Customer Service Interview Process

Questions and Tips

You know what you consider to be great service; does your candidate have the same high expectations?

Good candidates will be able to explain why customer service matters to a business and give clear examples of good and bad service. They should be prepared to talk about the County and how customer service might contribute to its success.

Watch out for people who really want a different role with the County but view customer service as the easiest way to get a foot in the door. They will be less likely to have thought through what great customer service means and may not deliver the kind of service you demand from your team members.

The first five questions below will help find candidates who share your underlying beliefs about the role customer service plays in an organization.

1. How would you define good customer service?

2. What appeals to you about this role?

3. What's the best customer service you've ever received? Why?

4. Can you tell me about a time when you received poor customer service?

5. Is there a difference between customer service and customer support?

6. Can you tell me about a time when you were proud of the level of service you gave a customer?

7. Have you ever dealt with an unreasonable customer? How did you handle it, and how would you handle it today?

8. Have you ever bent the rules in assisting a customer? Tell me about the situation and the outcome.

9. In your past work, have you ever received negative feedback from a customer? What did you do with the feedback?

10. Can you tell me about a customer who you found difficult to understand and how you approached the interaction?

11. Can you describe a time when you had to say no to an important customer's request?

12. What's the best way to help a customer who has worked with multiple customer service agents but hasn't received the help they need

Questions 6-12 measure candidates' emotional intelligence, empathy, and reflectiveness. In the answers, you need to *hear* specific, true stories of past service experiences.

Good candidates will share detailed examples from their own experiences and will be able to answer follow-up questions about those examples. Look for people who show humility and take responsibility for their mistakes.

Watch out for people who give theoretical examples rather than real situations or who only provide examples where the customer or their colleagues were at fault.

13. Tell me about a time when a customer was reporting a technical issue that you didn't know the answer to. What was your approach, and how did it end up?

14. Can you tell me about a situation with a customer when there wasn't a clear policy to use and you needed to make a judgement call? How did you approach your decision, and what happened?

15. Can you give me an example of a situation where there were major problems with your product/service and you needed to respond without having all the answers yet?

Questions 13-15 measure a candidates' ability to solve problems — an invaluable skill that can be improved, but let's the interviewer see past responses.

The best candidates will be able to walk you through their approach to situations where they didn't immediately have an answer. Ask them for examples of how they learned from those situations and applied them to another problem.

Beware of people who claim never to have been stumped or who can only give examples where another team or colleague provided the final answer.

16. Can you give an example of how you handled alerting a customer when your service caused a major problem?

17. When responding to a customer, how do you decide what information to include and what to leave out?

18. Can you tell me about a time when you needed to convince a customer or teammate to change the way they were working (e.g., adopt a new procedure or modify their language) and how you went about doing so?

Questions 16-18 are designed to measure candidates' communication skills. There's no greater skill for customer service employees than the ability to communicate clearly and with the appropriate level of detail. This section is an opportunity for your best candidates to stand out by explaining how they talk or write to customers.

Great candidates will show an ability to interpret a customer's needs and modify their communication styles for different audiences. Look out for candidates who can only describe a single communication approach; they may be too inflexible.

19. What's the last new skill you learned? Why did you choose that skill, and how did you learn it?

20. Can you tell me about a time when you made a great contribution to your team?

21. What's the next book I should read? Why?

22. What are you better at today than you were this time last year?

23. What do you think makes a good teammate?

24. If I were able to view your closet, what would I see?

The final six questions on our list are designed to measure candidates' attitudes and approaches to work. These questions give you an opportunity to understand what a candidate will be like to work with. Are they always looking to learn new skills? Will they be supportive of their colleagues as well as customers? Are they organized?

People who can talk about their interests and carry on a casual conversation typically perform well in a customer service role.

The candidate's answers should include some elements of their attitude, problem-solving abilities, efficiency, and customer service awareness as it applies to the County and your Department. These questions are to help you find that in your candidates and help ensure customer satisfaction is a top priority in this role, while creating loyal, returning, happy citizens and customers.

Please contact your Human Resources & Risk Management Department if you would like to discuss this process at 865-264-6300 or kwhitaker@andersontn.org.