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| **Professionals’ Core Competencies**  |
| **Customer Focus** |
| **Definition** | Understanding who the external and internal customers are and what they value. Meeting and exceeding customer needs while cultivating relationships that secure commitment and trust. Promoting and operationalizing best customer service practices as a value. Helping others deal effectively with difficult situations, minimizing damage to the relationship while promoting shared goals. Using appropriate methods to facilitate agreement. |
| **Importance** | The role of HR in a Washington state agency is to serve the needs of its employees and their managers on behalf of the citizens. Promoting and operationalizing customer service as a value helps ensure the perspectives of customers (internal and external) are the driving force behind strategic priorities, business decisions, organization processes and individual activities. It is critical that professional HR staff help develop and implement service guidelines that meet or exceed customers’ and the organization’s expectations. |
| **How do Washington State Human Resource Professionals Demonstrate This Competency?** |
| **Key Elements** | **Distinguishing Behaviors** |
| Enhances the customer experience.  | * Give full attention to the customers and emphasizes the importance of customer satisfaction.
* Understands customer needs and uses feedback to develop and improve processes, procedures, partnerships, performance expectations, and training so that customer satisfaction improves and service issues are prevented.
* Follows through on customer commitments despite time pressures or obstacles.
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| Clarifies the customer situation/ needs/ expectations/values. | * Actively gathers and leverages information to understand current and emerging customer business priorities, problems, expectations, and needs.
* Seeks customer feedback and suggestions for improving products and services.
* Identifies barriers affecting customer service and retention.
* Asks questions to determine the customer’s needs; listens carefully; shares information and rationale about the situation; summarizes to check understanding.
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| Involves the customer and uses feedback to improve processes.  | * Seeks out customers’ input to better understand their needs; develops ideas for how to meet those needs.
* Asks customers for feedback and ideas; listens actively to gain their support.
* Confirms customers’ needs were met or exceeded.
* Follows up to ensure intended actions are accomplished and results are achieved.
* Checks for customer satisfaction and seeks suggestions for improvement.
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| Identifies and responds to customer service issues. | * Sets priorities and makes decisions that consider customer impact.
* Measures customer satisfaction and retention to ensure customer solutions, practices, and procedures are carried out and achieve their objectives.
* Identifies barriers affecting customer service.
* Anticipates customer needs and responds before the situation requires action.
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| Supports customer-focused practices. | * Recognizes when processes and/or outcomes are negatively impacting the customer.
* Owns the issue and takes action to address deficiencies by identifying resolutions and notifying the appropriate leader.
* Engages employees in customer needs solutions
* Regularly updates understanding of customers’ needs and quickly adapts solutions, as needed, to changing customer demands.
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| Uses coaching and proven problem-solving methods to help resolve conflict. | * Helps people solve problems.
* Diagnoses problems and share solutions to create learning experiences.
* Involves others in problem-solving and idea generation with a goal of improving processes so to prevent future problems.
* Ensures others understand new product information or process updates.
* Aligns expectations for discussion and establishes action plans.
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| Stays focused on resolution. Helps others generate ideas for resolving conflict or problems. Seeks to gain agreement to a resolution. | * Avoids personal attacks.
* Maintains others’ self-esteem when discussing sensitive issues.
* Focuses on the facts, avoid assumptions, and clarifies motives.
* Expresses confidence in reaching a resolution.
* Presents and seeks potential solutions or actions, building on others’ ideas.
* Asks powerful questions to unleash ideas and get all parties involved in the solution.
* Confirms agreements and specifies next steps, resources, support, and how to track progress.
* Summarizes to ensure that all are aware of required actions and accountabilities.
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| Handles dissatisfied customers by hearing the customer out. | * Actively seeks information to understand customer circumstances, problems, expectations, and needs.
* Responds quickly to address customer problems.
* Generates mutually beneficial solutions or alternatives.
* Avoids over-commitments.
* Gains customer agreement to proposed solution.
* Makes sure that customer solutions, practices, and procedures are carried out to achieve the customers’ objectives.
* Expresses regret when appropriate, and takes responsibility for action.
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| Empathizes with the customer’s situation and associated feelings. | * Demonstrates value and respect for customers.
* Gives full attention and emphasizes the importance of customer satisfaction.
* Asks for the customer’s opinions and ideas.
* Listens actively to gain their support when clarifying expectations.
* Responds to and empathizes with internal/external customers’ complaints, requests, or demands.
* Establishes good two-way communication with internal/external customers regarding problems or requests.
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| Acknowledges and takes responsibility for actions. | * Takes accountability for customer satisfaction and loyalty.
* Uses appropriate interpersonal techniques to prevent and resolve customer complaints.
* Clarifies expectations and scope of decision making authority while expanding the customers’ feelings of ownership and accountability.
* Take responsibility to solve internal/external customers’ issues.
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| **Personal Growth Activities** may include, but are not limited to, on-the-job experience, developmental assignments, shadowing, experiential learning, participating in training as a leader or participant and other life experiences. Remember that many developmental activities can and will occur outside of work as part of your personal life.**Specific EXAMPLES of developmental opportunities for this competency include:** |
| **EXAMPLES of Developmental Activities*** Ask your manager about an especially difficult or complicated client problem. Ask to work with him or her in resolving the issue.
* Conduct interviews with customers to determine their needs and satisfaction with current services.
* Examine everything you do against these criteria: “Does this contribute to meeting customer needs?” Or, “What value does this add for the customer?”
* Keep track of customer problems. Track whether they have been resolved and how they have been resolved. Review the log once a week to see if there are any unresolved problems. Devise a strategy to solve these problems.
* List the requirements your customers have. Then ask your customers what their needs are. Note the differences.
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| **EXAMPLES of Training**Video learning:* Community Door Team on Customer Focus: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOAtLzJtIB8>
* Six Differences Between Customer-Focused Companies and Operations-Focused Companies by Shep Hyken: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPv2zZiV1rI>
* Professional Capital’s Customer Service vs Customer Focus – a discussion cartoon: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPv2zZiV1rI>

Book learning:*Exceptional Service, Exceptional Profit: The Secrets of Building a Five-Star Customer Service Organization* by Leonardo Inghilleri, Micah Solomon, Horst Schulze (AMACOM, 2010). Learn the Loyalty-Building Secrets of Distinguished—and Exceptionally Successful—Service Companies. This book will guide managers and anyone interested in transforming their interactions with clients *Getting Naked: A Business Fable About Shedding The Three Fears That Sabotage Client Loyalty* (J-B Lencioni Series) by Patrick Lencioni (Wiley, John & Sons, Incorporated, 2010). *Getting Naked* tells the remarkable story of a management consultant who is trying desperately to merge two firms with very different approaches to serving clients. One relies on vulnerability and complete transparency; the other focuses on proving its competence and protecting its reputation for intellectual prowess.  *Customer Service: Career Success Through Customer Loyalty* / Edition 5 by Paul R. Timm (Prentice Hall, 2010). The book provides a systematic process for building service skills that all business people need. External training:* American Management Association [www.amanet.org/training/ama-seminars.aspx](http://www.amanet.org/training/ama-seminars.aspx)
* Emory University Professional Learning Programs <http://ece.emory.edu/programs.htm>
* Franklin-Covey [www.franklincovey.com](http://www.franklincovey.com)
* Fred Pryor Seminars <http://www.fredpryor.com>
* The Leaders’ Institute <http://www.leadersinstitute.com/>
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| **Recruiting** for candidates who have this competency may include, but is not limited to, providing clear statements about qualifications desired or required in the recruitment announcement, performing specific outreach activities to organizations or groups whose members often possess the desired competency, developing interview questions that assess the candidates’ competence, and asking reference questions that assess the candidates’ competence.**Specific EXAMPLES of recruiting activities for this competency include:** |
| **Example of qualification statement:** People skilled in Customer Focus have a work history of successful customer interactions, long-standing relationships with customers and are sought out for their skills and competence in resolving customer issues. **Example of outreach activity:** Source the job announcement to the SHRM or IPMS-HR journal/online career center, or contact known individuals with this skillset asking for names of potential candidates who demonstrate this competency.**Examples of interview questions:**1. Tell me about the most you’ve ever done to obtain information to better understand your customers’ needs/concerns to improve your service. Did the information make a difference?
2. Describe a recent action or policy you instituted to foster and support customer focus.
3. To better serve customers, there is a tendency to promise more than we can deliver. Tell me about a time when you overcommitted yourself or your organization.
4. When relationships with customers have gotten difficult, what have you done to understand the situation? Give me an example.
5. How have you known if your internal or external customers were satisfied? Give me an example of a customer who was satisfied as a result of your efforts.

**Examples of reference check questions:**1. We are looking for an HR professional who understands who their customers are and what they value; who meets or exceeds customer expectations; and promotes and operationalizes best customer service practices as a value. With this in mind, how would you describe the candidate’s ability to (pick a key element)?
2. To better serve customers, we sometimes promise more than we can deliver. Tell me about a time when [applicant name] overcommitted him/herself or your organization.
3. Employees sometimes lose sight of customer needs over time. Describe a time when (applicant name) got off track and lost sight of customer needs, and what they did, if anything, to get back on track.
4. All of us have customers who have complaints. Tell me about a recent customer complaint about (applicant name) that came to you. Was the customer’s concern justified? How did (applicant name) respond when you approached them regarding the complaint?
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| **Identifying Required Proficiency Levels**While behavioral indicators are used to help in evaluating performance, proficiency levels describe the level of a competency required to perform a specific job successfully. These levels relate to the work required for **a specific job**. Different jobs require different levels of proficiency for successful performance. Not all jobs will require the highest level of proficiency and some may not require specific competencies at all. The proficiency levels outlined below apply to all of the HR Core Competencies. |
| **Proficiency Level** | **Proficiency Description** |
| **Entry** | * Limited or no use of competency required for the job
* Competency has been minimally demonstrated
* May have had limited opportunity to apply the competency
* May have limited understanding of the competency
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| **Developing** | * Basic understanding or knowledge required for the job
* Basic understanding and knowledge sufficient enough to handle routing tasks
* Requires some guidance or supervision when applying the competency
* Understands and can discuss terminology and concepts related to the competency
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| **Independent** | * Detailed knowledge, understanding and application of the competency required to be successful in the job
* Ability to handle non-routine problems and situations
* Requires minimal guidance or supervision/works independently
* Consistently demonstrates success in the competency
* Capable of assisting others in the application of the competency
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| **Advanced** | * Highly developed knowledge, understanding, and application of the competency required to be successful in the job and organization (total mastery)
* Can apply knowledge outside the scope of one’s position
* Is able to coach or teach others on the competency
* Has a long-term perspective
* Helps develop materials and resources in the competency
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| **Expert** | * Specialist/Authority level knowledge, understanding, and application of the competency required to be successful in the job
* Recognized by others as an expert in the competency and is sought out by others throughout the organization (expert in the area)
* Works across team, department, and organizational functions
* Applies skills across multiple projects or functions
* Able to explain issues in relation to broader organizational issues
* Creates new applications or processes
* Has a strategic focus
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