



Jill Dean, client services director at Associate Member Power Train has teamed up with *customerfirst* to give advice and guidance on a range of issues to promote best practice and customer service excellence. In her first customer service clinic Jill tackles some of the important issues to cover when giving feedback to others.

Giving feedback: It's all down to the preparation...

"I'm responsible for 12 people working in a very busy, pressurised environment dealing mainly with customers on the phone. There have been several complaints from customers about one member of my team who is very abrupt and often annoys or upsets people. Previous attempts to give him feedback made things even worse. Help!"

Let's start with what you need to ask yourself...

- is he deliberately abrupt or has he not had the right training? Or do you think he just doesn't realise he is upsetting customers?
- is he the same with all customers or do some trigger something that leads to his abrupt behaviour?
- do you know what a 'good' call with a customer looks like in your company?
- could you use other team members as examples of how to behave?
- why was your original feedback taken so badly? Does he take all feedback badly?
- have you put off talking to him, so that further comments will come as a surprise?

Here are some tips to get a good result when you give feedback:

- prepare, prepare, prepare....what

you are going to say and how you are going to say it. If necessary, practise on a colleague you can trust

- ensure your facts are right and be precise. Gather good and bad evidence as examples. Listen to his calls and make notes
- discuss the 'cause' of his abruptness as well the 'effect'. The problem won't go away unless you deal with the cause
- ensure you know what you want and have ideas on how to help. This might, for example, involve coaching, or him sitting in on calls with a colleague who is great with customers. Get him to tell you what would work for him
- tell him when he handles a call well. Again, use recorded examples if necessary
- think about his personality and how he might want to hear the feedback. Would he prefer you to get straight

to the point? Or is he someone who needs to make light of it to take away any embarrassment? Maybe he wants you to understand how he feels before he will open up?

- be prepared to really listen to his view – you might be surprised by what he says. If you hear things that you don't know how to deal with or can't do anything about then say so. You may want to think things through before meeting up again
- be prepared for him to be abrupt with you too. Ranting might clear the air and he may feel better for it. Don't take it personally
- don't be surprised if he welcomes your feedback and an opportunity to talk about it even if he doesn't like what he hears
- give him time to digest the information before talking further. We're all human and can overreact if we hear a few home truths.

One final tip. Meet in a private place and allow enough time. While shopping recently I overheard a manager giving someone feedback on the shopfloor (it wasn't good either). It put me off buying anything. Then again, it was a good excuse to go for a coffee! 