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Customer Service

This section continues a series of articles, tips, resources, and information to assist providers in developing strategies to improve customer service and increase program participation. They are based on business principles that can also be used in the public/non-profit sector.

Your Most Unhappy Customers are your Greatest Source of Learning

By Michael Hill of "Complaints R Great"

A customer who complains to you should be valued – many of your dissatisfied customers will take their business elsewhere and not even give you an opportunity to respond. Bill Gates has stated that: "Your most unhappy customers are your greatest source of learning".

"I really care for you and I want us to stay together. Do you really want end this relationship?"

"Why don't you speak to me?"

"Why do you find it so hard to say sorry?"

"Why can't you acknowledge my hurt?"

"Why don't you care?"

Comments from a marriage counseling session? No. But they are comments of customers who are feeling unloved, who want a relationship to blossom but a problem has been allowed to grow and grow until the relationship breaks down with no chance of reconciliation.

It's such a let down when you tell someone you trust about a problem but they do nothing or little other than uttering a few, vaguely interested reassurances to help resolve the problem. None of us are perfect and most of us are accepting of the odd mistake but we do expect to engage in a dialogue to make sure that something is done to put things right and prevent the problem from happening again.

But how do you treat these loyal customers who want an ongoing relationship with you? Do you make it easy for them to talk to you?

Up to two-thirds of dissatisfied customers do complain to the provider of the purchased product or service but many remained unheard. Why? Because available channels are too limited and restrictive – businesses too often require the complaining customer to go to a great deal of effort to have any concerns properly heard – making them spend time writing and posting a complaint and get little opportunity to discuss the problem experienced with someone who grasps ownership of the complaint and directs the process in achieving resolution.

Sometimes, communication within a relationship breaks down and we need some external help to get the relationship back on track. We may rely on the support of friends and family or we may get professional support through counseling and mediation. We can do the same in complaint management – having processes in place that allow for experienced internal or external complaint handlers to mediate and help both parties to find a solution that gets them communicating again and allows the rebuilding of the relationship.

But sometimes, the solution is separation and we have to recognize that sometimes we must let go of a customer. But we need to do so in a way that is understanding and clearly communicated.

Do you measure the customer feedback experience – do you understand the expectations of the complaining customer and how often do you match those expectations?

Do you reassure your customers by letting them know how you develop and change for the better by listening to their comments?

Key Learning Points

Many businesses still look on complainants as those customers who are difficult and impossible to satisfy but businesses who value the complaining customer build loyalty, increase customer retention and build a good reputation in the marketplace. A Warwick Business School study found that consumers considered an effective complaint management process to be the key differentiator in 43% of the UK businesses with good reputations.

If you want to build long and loving relationships with your customers then:

- Always be open to discussing problems with your customers
- Listen and empathize – consider the reasons behind the dissatisfaction and hurt
- Be personal and caring – don't brush them aside with automated, standard responses
- Say sorry and acknowledge the problem – even if you believe you are not in the wrong
- Show your affection when you're in the wrong – but don't overdo it!
- Give customers and complaint handlers access to someone who can come in to mediate when a solution cannot be found but a continued relationship is still required
- Take time to think about your actions and look at ways to improve the way you do things in future

If you are doing something that works for you, please consider sharing it with others through the InfoGram. Submit information to Barbara Estrada at bestrada@aging.ca.gov.

Senior Meal Programs Cater to New Tastes

March 18, 2007

By Maria L. La Ganga, Los Angeles Times

As baby boomers become eligible for food programs for the elderly, providers are finding they must offer healthier fare.

Pacifica, Calif. — Arlene Ciolino started the day with 75 minutes of aerobics, followed by 1 ½ hours of yoga. So by noon she was hungry. She stowed her blue exercise mat, doffed her white sweatshirt and bellied up to the salad bar. First came a layer of crisp romaine lettuce, then a scoop of chicken salad, a drizzle of Caesar dressing, a few croutons and a dusting of parmesan. A whole-wheat roll rounded out the meal.

It was light and health-conscious, just like Ciolino, a slender 67-year-old retired bookkeeper. On this drizzly Thursday afternoon, she was lunching at the uncharted edge of aging in America: a senior center 15 miles south of San Francisco that is working to attract a new generation of diners with meals to match their active lives.

Check the menu at the federally subsidized lunch program in a handful of progressive places nationwide and you'll see your grandmother's mashed potatoes and gravy nudged aside by fresh, organic and *al dente* foods demanded by a younger population more interested in arugula than arthritis.

Unlike the elderly diners who came before them, these folks were influenced more by the food revolution of the 1970s (think Alice Waters) than the Great Depression of the 1930s (think Hoovervilles).

And they are beginning to leave their mark on the Meals on Wheels Assn. of America,

one of the biggest senior lunch providers in the nation, which launched an in-house think tank last year to "reinvent, redesign and re-engineer" its services in part so they appeal to a finicky new clientele.

"When those baby boomers start using the programs — and they can now, because they're 60 — we're going to have to change," said Enid Borden, chief executive of the group, whose member organizations serve more than 1 million meals each day.

"As I get older, the kind of food that I'm going to want to eat isn't the same that my mother ate," Borden said. "My mother ate meatloaf and mashed potatoes. I don't eat that." Therein lays the challenge. Where there once was just a single generation of senior citizens in America, now there basically are two: the old and the very old, bracketed by baby boomers at one hand and centenarians at the other. And they don't crave the same kinds of food. "We're supposed to provide food people like and that's healthy," said Jean Lloyd, national nutritionist for the U.S. Administration on Aging. "It's not easy.... One meal doesn't fit all."

Senior lunch providers throughout the country are required by law to serve people 60 and older. And as the federal Older Americans Act nutrition program turns 35 this year, it is feeling the strain of catering to this increasingly diverse population. The average life expectancy in the United States has jumped from 47 to 77 over the last century, and the fastest-growing age group is 85 and older. Furthermore, with people putting off retirement and women giving birth in their 50s and (occasionally) 60s, the "golden years" aren't what they used to be.

The federal nutrition program, originally designed to reduce hunger and cut social isolation, now serves nearly 3 million people each year, making it the largest publicly funded nutrition service for older adults in the country. Local providers delivering meals to the homebound elderly are oversubscribed; 40% nationwide and 30% in California have waiting lists. At the same time, senior centers are struggling to entice 60- and 70-year-olds to come in and dine.

The needs of the homebound are only growing. Over the last 20 years, home-delivered meals, which are pricier than those offered in senior centers, have gone from 15% of the elderly nutrition program to about 58%, according to the Administration on Aging. But resources are limited. Federal funding — which provides less than half the cost of a meal — for the most part has been flat in recent years. (The rest of the money comes from state and local government, fundraising and the seniors themselves.)

Younger diners get all the benefits of the senior lunch — a nutritious meal in a supportive, social setting. But they also are desirable to the programs in part because they can help defray costs. They often are volunteers, helping to serve others as they dine themselves. And they are often the ones most able to make the small suggested donation — \$1.25 to \$4 a meal, depending on the venue — toward the cost of lunch.

All of which raises the thorny question: How do you attract this younger generation of

older America? To date, no one really knows the answer. But words like "health-conscious" and "choice" are probably somewhere in it. "We're just on the edge of this," acknowledged Barbara Estrada, a nutritionist with the California Department of Aging, who points to pockets of experimentation around the country.

For instance, several times a year senior centers throughout Los Angeles roll out dishes more commonly seen in upscale bistros: Cajun turkey breast with apple chutney, marinated lamb shank with red herb sauce, sesame seed mahi-mahi with Asian vinaigrette, herb-crusting baked cod.

"The new senior has a different type of requirement," said Bertha Hurd, nutritionist for the city's Area Agency on Aging. "Their palate is quite different." Hurd is the brains behind the Millennium Menu program, the culinary effort to entice younger seniors to government-funded nutrition services. She would offer such meals far more often, she said, if the city could afford to. Moreover, Hurd recently decided that Trans fats would be banned from the city's 110 senior meal sites starting in April. She has notified vendors to stop using the chemically modified fat, which is popular for baking but has been linked to heart disease.

On the cusp of the wine country in hardscrabble Clearlake, the Highlands Senior Service Center now offers a salad bar every day in response to the increased demand for fresh fruits and vegetables. They've cut way back on processed fare and stopped serving fried foods completely.

"Having the salad bar here pleases everyone; the younger ones who want a good healthy salad and the older ones too," said Linda J. Burton, Highlands' executive director. "I've gotten positive feedback from an older senior who said if they come and eat the salad bar, they don't have to take their laxative."

Along the Mendocino County Coast, when the 60-plus crowd lunches at Druid Hall, the bread is whole wheat, the vegetables are *al dente* and sometimes organic, the lasagna has tofu and there are regular vegetarian days. The trend toward expanded choice is not peculiar to California.

A group of senior centers in Oregon and Washington state offers ethnic foods at half its locations and is scheduling flexible eating times similar to restaurants — a departure from the noon-sharp mentality. It's all about changing expectations, said Joan Smith, executive director of the organization Loaves & Fishes Centers Inc., which is based in Portland, Ore. "Someone who grew up in the Depression is just so thankful for what you bring," Smith said. "That'll change with the baby boomers: 'This isn't what I wanted. I want it at 3 p.m. and with a six-pack.' "

And then there's Pacifica. When Jim Lange, who heads up senior and food services for the city, first took the job in 2004, "Everything was convenience foods." There were frozen, breaded chicken patties, he recalled, pressed turkey roll, frozen pizza, pre-made meatloaf and always, always frozen vegetables.

The 20 or so seniors who dined each day would often arrive at 9 a.m. and sit in the darkened multipurpose room, waiting to eat lunch and go home. Mondays and Fridays, the number of diners rarely crested single digits. So Lange turned the lobby into a cozy lounge, complete with paperbacks and coffee. He pushed for scratch cooking, introduced healthier versions of old favorites and added salad bars, vegetarian lasagna and chicken mango sausage.

Lange had long eyed a group of younger seniors who would come in to the community center for exercise classes, work up a sweat and "run out," he said. "I tried to get them involved in volunteering. 'Hey, we have a salad bar today. Can you be a server?' They'd come in and say, 'This lunch isn't bad.' And then they'd come back. Lunchtime attendance has nearly tripled, and on salad bar days, yoga mats can outnumber the wheelchairs in the sunny lunchroom.

Before Lange arrived and lightened up the menu, Ciolino, the 67-year-old exercise fanatic, had tried the senior lunch twice, tops. Diabetes and high cholesterol run in her family, and she's a pretty particular eater, keeping her distance from "a lot of fat-type things." "The food was terrible. It was all mushy, like hamburger and gravy," she said. Now she eats here a couple of times a week — partly because of the healthy new menu and partly because, since her husband died two years ago, she just can't bring herself to cook. "This became very important to me after he died," she said. "At least there was a place to go where I'd get one meal. And I love the salad bar."

Disaster and Emergency Preparedness

This is taken from a small brochure developed by the Office of Emergency Services (OES). The following information was developed for individual use. However, it can also be adopted for group or agency plans. This brochure is available in eight languages on the OES website as the following direct link:

<http://www.oes.ca.gov/Operational/OESHome.nsf/ALL/012465F1364F55F6882571F40079BF0F?OpenDocument>

10 Ways you can be Disaster Prepared

1. Identify your Risk
 - a. Hazards where you live and work.
2. Create a Family Disaster Plan
 - a. Your family needs a plan that tells everyone:
 - i. Where to meet if you have to evacuate.
 - ii. Who you've identified as the out-of-state friend to be your "family contact"
 - iii. How to get important information in your community.
 - iv. How to take care of your family pets.
3. Practice your Disaster Plan
4. Build Disaster Supply Kit for your Home and Car

- a. Should have at least the following items and be kept in containers that can be easily carried or move:
 - i. 3-day supply of non-perishable and canned food, and water.
 - ii. First Aid Kit.
 - iii. Battery-powered flashlight and portable radio.
 - iv. Change of clothing and footwear, and blankets or sleeping bags.
 - v. Extra set of car keys, and a credit card and cash.
 - vi. Extra medications.
 - vii. Sanitation supplies.
 - viii. An extra set of prescription glasses.
 - ix. Keep important family documents in a waterproof container.
5. Prepare your Children
6. Don't Forget those with Special Needs
7. Learn CPR and First Aid
8. Eliminate Hazards in your Home and the Workplace
9. Understand Post 9/11 Risks
10. Get Involved, Volunteer, Bear Responsibility

More information can be found at the following websites:

Governor's Office of Emergency Services

<http://www.oes.ca.gov>

California Services Corps

<http://www.csc.ca.gov>

American Red Cross

<http://www.redcross.org>

Fire Safe Council

<http://www.firesafecouncil.org>

Video Library Updates

The following resources have been added to the video library:

- Fall Prevention
 - No More Falls! A Guide for Older Adults by Kaiser Permanente.
- Elderly Abuse
 - Life Line – Preventing Elder Abuse with Betty White.

The video library list can be found at the following website:

http://www.aging.ca.gov/aaa/guidance/Nutrition_Video_Listing_02_07.pdf

Be sure to tell Kimberly Weitnauer the number of the video you want to borrow at (916) 419-7554.

Resources of Interest

Aging and Statistics

California Health Interview Survey (CHIS) <http://www.chis.ucla.edu/>

The CHIS provides the state's broadest overview of health issues and essential data for building healthier communities. The site contains get state and local data on hundreds of health topics. You can run your own customized searches using AskCHIS, review publications and data summaries, learn about current research, or attend an AskCHIS workshop.

Best Practices

The following are located on the Department's website www.aging.gov.ca.

These resources were obtained during AAA monitoring visits and represent best practices in specific program areas. The contact person responsible for the practice and program is listed. These are just a few of many best practices to assist programs in developing or improving programs in their area. For additional information, you can assess them at the following website:

http://www.aging.ca.gov/aaa/guidance/cda_operations_and_best_practices_guides_index.html

- Information & Assistance (Title III B)
 - Disaster and Emergencies, Policies and Procedures
PSA 21
Contact: Renee Dar-Khan
(951) 867-3800
rdarkhan@co.riverside.ca.us
 - Disaster Emergency Contact List for Vulnerable and At-Risk Clients
PSA 8
Contact: Shea Muller
(650) 573-3527
smuller@co.sanmateo.ca.us
 - Disaster Preparedness and Registration Packet
PSA 3
Contact: Nancy Taylor
(530) 898-6768
ntaylor@csuchico.edu

- Emergency Action Plan
PSA 28
Leanne Martinsen
(707) 644-6612
leanne@aaans.org
- Elderly Nutrition Program (Title III C)
 - Be Well Program
PSA 19
Contact: Sue Kennedy
(213) 739-7386
skennedy@css.co.la.ca.us
 - Distinguished Site Awards/CNS Training
PSA 19
Contact: Sue Kennedy
(213) 739-7386
skennedy@css.co.la.ca.us

Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

Heart Month information can be assessed through the Interactive Council on Active Aging web page: <http://www.icaa.cc/heartmonth.htm>

Food Safety

- **California Retail Food Code (CRFC)**
 - A new law which replaces the California Uniform Retail Food Facilities Law (CURFFL) and represents a culmination of an extraordinary collaborative effort of the California Retail Food Safety Coalition (CRFSC)
 - Effective on July 1, 2007
 - CRFC is intended to create uniformity and consistency throughout California.
 - What's new in CRFC?
 - Minor changes in terminology.
 - Changes or new requirements that address risk factors or public health interventions:
 - Changes or new requirements that address Good Retail Practices.
 - SB 744 is the "clean-up" Bill currently going through the legislative process. It can be accessed at the following website: www.leginfo.ca.gov

Additional information on California Retail Food Code can be assessed at the following website:

http://www.ceha.org/documents/CalCodeSummaryof_major_changes_corre cted_3_27_2007.pdf

- **Food Safety Magnets and Thermometers**
Produced by MILJOCO Corporation can purchased online at www.miljoco.com

Nutrition and Health

Choices for Independence & Nutrition <http://nutritionandaging.fiu.edu/>

- Older Americans: Making Food & Nutrition Choices for a Healthier Future: The Older Americans Act Nutrition Program in the US Administration on Aging Choices for Independence.
- Practical Handbook for SUA & ITO Nutritionists & Administrators: Integrating Food & Nutrition Services into the US Administration on Aging's Choices for Independence.

Strategic Action Plan 2007 – 2012

The AoA's Strategic Action Plan for 2007 – 2012 has released. This Plan continues AoA's focus to bolster the role of the Aging Services Network in long-term care, and gives particular attention to implementing that new provisions in the Older Americans Act that reflect the key principles of choices for Independence. The Act now authorizes all levels of the Network to actively promote the development of consumer-centered systems of long-term care, and specifically encourages the Network to implement Aging and Disability Resources Centers, evidence-based prevention programs, and flexible service models, including consumer-directed options, to help individuals avoid unnecessary nursing home placement and spend down to Medicaid. As outlined in this plan, these and other new provisions in the Act hold great potential for modernizing aging services in the 21st Century and enhancing the quality of life of our older citizens. A full copy of the Plan can be accessed on Strategic Plan web page:

<http://www.aoa.gov/about/strategic/strategic.asp>

Books of Interest

- Eating Healthy for Older Adults
Topics include calcium, fiber, potassium, protein, sodium, and vitamins B12 and D intakes. Discusses physical activity, weight maintenance and fluid requirements, and offers food-handling safety tips and online senior resources. Printed in large type for easier readability. More info can be found at the following website
http://www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/shop_6953_ENU_HTML.htm
- Nutrition Education: Linking Research, Theory, and Practice by Isobel R. Contento, PhD, Teachers College, Columbia University
Nutrition Education: Linking Research, Theory and Practice gives students the nuts and bolts of designing and providing nutrition education. This text focuses on theory and incorporates state-of-the-art research findings. Nutrition Education is divided into three parts:
 - Part 1 discusses the foundations of nutrition education.
 - Part 2 walks students through the steps necessary for designing effective nutrition education strategies.

- Part 3 teaches students how to put the information they have just learned into action, providing extensive information on how to implement nutrition education strategies effectively.

Ordering information can be found at the following website:

<http://www.jbpub.com/CATALOG/0763738069/>

Information from the Meals on Wheels Association of America (MOWAA)

For more information please visit MOWAA's website at: www.mowaa.org

- GrantStation Announcement
 - The Joy of Fundraising
 - Terry Axelrod's fourth book, *The Joy of Fundraising* will teach you to shift your fundraising thinking, focus, and actions to an abundance-based approach that attracts long-term donors who are passionate about your mission. This series of excerpts condenses Axelrod's years of teaching into simple, powerful tips for success and challenges you to exchange a context of scarcity for one of abundance, learn how to honor lifelong donors, and take the first step toward sustainable funding.
 - This book can be purchased online for \$13.57 + shipping & Handling at the following website:
http://shop.socialworker.com/Philanthropy-11276-0970045565-The_Joy_of_Fundraising.html

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