

E-COURSE REVIEWS

Reviewed by Catherine Bull for Lguide.com

For customer service employees, work can be a life in the trenches. The following customer service courses—aimed at frontline staff—include information on how to build a relationship with a customer, keep a cool head in a confrontational service situation, and turn upset, angry customers into loyal ones. The differences between those courses lie in the price, level of interactivity, use of technology, and overall aesthetics and engagement of the material.

Highly Recommended

★★★★½ *Healing the Customer Relationship*: 2 to 3 hours, US\$45 per learner per module. Publisher: AchieveGlobal

This engaging course guides you through several confrontational scenarios with angry customers. AchieveGlobal carefully explains the HEAL strategy (Hear out the customer, Ease the tension, Act to improve the situation, Leave a positive impression) and offers many opportunities to practice your new knowledge. Games, scenarios, quizzes, and an excellent final simulation reinforce learning and make this course fun to use.

The final simulation asks you to placate an angry customer. After hearing his initial complaints, you're given choices for your response. He replies, and you carry out a dialogue while a thermometer in the corner of the screen monitors his anger level. This situation offers a full range of possible responses to your angry customer, all of which seem viable. The result is a simulation that comes eerily close to capturing the challenge (and stress) of a real-life encounter. The overall aesthetic of the graphics is pleasing and funny.

Recommended

★★★★ *Overcoming Challenging Service Situations*: 2 to 3 hours, US\$99.95 for 1 year of course access. Publisher: SkillSoft

This SkillSoft course teaches you how to guide customers toward solutions. Users learn how to recognize the warning signs of a confrontational situation, accept responsibility for mistakes, defuse customer anger, and implement guided problem solving. Engaging scenarios and dialogues help reinforce skills such as reading body language. The course also includes a section on recognizing when a situation is potentially dangerous.

"SkillGuide" worksheets and "SkillEval" aids help analyze customer service problems, while frequent interactive quizzes ensure comprehension. However, this course has some minor design flaws. For example, if the audio option is turned off, you're forced to click repeatedly to read bulleted lists.

Adequate

★★★ *1 to 1: Customer Service Success*: 30 to 45 minutes, US\$24.95 for 1 year of course access. Publisher: Syntrio

This Syntrio course emphasizes building a relationship with customers. It focuses on greeting customers, listening, responding appropriately, and cultivating lasting relationships. The course does an adequate, if somewhat uninspired, job of providing helpful customer service training. Interactive questionnaires, self-assessments, and exercises help reinforce comprehension, but a greater use of examples and higher level of interactivity would make this course more engaging. This course is text-based, with limited audio and point-and-click illustrations.

★★★ *Helping Irate Customers*: 30 minutes, US\$24.95 for 1 year of course access. Publisher: VentureSkills

This motivational introductory course asserts the following tenets of customer service: Have a positive attitude, see irate customers as a challenge, empathize, and follow through. The course is a series of Webpages with printable worksheets and cartoons. The introduction is poorly written, but bad grammar doesn't affect the rest of the course.

Numerous quizzes give you instant feedback, but don't really reinforce learning, as the correct answers are too obvious. In addition, the tone of the feedback varies widely from suggesting that a choice isn't the best to (we're not kidding) "Ooooooooh, yes, I agree. Can't you just imagine the little hairs standing up on the back of that customer's neck?" Nonetheless, this is a good course for novice customer service representatives. Although the tone sometimes verges on condescension, the information is solid.

★★★ *The Neon Signs of Customer Service*: 20 minutes, US\$45 for 1 month of access to all youachieve.com courses. Publisher: youachieve.com

Using anecdotes from her experiences as a hotel concierge, the author of youachieve.com's *The Neon Signs of Customer Service* articulates simple principles for providing customer service. Points such as "Angry customers don't care about you, they only care about themselves" and "Every customer service interaction involves choices" are delivered with levelheaded optimism. Though the content is concise, effective, and engaging, the format is limited. The interface consists of plain, text-based Webpages and offers little interactivity.

Not Recommended

★★½ *Quality Customer Service*: 2 to 4 hours,

At a Glance

Healing the Customer Relationship: Highly engaging, useful information, reasonable cost.

Overcoming Challenging Service

Situations: Useful information, practical “SkillGuide” worksheets, relatively expensive, minor design flaws.

1 to 1: Customer Service Success: Just-in-time format, good value for time and money, not especially interactive.

Helping Irate Customers: Helpful information, good use of examples, too motivational for some users, inconsistent tone.

The Neon Signs of Customer Service: Clearly presented advice, extremely low interactivity.

Quality Customer Service: Good basic information, reasonable price, dull format, assessments flawed, low interactivity.

US\$24.95 for 1 year of course access.

Publisher: Crisp Learning

This course is a basic how-to course for frontline customer service employees. Topics include how to present a positive customer service attitude, how to identify and provide for customer needs, and how to encourage your customers to return. According to *Quality Customer Service*, the difference between effective and ineffective service is sensitivity, sincerity, and human relations skills.

Much of the value of this course lies in the printable job aids. Interactive features include self-assessments, case studies, animations, and audio clips. But the overall format isn't especially lively or engaging. Though the progress reviews provide correct answers to missed questions, the final assessment doesn't, so there's no way of knowing whether your answers are correct.

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