

SOUTH PORTLAND FIRE DEPARTMENT

STANDARD OPERATING GUIDELINES

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1. **PURPOSE:** To establish guidelines to familiarize fire department personnel in proper interaction with the public. This guideline is meant to set management expectations.

2. **POLICY:**

HISTORY/VALUE OF OUR CUSTOMER SERVICE PROGRAM

Our History in Customer Service

For over 100 years the South Portland Fire Department has been delivering service to the citizens of South Portland. A long and proud history of exceptional service delivery, by our members, precedes each of us. South Portland has been, and still is, a very progressive, positive, and encouraging place to operate and deliver service.

Considering the length of time we have been providing this high level of service, the use of the term "customer" is a fairly recent addition to our organizational vocabulary. Traditionally, we have called the people who we take care of, "patient" or "victim". These traditional terms are limiting and are not indicative of the high level of service and concern the members of the department demonstrate to the community.

Definitions

Webster's New World Dictionary defines the term "customer" both formally and informally. "Customer" is formally defined as "one who buys goods or services," and it's informally defined as "any person with whom one has dealings." Our organization traditionally adopts an informal approach and our organizational vocabulary is simple and informal. The fire department no longer limits its organizational definition of the term "customer" to only its formal interpretation. We have expanded our definition to include any person who receives our services and anyone with whom our members have dealings. Examples of this expanded definition of our "customers" include:

- The actual service recipient.
- Anyone who knows or is closely related to the service recipient (e.g., family, friends, neighbors, pets, etc.).
- The people we encounter, directly and indirectly, during our workday (e.g., members of agencies we routinely do business with, residents/vacationers who visit our work place, who see us during our work day, or we pass on the road.).

These people are an integral part of our workday. We want to treat them in a positive way and include them in our customer service action plan. Every interaction with our "customers" is an opportunity to **solve their problem** and leave an impression that we are proud of.

It's the South Portland Fire Department's mission and number one priority to deliver the best customer service possible. "Customer service" is generally defined as "the ability of an organization to consistently give their customers what they want." It is the goal of the South Portland Fire Department to go beyond traditional customer service and provide exceptional customer service - where we exceed our customer's expectations. "Exceptional customer service is the result of an explicit, long term, planned out, acted out, and refined organizational approach to service delivery. It requires a personal commitment, as well as, organizational support and leadership.

"Added value" is a phrase we attach to our organizational definition of exceptional customer service. "Added value" occurs "anytime we go beyond our standard quick, effective, nice, customer-centered service to create a feeling of 'WOW!' with our customers." Added value only requires a little extra effort and leaves our customers with the feeling that we care and we're nice. It's the philosophy of the South Portland Fire Department to provide "added value service" whenever we have the opportunity.

Our customers, and their problems, do not come with an instruction manual. Exceptional customer service and added value customer service are the result of a refined system where members of the South Portland Fire Department are empowered by the organization to operate between the lines to provide caring service with both quality and value. "Empowerment" means "the organization delegates official authority and trusts its members with the power to provide customer service to the level of their abilities and imagination." To determine if you are empowered to perform exceptional added value customer service, ask yourself:

- Is it the right thing for the customer?
- Is it the right thing for the department?
- Is it legal, ethical, and nice?
- Is it safe?
- Is it on your organizational level?
- Is it something you are willing to be accountable for?
- Is it consistent with our department's values and policies?

If the answer to these questions is "yes," then don't ask permission - you are empowered by the organization to "JUST DO IT!"

The Value of a Customer Service Program

The organizational benefits of providing exceptional customer service, with added value, are numerous. Benefits include:

- Builds positive relationships and trust within our fire department
- Builds positive relationships and trust in our community
- Secures and maintains adequate resources and benefits
- Happy customers, bosses, workers.
- Positive job satisfaction
- Places us in the best position to compete

- It's fun to be nice and do nice things
- Doing it right eliminates bad press, liability, and extra paperwork
- It saves lives and property - that's important to our customers
- It's the right thing to do

Delivery of Customer Service

It is a priority to deliver the very best Customer Service to our customers. Our human and technical skills are the foundation of the South Portland Fire Department. The balance required to provide all the services our department is committed to delivering is rooted in being well trained and skilled. The value we place on technical and human skills is the same. Membership in the South Portland Fire Department Family carries with it a host of responsibilities and expectations. And the awareness and commitment to meeting all of them will ensure the fulfillment of our mission.

Our awareness begins with viewing everyone as our customer. It is our job to respond to the needs of our customers. The people who call us with their needs cannot be viewed as interruptions to our work, they are our work. This philosophy will be supported as we develop a simple Customer Service plan, train all our members on that plan, and then trust and depend upon our members to directly execute the plan properly, whenever opportunity occurs.

Nice is the essence of this whole Customer Service drill. Be nice to customers, to each other, and to yourself. This must become the most powerful value we create. At an internal level it simply means that we treat everyone with respect, kindness, patience, and consideration. Our diversity must continue to be one of our greatest strengths. On the external level we respond quickly, skillfully, and most important positively to every customer need.

The South Portland Fire Department's Customer Service expectation is that everyone and every part of the system behave like the customer's situation is an urgent event, from the time we know about it until its over.

A set of guidelines designed to create a positive public impression include the following:

- Follow SOGs, mission statement, organizational values
- Be professional
- Give the customer your undivided attention
- Take a moment to educate the community about what we do

Customer Service Opportunities

The South Portland Fire Department has expanded its view of the customer to include those observing our actions indirectly. Family members, friends, police, and those in the bleachers watching the show are all potential customer opportunities. This expanded view includes the less-obvious customers such as those we encounter en route to and from our incidents. Members can consider a standard service delivery plan for dealing with these extended customers such as; driving in a courteous manner, describing situations-when appropriate to do so, explain actions, determine needs, provide services necessary to

assist customers in reconnecting their lives. And prior to leaving a scene, members perform a re-con to ensure all customer service opportunities are met.

We have endless opportunities to consistently create a positive impression, feeling, perception, and memory wherever we are and with whomever we encounter. This can be best accomplished by attempting to execute a standard problem solving approach to every incident to encounter. Because members are empowered to provide "added value" level Customer Service, we are only limited by our imaginations and ability to creatively problem-solve.

Because we are human and will find ourselves challenged by tough events or customers, we must put on our game face and then orchestrate a standard service delivery performance. In the real world, for those occasions when we don't feel nice, we must act nice. It's our responsibility as professional to solve the customer's problem, even in tough situations. To our advantage, we work in teams and always have the help of each other.

The most important element has not changed—The relationship and feelings that occur between the customer who has a problem or need and the Fire Department member who responds to that need should be encouraged. We hire people who want to help others. Let them do that.

MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

- Basic organizational behavior must become customer oriented.
- Need to continue to invest in Human Resources.
- Customer Service is part of our ongoing developmental process.
- Bosses must take responsibility themselves, expand authority in others, and set the stage for good things to happen.
- The basic management objective is to have our team win because of the coaching and not in spite of it.
- Good coaching is almost invisible to the customer. Good service is enormously obvious.

Support Personnel

The importance and impact of internal support, resources and relationships is enormous. It is easy to lose track of all the people who work in areas removed from our own. The location of our fire stations allows us to provide great service to every inch of our city. Sometimes it is easy to lose perspective on how much Fire Department support services actually makes a lot of what we do in the streets possible. Everyone, administrators, Resources Management, training and secretarial staff, Medical Services personnel, Dispatch and Deployment, and volunteers are working together to enhance the service we deliver to the public. When we approach our days it's important to remember that how we treat each other is linked to the external service we deliver to our customer.

Labor's Role and Input

The most valuable resource of the South Portland Fire Department is our membership. It would not be possible to deliver exceptional customer service, with added value, if not for the trust, loyalty, commitment, and unity demonstrated by our members. Local 1476 and the Call Companies both play an extremely important role in both our membership and our organization's ability to deliver exceptional customer service.

Summary

Customer Service Excellence is the goal of the South Portland Fire Department. Accomplishing this goal requires leadership, commitment, planning, practice, creativity, and smart application, networking and continual refinement. Our customer experience, insight and expectations help us identify how we can expand, grow and improve. Customer service excellence in concert with being fast, well trained and nice is the only way we can stay on top.

3. REFERENCES:

- None

By Order Of:

Kevin W Guimond

Kevin W. Guimond
Fire Chief