Not your average customer service course

The Employers and Manufacturer’s Association (EMA) is a pre-eminent business association that have partnered with NZ businesses for over 100 years. They offer a vast array of practical courses to help employees build their professional development. Here’s a look at a half-day workshop with EMA on ‘Communicating with your Customers’ using TetraMap’s Why is the customer like that?

What do a funeral services director, a customer care manager in local government and an entry-level WaterCare employee have in common?

If you haven’t already figured it out - the answer is ‘customers.’

Learning how to better communicate with customers is what drew this diverse group of individuals, along with a mix of others, together to take part in EMA’s course titled “Communicating with your Customers.”

The course, held at EMA’s Northern office in Auckland is a publicly available course that focuses on helping participants form enduring customer relationships and pave the way for career success.

But as workshop leader and Certified TetraMap Facilitator, Deborah Carruthers, put it, this isn’t your typical customer service course. The training uses TetraMap as an integral part of the workshop to allow participants to start to understand themselves first, before starting to grasp individual customer need.

“Everyone in this room is a customer and everyone in this room could be your customer,” said Deborah as she opened up the half-day course.

As the group of participants introduced themselves, there was a multitude of reasons for attending the half-day course. As the funeral director introduced himself, he commented, “maybe I’m not coming across as I think I’m coming across.” The customer care manager explained that she signed herself up for the course to shift her own mindset from loss of energy to refired enthusiasm. The entry-level WaterCare employee offered her reason for attendance as needing to learn to ‘push back’ more as she was often getting stepped on by customers.

As diverse as the reasons were, it was clear that each individual was seeking a better way to communicate with and understand their customers.

The first step in the process began with the question: “How do you think you behave?” It was an introduction to the TetraMap instrument - a simple questionnaire that helps an individual identify how they think they behave. It also helps individuals realise how similar or different they
are to someone else. The results are then plotted on a graph and each individual identifies their preferences based on nature’s four Elements - Earth, Air, Water, and Fire.

While many customer service courses might focus on technique or performance, this began with understanding self first. Secondly understand how others are different, to gain a deeper understanding of why an individual’s communication style, behaviour or motivations might well be causing the conflict or disconnect with their customers. So the key message is: understand yourself, understand others, and then seek to understand the customer.

“Can I go from a Water (calm, patient) to an Earth (strong, direct)?” asked a woman in the back. The woman, who worked in an auto-care shop, was losing confidence at her job because she was having difficulty dealing with assertive customers. She often second-guessed herself on the phone even if she knew the answer. As a result, she was receiving complaints from customers saying she didn’t know her products well-enough. Her boss found out about the course and recommended it might be what she needed.

Deborah explained that based on the customers you are dealing with and the situations you are in, these Elemental preferences will change.

Another woman added, “It’s about identifying your lower [Elements] and being aware of how your customer might prefer to be communicated with.”

The course covered four key areas including implications of verbal communication, your ‘communication’ style, active listening and body language and problem solving. As the participants started to grasp what their own Elemental preferences entailed, there were nods and a-ha’s spread throughout the room.

Deborah moved the group on from exploring the Elements to applying these preferences to tone, vocabulary, behaviour etc. The room was then split into groups to go deeper into how to build rapport faster with different customers.

The comprehensive course was rounded off with a discussion on dealing with those challenging customers. Or as Deborah said, “how to diffuse some customers.” The room immediately started passing around stories of those hard-to-deal with customers. Deborah drew the discussion back to the Elements, suggesting that “listening for clues or verbal prompts to tell you the sort of customer you’re dealing with and adjusting your language to suit their Elemental preferences,” is one way to handle the situation.

As the course wrapped up, positive comments spread from the participants saying they’d feel more confident now going back into the workplace.

After the course ended, Deborah added, “The reason I love teaching TetraMap is being able to watch and listen to the participants discover their elements and the effect it has on their relationships, both work and personal. To see people walk out and understand both themselves
and others better is very satisfying.”

EMA regularly hold customer service workshops and other programmes incorporating the TetraMap approach. Their next workshop is Key Account Management using Why is the customer like that? on Dec. 2. For more information visit ema.co.nz or contact us today!