

- 10. When talking with customers, I don't test for understanding to be sure I accurately heard what was said.
- 11. I encourage the complete airing of all customer problems — big and small.
- 12. When talking with customers on the phone, I put them on hold without first asking if it's okay.
- 13. When working with customers, I am supportive and helpful.
- 14. When talking with customers, I only listen for the content of their message and not the feelings behind what they're telling me.
- 15. I don't provide customers with periodic progress reports on the status of problems, even if they take awhile to solve.
- 16. When talking with customers, I show enthusiasm for both the customer and my company and its products or services.
- 17. When talking with customers, I never use their name during the course of our conversation(s).

- 18. When talking with customers, I periodically use brief encouraging remarks such as "right," "okay" and "um hmm" to let them know I'm listening.
- 19. When necessary, I look for creative or innovative ways to solve customer problems.
- 20. When responding to customer requests, I make sure the customer has my name and phone number as well as the names and phone numbers of any other people who will be involved in satisfying the request.
- 21. When working with a customer, I try to find out how the customer wants to be treated and then adjust my behavior accordingly.
- 22. When talking with customers, I'm always alert and attentive to what they are saying.
- 23. Even if I know about a problem in advance, I don't call and let the customer know about the situation and what's being done about it before the customer calls me.
- 24. I personally set high customer service standards for myself and strive constantly to meet them.
- 25. When working with customers, I don't try to find out about their personal interests, and then use this information to help build rapport.

## SKILL ASSESSMENT

- 26. When talking with a customer, I don't introduce new topics into the conversation until we have concluded our discussion of the current one.
- 27. When working to solve a customer problem, I explain how long it will take to solve the problem and, if possible, what can be done to prevent the problem from happening again.
- 28. If a customer criticizes me or my company, I become defensive or argumentative.
- 29. When customers call with concerns, I make an effort to understand how the situation affects them personally.
- 30. I become impatient with customers if they ramble on during our conversations.
- 31. When a customer encounters a problem with one of my company's products or services, I try to find out exactly what happened and then provide the customer with an explanation.
- 32. If a customer calls with a question about our products and services and I don't know the answer, I find out and immediately get back to him or her with the answer. ■



**Instructions**

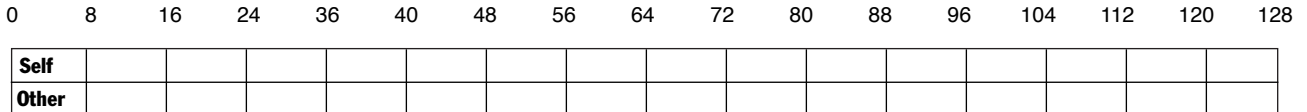
- Read the first statement in the questionnaire. On the chart at the right, circle the letter that corresponds to your choice for how true the statement is in relation to your own customer service behavior. Repeat for all 32 statements. Circle only *one* choice for each statement. Press hard, as your responses are being recorded on the sheet below.
- Please do not read the interpretive material that follows until you have completed the inventory or have been instructed to continue.
- After you have made your choices for all 32 statements, separate this two-part form and follow the scoring instructions on the next page.
- Use the following key to make your choices:  
 C = Completely True  
 M = Mostly True  
 S = Somewhat True  
 L = A Little True  
 N = Not At All True

<b>1.</b>	C M S L N	<b>2.</b>	C M S L N	<b>3.</b>	C M S L N	<b>4.</b>	C M S L N
<b>5.</b>	C M S L N	<b>6.</b>	C M S L N	<b>7.</b>	C M S L N	<b>8.</b>	C M S L N
<b>9.</b>	C M S L N	<b>10.</b>	C M S L N	<b>11.</b>	C M S L N	<b>12.</b>	C M S L N
<b>13.</b>	C M S L N	<b>14.</b>	C M S L N	<b>15.</b>	C M S L N	<b>16.</b>	C M S L N
<b>17.</b>	C M S L N	<b>18.</b>	C M S L N	<b>19.</b>	C M S L N	<b>20.</b>	C M S L N
<b>21.</b>	C M S L N	<b>22.</b>	C M S L N	<b>23.</b>	C M S L N	<b>24.</b>	C M S L N
<b>25.</b>	C M S L N	<b>26.</b>	C M S L N	<b>27.</b>	C M S L N	<b>28.</b>	C M S L N
<b>29.</b>	C M S L N	<b>30.</b>	C M S L N	<b>31.</b>	C M S L N	<b>32.</b>	C M S L N



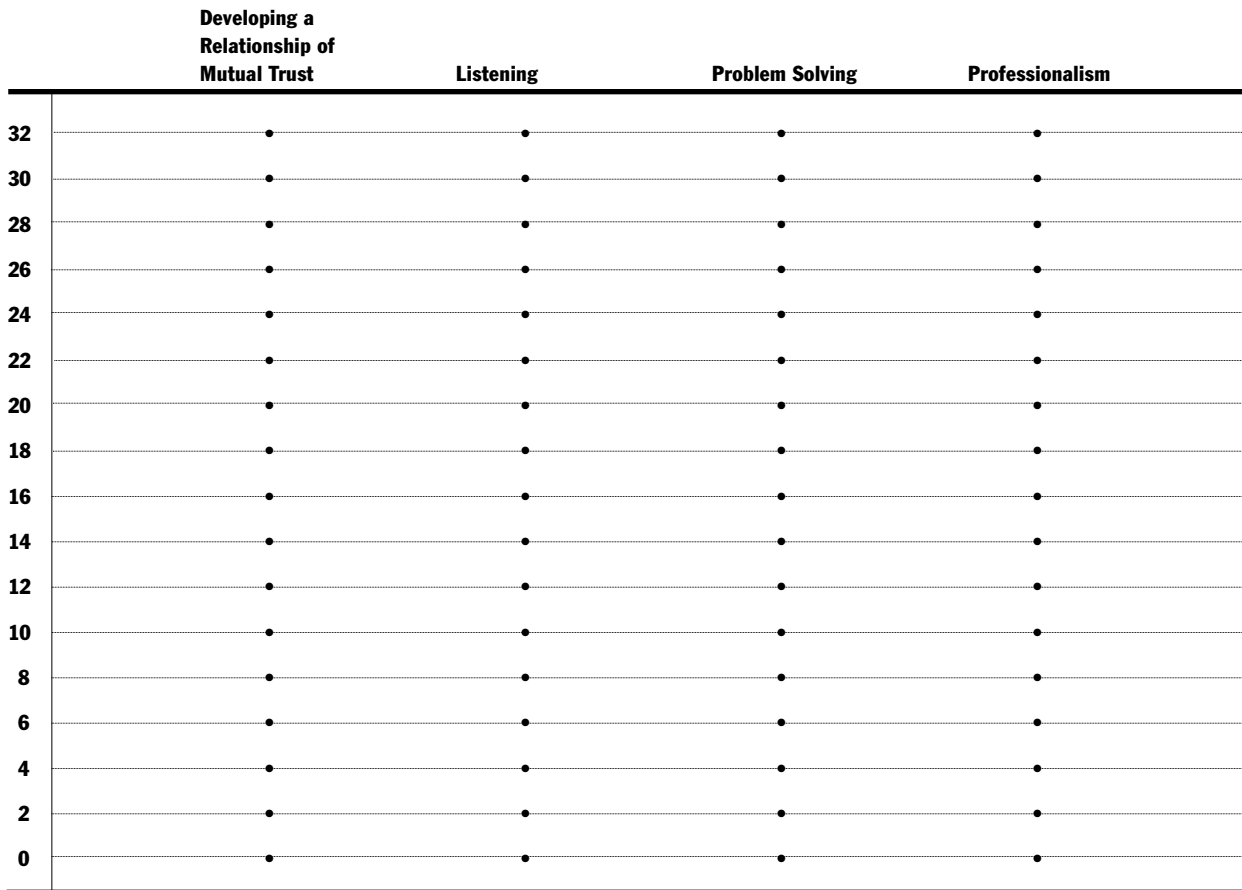
**Overall Effectiveness Profile**

Complete the bar chart below by shading in the bar from the left up to the point that equals your overall effectiveness score. If you have received feedback from others, use a different ink color or pattern to shade in the second bar to indicate your overall effectiveness average from the Feedback Data Chart on page 9.



**Skill Effectiveness Profile**

Using your skill effectiveness scores from page 7, circle the appropriate point in each column below. Then draw a line to connect the circled points. This line is a profile of your customer service behavior at this time. To plot your feedback scores, use a different ink color or pattern to plot and connect your averages from page 9.



### Difference Score Ranges

Another dimension to consider in interpreting your scores is the difference or gap between your Self score and the Others' scores. Differences indicate a perception gap between how you and your customers view your customer service behavior. The difference score ranges information below will help you interpret any gaps you have between your Self scores and the Others' scores.

**0-6** *No substantial difference.*

Your perceptions are very similar to those of the Others.

**7-12** *Moderate difference.*

Your perceptions and those of the Others are in need of minor adjusting. A discussion between you and your manager about the difference should bring about alignment. Also, if you are comfortable sharing your results with any of the Others, discuss the difference with them.

**13-19** *Significant difference.*

Your perceptions and those of the Others are seriously divergent. In addition to a discussion with your manager and the Others about the difference, some changes in behavior are needed.

**20+** *Major difference.*

Your perceptions and those of the Others are at a crisis stage. In addition to a discussion with your manager and the Others about the difference and changes in behavior, ongoing monitoring and follow-up are needed to bring about alignment.

### Diagnostic Questions

Refer back to Your Profiles on page 10 of this booklet and the Effectiveness Score Ranges chart on the preceding page. If you have Self or Other scores that fall into either the "average," "low" or "very low" categories, the following questions will help you gain additional insight into your customer service behavior and identify areas for improvement.

## INTERPRETING YOUR SCORES

### Developing a Relationship of Mutual Trust

1. Do you frequently get so caught up in solving customer problems and accomplishing customer service tasks that you forget you're also dealing with a person? (*While solving problems and accomplishing tasks is an important part of providing superior customer service, don't forget that you're dealing with a person who has his or her own set of issues and problems.*)
2. Do you view the process of developing an interpersonal relationship with customers as a secondary part of your role as a customer service representative? (*While your role as customer service representative involves solving customer problems, resolving customer concerns and responding to customer requests, it also involves developing a relationship of mutual trust with your customers.*)
3. Do you rely on one or two approaches to build mutual trust with customers? (*While it's good to have developed a couple of different ways to build mutual trust with customers, don't forget to pay attention to how the customer wants to be treated and then adjust your approach accordingly.*)
4. Do you sometimes make promises to customers and then not follow through and do what you promised? (*Making a promise and not keeping it can undo an entire series of kept promises. Making and keeping your promises builds trust and enhances your credibility.*) ▶



### Four Components of Superior Customer Service

In some ways the type of service you provide depends on the type of organization you work for — manufacturer, financial institution, service provider, not-for-profit organization, etc. However, regardless of organization type, there are some common customer service components that when done in an exemplary manner, will distinguish your company in a positive way from most others. These components are: *developing a relationship of mutual trust*, *listening*, *problem solving* and *professionalism*. Following is a reading about each of these components including a review of some of the research that documents the importance of performing these tasks well. Regardless of your scores, you will likely find the information in the reading useful, but pay special attention to areas in which you scored average or lower.

After completing the reading, turn to the Improvement Ideas on pages 16 & 17 of this booklet and start planning how you can improve your effectiveness at providing superior customer service.

### Developing a Relationship of Mutual Trust

This component serves as the foundation for providing superior customer service. It is essential for achieving open communication with customers. Creating an environment of trust also results in closer personal relationships (Larson, 1992; Lawler & Yoon, 1996; Nooteboom, Berger & Noorderhaven, 1997) with less need for detailed contracts (Crocker & Reynolds, 1993).

There is no one best time nor one best way to build trust. Trust should develop naturally throughout a call, or more likely over a series of calls. You need to find ways to build trust that are comfortable for you, as well as appropriate to the particular customer. However, the way in which you go about handling and following up on calls will add to or detract from the relationship of trust that exists between you and a customer. In addition, Crandall (1999) offers the following techniques as ways you might build mutual trust with customers:

- **Establish regular contact with customers.** This might take the form of a newsletter, e-mailing or faxing jokes, clipping and sending articles of interest or industry information, sending a handwritten note, or placing a phone call to see if there is some way you can be of assistance to a customer.
- **Find out how each customer wants to be treated.** Some customers like making small talk, or exchanging jokes or industry gossip. Others prefer to stick strictly to business. Some customers prefer phone contact and others want to use faxes and e-mail. Finding out a customer's preferences enables you to

tailor your approach.



fault; adhering to high social and ethical standards when talking with customers; showing enthusiasm for talking with customers as well as for company products and services; setting high customer service standards and striving constantly to meet them; and never becoming defensive or argumentative — even if a customer is being critical.

### **Improvement Ideas**

The *Customer Service Skills Inventory* provides you with an in-depth assessment of how well you perform the four key components associated with providing superior customer service. With this in mind, the next question becomes “What can I do to improve my scores and reduce any discrepancies between my Self scores and the Other scores?” While there isn’t one best answer, the following improvement suggestions are intended to help you develop a plan for charting your improvement.

In addition to reviewing the improvement suggestions, it is also recommended that you revisit the inventory itself and carefully re-read the items that make up any scale where you scored average or below. The individual items may help you think of additional improvement ideas. After you have reviewed the ideas below and the items making up the scale(s), turn to page 18, *Analyzing Your Profile*, and complete the Action Planning exercise to help you identify some concrete steps for your own development.

## **BACKGROUND READING**

### **Developing a Relationship of Mutual Trust**

- 1.** Engage each of your customers in occasional non-business related discussions to find out more about each one of them as a person.
- 2.** Set a goal for yourself to do something supportive or helpful that goes beyond what is expected for at least two customers each week.
- 3.** Make a point to determine, either by asking directly or inferring from cues, how each of your customers prefers to be dealt with when you are working with them to solve problems or resolve concerns, and then adjust your behavior accordingly.
- 4.** Think of a positive way to reward yourself each time you make a promise to a customer and keep it. Then think of a negative way to punish yourself each time you make a promise and don’t keep it.
- 5.** Set a goal for yourself to use your customers’ names at least twice during every conversation with them.

