kind of tie into the the next stages of our conversation.

31:16  
So at the beginning of the call flow should be your greeting.

31:20  
So the key to the greeting is you want to sound professional, you want to have a strong opening.

31:26  
This is going to set the tone for your conversation.

31:29  
This allows you to have call control and control of that interaction, but also making sure that the veterans experience is respectful, efficient and it's outcome oriented.

31:43  
So it is very important that you guide the call along.

31:49  
It's not necessarily that you have to be in control.

31:53  
When we say conversation control, what we're saying is that you are leading the conversation and steering the conversation in the direction it needs to go so that you can have the desired outcome, which would be to resolve whatever issue is at hand there.

32:11  
So we have some objectives.

32:12  
So again, first step is the greeting.

32:15  
So objectives here establish rapport in a confident and friendly voice, be able to provide complete and accurate information.

32:24  
And most importantly is you're identifying that you are who you are, so your name and you are with the VA.

32:32  
So something that I think about when I think about outbound calls or if you're making these phone calls to veterans based on a survey response, they may be hesitant to give you a lot of information or speak with you because there are so many scams out there.

32:49  
Unfortunately, I know for me I get tons of spam calls every single day.

32:56  
It says potential spam come up on my phone and I don't answer those.

33:02  
And if I do, I'm very, very hesitant about when someone's asking me for personal information or wanting to discuss something with me.

33:11  
So, you know, identifying yourself and that you are with the VA, that's going to be very important.

33:19  
Another important step in that is once you have readed them, you've acknowledged who you are, you verified who they are.

33:29  
Another best practice is to acknowledge the veterans service, though this is really important because this also helps set the tone for the rest of your call and it is preferred to acknowledge a service at the beginning of the call as opposed to the end of the call.

33:47  
It really can work either way.

33:50  
It's it's not to say one is is necessarily right or wrong, but if you say it at the beginning, it just helps set that tone for the rest of the call.

34:01  
And so we have a few examples here.

34:04  
And the reason that we give these is because it relates to the veteran that you're appreciative of them and this conveys that you are here to help them and that you recognize, hey, this is a person, this is a veteran, they have served our country.

34:20  
Thank you so much.

34:21  
That can go a long way in customer service, just showing appreciation, showing gratitude.

34:29  
So we have a couple examples here.

34:30  
These are all saying pretty much the same thing, just a couple different variations.

34:34  
So you could say, you know, thank you for that information and thank you for your service or thank you for that information and we appreciate your service or you can even say something like on behalf of the VAI would like to thank you for your service, something along those lines.

34:52  
And I am just curious, is that something that you typically do on these phone calls?

34:57  
Do you typically acknowledge the veterans service?

35:00  
Has that been a past practice for you?

35:14  
Hey, good.

35:15  
I see where Marilyn said yes.

35:18  
Thought I heard somebody else come off mute.

35:25  
If you'd like to come off mute, you certainly can.

35:27  
And share maybe something that you do along these lines of acknowledging the service.

35:42  
This is Marilyn and our customer service training that we give our specialists.

35:48  
We require that of them for them to thank the veteran for their service and we always greet them.

35:57  
You know my name is Marilyn Gonzalez.

35:59  
How may I help you?

36:00  
We talked about the VA that's part of the introduction to the call, how we greet our veterans and they really appreciate that at the end of, we do it at the end of the call.

36:12  
But it's a great idea.

36:13  
I might think about moving it at to the beginning of the call.

36:18  
That's great.

36:19  
Yeah.

36:19  
And you know, like I said it, it can work at the end of the call, you know, after you summarize what all you've done and then you can say thank you so much for your service.

36:27  
It's been my pleasure to, to serve you today or something along those lines.

36:31  
So it can definitely work either at the beginning or at the end.

36:37  
Thank you for sharing, Marilyn.

36:44  
All right.

36:45  
So the next step is Stage #3, this is deliver the message.

36:52  
And so I know there's a lot of text here on the screen, but what we're wanting to focus here is this is when we are getting into the actual assisting the veteran.

37:03  
So it's really important for us to make sure that any issue or question or concern that the veteran brings up to make sure that we identify that situation, document it or address it appropriately.

37:21  
The desired outcome for assisting them is that the veteran feels that we're listening to them, that we're understanding them.

37:30  
It's helping meet some of those core needs to feel heard, understood, acknowledged.

37:36  
You know that's just a few of them, but it's also making sure that we're doing as much as possible with all of their VBA issues or VHA issues and we're not just rushing them along.

37:52  
So a couple of these that we have here, so these are just kind of things that we want to make sure we're doing anytime we have that interaction.

38:00  
So I'll just pull out a couple here that I personally think are are super important clarifying the goal of the call.

38:09  
So what is it we're wanting to accomplish here, making sure that we're on the same page and we both have the same goal in mind.

38:18  
Also making sure that we provide complete and accurate information that kind of speaks to the quality piece, right, of our core characteristics.

38:29  
Making sure that we are giving them all the information we need, making sure that we're doing that follow up if we say we're going to.

38:38  
And then last, also listening for unasked questions, this is a big one because if you're over the phone or if maybe some of you are in person, there are some of those nonverbal cues that can help turn a conversation.

38:55  
And So what I mean by that is they may have unasked questions or they may, you know, make a statement or they may even give a hint that they're confused, but they don't come out and say it.

39:09  
So maybe those unasked questions is them asking, like, you know, well, I heard about this form that people get if their loved one was wanting to be buried in a private cemetery.

39:25  
And it's something about a maybe a headstone or some kind of medallion.

39:30  
They're making a statement, but that's a loaded statement, right?

39:34  
So has someone recently passed away?

39:37  
Has a veteran recently passed away?

39:39  
Have they already been laid to rest?

39:41  
Are they asking about a headstone and marker or a medallion?

39:46  
Do they possibly have burial benefits or, excuse me, burial costs that they could be reimbursed for?

39:54  
So you know that's those statements can sometimes actually be those unasked questions.

40:05  
I wanted to pause for a moment.

40:07  
What questions do y'all have so far about the stages of a conversation?

40:12  
Any questions?

40:24  
OK, I'll keep it moving, but let me know in the chat or come off mute if you do think of any questions.

40:32  
All right.

40:33  
So the next one is Stage 4, which is listen and respond.

40:39  
So this is where we're going to touch on active listening.

40:43  
Active listening is the practice of paying full attention to and absorbing what someone's saying so that there's a mutual understanding.

40:53  
OK.

40:53  
So it's important to diffuse situations and seek solutions.

40:59  
Active listening involves actually listening to their words and also looking at some other things, so the tone of their voice listening to the tone of their voice.

41:10  
Also unspoken emotional cues.

41:13  
An unspoken emotional cue could be crying would indicate that they are upset.

41:19  
It could also be the speed of their voice, how fast they're speaking.

41:25  
If they're speaking very, very quickly and they seem like they're in a panic, that may be an indicator that something else is gone.

41:32  
Going on there.

41:33  
They're in some type of rush.

41:35  
Let's try to help and see what we can do.

41:39  
So we have several benefits to active listening.

41:42  
When we use our active listening skills, this does help build relationships, meet those core needs.

41:50  
So it's really important because with those core needs, we all, we have a lot of core needs, but there are a few in customer service that we can pay close attention to.

42:03  
And so that would be the need to feel understood.

42:07  
So when someone does not feel understood, a lot of times this can lead to arguments, it can lead to people even becoming irate.

42:20  
This can lead to people not contacting us again seeking assistance.

42:25  
It can break relationships.

42:27  
So when people feel that they are not being listened to, that they're not being heard or that no one is understanding them, that's really kind of a pivotal moment where someone decides they're either going to try again another day to reach out to us and get a resolution or they go the other way and say I'm done with VA, I'm not getting anything else from them and they are done with us.

42:52  
So that's why that's just one part of why core needs are so important.

42:58  
Also with active listening, if we are actually paying attention to what they're saying and we're just focusing on them, right.

43:08  
So meaning we are setting aside distractions, We are, you know, setting down our phone, setting down, setting our IM to away or busy or whatever.

43:19  
And we are just focusing on them and actually hearing what they're saying and also listening for some of those emotional cues or those unspoken cues that can help us with problem solving, right.

43:34  
So that can also help us increase our productivity because we're getting to the issue in a faster manner and actually figuring out what's going on here, so then we can figure out what we need to do.

43:48  
So we have some active listening techniques also.

43:52  
So focusing on the purpose of the conversation, also clarifying and paraphrasing.

43:59  
This is a really big one.

44:00  
When you're actively listening to someone, it's very helpful to give them a cue that you're actively listening by paraphrasing or even giving some some verbal clues like OK, I hear you.

44:13  
OK, keep going.

44:15  
OK, that makes sense.

44:17  
Tell me a little bit more, right?

44:20  
Those cues let them know that you are engaged with them, you are paying attention.

44:26  
That also feeds into, again, building trust, building rapport.

44:31  
If someone feels like you are listening to them and maybe no one else has listened to them, you're automatically going to have a level up to be able to actually assist them because they're going to trust you a little bit more.

44:45  
So we want to ask questions, ask for clarification, make sure that we actually know what the situation is and what their outcome needs to be.

45:04  
Another, let me pause for just a moment.

45:06  
And your participant guy, there's another part here that talks about apologizing to the veteran.

45:13  
And I think this is a big piece that sometimes we're not necessarily taught in school or not necessarily taught, you know, when when we first start customer service.

45:24  
But it's kind of the art of apologizing and being able to apologize.

45:29  
So I think that knowing how to apologize is a key part and it can go a long way during your conversations.

45:37  
So you know when something goes wrong, the veteran appreciates the initiative that you're giving by apologizing.

45:46  
So even though you know it, it may not be your own wrongdoing then it but it does reflect the the department as a whole or a specific division.

46:01  
If we kind of look at it as I'm not just from central office, but I'm Ava employee and say on behalf of VA, I'm, I'm very sorry that this has happened and that this, you know, situation occurred.

46:13  
Let's work together and see how we can figure that out.

46:17  
That took about two seconds of my time, right?

46:19  
So it doesn't have to be a lengthy apology.

46:23  
It doesn't have to be you saying that you know you were completely wrong in a situation.

46:29  
But what it's doing, it's acknowledging that something did happen, that there was some type of offense or some type of failure on somebody's part.

46:39  
And I think for some of us, what we have to think about is being able to kind of set our pride aside.

46:45  
Because I know back in the day going through customer service training, it was hard for me to say, well, I'm gonna apologize for my coworkers behavior.

46:56  
Why?

46:56  
Why would I do that?

46:57  
I didn't do anything wrong.

46:59  
But I recognized that I kind of had a tunnel vision mindset where I was saying this is me, me, me.

47:07  
I didn't do anything wrong.

47:08  
Why are you upset and taking it out on me?

47:12  
But the the better approach there is really saying we are VA as a whole.

47:18  
And I'm a VA employee and yes, internally I recognize that maybe I didn't do something, I personally didn't do something wrong or it wasn't my, you know, offense or error.

47:31  
But just saying, you know, I'm very sorry that this this has occurred.

47:35  
Let's work together and see how we can resolve this.

47:38  
Again, that can go a long way.

47:41  
So knowing how to apologize, I want you to think for a moment.

47:48  
Can you think of a scenario or a time where maybe you've apologized for something that happened with a claim or a policy or something in your business line that maybe you had to apologize for something?

48:04  
Can you give us some examples of of maybe what you said?

48:08  
This can be a sharing time where we kind of share with each other our ideas and one of the other attendees might be able to take away what you said and and use it in their interactions.

48:19  
So I'd love to hear from anyone who maybe wants to share when a time when they've had to apologize.

48:25  
What did you say to the veteran?

48:37  
Hi, this is Robert here.

48:39  
One of the things you know, and I've done over the years is that one.

48:42  
I don't look at it.

48:43  
I don't take it personal when people say something went wrong with their claim or something happened.

48:49  
It's not that they're upset with me because they don't know me.

48:51  
They're upset with the VA.

48:52  
So I have no problem apologizing for what happened to their situation, how it made them feel, and then working with them to try to make it better.

49:02  
So I think I'm not making it or not taking it personal.

49:06  
It allows me to you know apologize with with no because I'm apologizing for VA.

49:11  
I'm apologizing for what you went through because regardless of who did it or didn't do it, we didn't want, we didn't want you to go or you shouldn't have had to go through this as the veteran, the spouse or whoever.

49:26  
So I think by making it myself, taking it out, you know, from looking at it from, hey, these people are upset with Robert.

49:32  
They don't know me, so they're not upset with me so and then I can help them better.

49:37  
That's a great strategy.

49:38  
And thank you so much for sharing, Robert.

49:40  
You're absolutely right.

49:41  
It's most of the time it's not personal, you know, and we're unfortunately kind of getting the brunt of the frustration, right.

49:50  
So great point there.

49:51  
It's not personal.

49:53  
And sometimes we, you know, apologizing is gonna help build that relationship back up.

49:59  
And so that's what we need to do.

50:03  
So yes, again, thank you so much for sharing.

50:06  
That's a great point.

50:07  
It's not personal.

50:10  
Anyone else like to share?

50:12  
Yes.

50:13  
By not taking a personal you could take a different approach.

50:17  
It's the experience that you allow that person to have by changing by promising them what you gonna do for them.

50:24  
You know, this is the first time I've encountered.

50:27  
I have addressed your issue.

50:30  
Please allow me to assist you And then you change their your view by being positive and by following up through you know.

50:39  
So you're getting both world.

50:41  
You get yes he was upset at the beginning but at the end he's thanking you.

50:45  
He or she is thanking you for what you've done for them.

50:48  
Absolutely great, great point there as far as taking something negative, right.

50:55  
So it started off as kind of a negative interaction.

50:58  
They were upset.

51:00  
You apologize and then with your assistance, you're able to turn it around.

51:04  
And that's kind of the goal there, right?

51:07  
Because a lot of times people aren't calling us because they're saying, hey, VA, you did a great job working on my claim.

51:14  
Thank you so much.

51:15  
Right.

51:16  
We don't usually get those kudos.

51:19  
Usually it's people contacting us because something is wrong, something has happened, some failure or error has occurred somewhere along the way.

51:29  
And that's I think that's a sign of someone with really high emotional intelligence and also really good customer service skills overall with being able to take that negative and turn it around.

51:44  
And like you said at the end of the call, they're saying you were wonderful.

51:47  
Thank you so much.

51:48  
You really helped me tremendously.

51:54  
All right.

51:54  
So we're going to keep moving right along.

51:57  
My time is slipping away from me.

52:02  
And so we're going to keep it moving, but we have some exploring alternatives and solutions.

52:09  
That's going to be stage #5.

52:12  
And so we're just going to kind of run through some of these.

52:14  
So this is when you're looking to determine what the what this situation calls for, what action you can take.

52:25  
You want to think about some of these questions, and they're listed in your participant guide, so you're going to define the problem.

52:31  
What specifically is the issue?

52:34  
What isn't part of the problem?

52:37  
Okay.

52:38  
Gather some information.

52:40  
You may need to brainstorm options, right?

52:43  
So attempt to solve the problem.

52:45  
Come up with new ideas.

52:48  
You may need to even go outside of, you know, your specific division.

52:53  
Reach out to other business lines, even look at those potential solutions.

52:59  
What do you want the outcome to be?

53:03  
And then you're gonna choose and implement the best option.

53:07  
So we're not gonna spend a whole lot of time here just because these are not necessarily specific to customer service.

53:14  
These are gonna be more specific to your business line and what actions you can actually take next.

53:21  
I wanna get into assertive communication skills and I think this is one of the most important points that we talk about here.

53:31  
So assertiveness is the ability to communicate your feelings and needs clearly to another person while remaining respectful of that person's feelings and needs.

53:43  
So in order to really understand assertive communication, we need to look at other communication styles that are out there.

53:51  
So we have passive communication.

53:55  
Passive communication communicators, excuse me, are likely to avoid expressing themselves and they're going to quietly accept other people's positions.

54:06  
A lot of times the driving force behind passive communicators could be feared that they have desire to avoid conflict, right?

54:17  
Could even be a lack of confidence to speak up.

54:20  
So on the other side of passive, we have aggressive and aggressive communicators.

54:29  
Those are going to be communicators who usually blame others, they attack others opinions, they can be pushy with their views.

54:38  
These communicators, they use a lot of you language.

54:42  
A lot of times what I've seen is they'll they'll cut people off right they'll someone will be mid sentence and they just cut them right off.

54:48  
They kind of steamroll them and they use a lot of times a frustrated or angry voice.

54:54  
So the driving force here behind these aggressive communicators, it could be a desire they have to control every situation to win or to always be right.

55:08  
And so with this, there's a middle ground.

55:12  
Assertive communication is that middle ground between passive and aggressive.

55:18  
The assertive communications goal is to say what needs to be said directly and respectfully, Okay.

55:27  
So this is where you focus on your part of the message.

55:31  
We don't attempt to control what the other person says or does.

55:37  
And this kind of makes me think of those like sayings or exercises where you write out the circles of control.

55:46  
So it's like what I can control, what I can't control.

55:50  
It's kind of a fun little exercise to kind of remember or remind yourself, you know, there are certain things I can't control, but I can control how I respond or I react.

56:02  
So this next slide, we have some common characteristics that go along.

56:09  
This helps us with our techniques when we're determining what type of communication style someone is using.

56:18  
So the first one we have passive, so again scared to say what they think.

56:25  
Usually they're going to put others needs first.

56:28  
They're a people pleaser.

56:29  
They're a yes person.

56:30  
They are not going to stand up for themselves.

56:34  
And then to the far right, again, aggressive.

56:37  
This is where they're going to put their needs first.

56:41  
They can.

56:41  
They sometimes react in an aggressive way, an angry tone.

56:45  
They're out to win.

56:47  
But again, there's that middle ground, that's that assertive communication.

56:51  
This is where we speak clearly and confidently.

56:55  
We are taking others needs into account as well as our own, but also able to stay calm.

57:05  
So we have a process for assertive communication, because assertive communication is going to be the best approach.

57:13  
Because in contrast, if you're passive or aggressive, then what's going to happen is people are going to be distracted with how you express yourself and they won't be able to hear what is beneath it.

57:26  
So you're really giving them two jobs here.

57:28  
What you're doing is you're asking them to hear you, but you're making it difficult to do that because you're giving them an unhelpful communication style to react to.

57:37  
OK, so that's why assertive communication is that middle ground.

57:42  
That's the best option.

57:45  
There is a process here, so stating the issue or problem very clearly while also showing empathy and state what you need specifically.

57:57  
So being clear about what you need.

58:02  
So next we're going to look at these I statements.

58:04  
And these are really important because these I statements are what we're going to want to use in assertive communication techniques.

58:13  
So with the I statements, you're phrasing your point of view with the word I instead of you.

58:23  
So it doesn't solve every problem, but it's helpful to start a conversation on the right foot.

58:29  
Okay.

58:30  
So with these statements, notice this statement here.

58:35  
The first one is you are causing the delay that is a you statement.

58:41  
This is typically the finger pointing placing the blame.

58:45  
This is usually going to be an aggressive communication style.

58:49  
It feels very you know direct to you're the problem.

58:55  
Whereas the next statement is an I statement and it is I am concerned about the delay.

59:01  
This is taking our own needs into account while still being direct.

59:05  
So this communication style allows the other person to hear your concern without feeling like they have to defend themselves right.

59:14  
It also positions the other person as a potentially helpful person who can then take a step towards you rather than positioning them, positioning them as a potential enemy.

59:26  
OK, now it looks like we have run out of time.

59:30  
I know we had some great discussion, so I am going to pause there and I do want to say we have another segment that is scheduled I believe for next Wednesday.

59:42  
So I'm going to put a little bookmark here and we're going to finish this topic next Wednesday when we rejoin for our second part.

59:54  
But did want to say really appreciate your time, your participation, your attendance today.

1:00:02  
I know that some of you might have to drop off right at the top of the hour with with competing priorities, but I was going to be here in case anyone has any questions so far about what we've covered or any comments or concerns.

1:00:22  
Yes, Donna, we have the TMS number.

1:00:26  
I will go ahead and post that in the chat box.

1:00:31  
That is gonna be TMS number.

1:00:33  
You can go ahead and fill out the survey that way.

1:00:35  
You get credit for this hour of training, right?

1:00:38  
And give us some feedback because we would love to hear from you.

1:00:41  
We, again, Megan and I are our biggest critiques of our training materials.

1:00:46  
So we're always, you know, working on that quality, working on those core characteristics.

1:00:51  
So please give us some feedback on if you found this to be helpful, if you'd like more of this information.

1:00:57  
But again, just gonna kind of stick a pin in this slide right here and pick back up next week since we are running a little short on time.

1:01:09  
Sound good for everybody?

1:01:10  
We'll stick a pin here.

1:01:12  
You do have the TMS number 4633896.

1:01:18  
Again, please leave us your feedback.

1:01:21  
I'll still be on for a few minutes if anyone has any questions or wants to discuss any of the topics we've covered.

1:01:29  
But if not, again, thank you so much for your time, your participation, your attendance.

1:01:34  
It was great getting to spend this time with y'all this afternoon.

1:01:38  
Thanks so much.

1:01:46  
Yes, thanks, Jennifer.

1:01:47  
This is Steve.

1:01:48  
So I'm gonna hang on for a few minutes as well.

1:01:50  
Don't mind.

1:02:10  
Yes, Thanks a lot.