

**University of Kentucky**  
**HR Customer Service Standards**  
*February 2013*

---

Providing excellent customer service to our UK clients is critical to our success as an administrative service provider at the University. Service and customer satisfaction are indicated in our HR values and critical success factors. Because we are not always in a position to be able to say “yes” to our customers, what is even more important to them is how we listen and respond to them. Exhibiting strong listening skills is critical for successful HR professionals. In addition, being responsive and empathetic allows you to demonstrate the “human” aspect of Human Resources. We are not just a group of staff who enforce policy. Our goal is to be viewed as a valuable resource for all employees throughout the University – not only as experts in policy interpretation and practice application, but also as problem-solvers and helpful professionals who contribute positively to the success of UK and in making it one great place to work!

At minimum, our colleagues and customers expect us to be competent in our roles in HR and to maintain confidentiality. When we’re at our best, we treat all people with respect, compassion and fairness.

And remember, our HR colleagues are our most important customers! How we treat each other is reflected in our interactions with others around campus.

As a division, and in an effort to assist each other, we have outlined below some specific examples of how we perform when interacting with our customers.

Welcome to UK Human Resources and we look forward to seeing you be successful and grow as a professional!

Regards,

Kim Wilson and Mary Ferlan

*NOTE: Please be aware, specific circumstances may require an adjustment to the below standards, resulting in an overall better experience for our customers.*

Phone Etiquette and Expectations:

- Always answer professionally...”Good morning/afternoon, UK Human Resources. This is [your name] in [specific area], how may I help you?”
- Be aware of how your tone of voice and body language translates to the customer over the phone. We want to convey positive, pleasant and helpful energy.
- While servicing another “live” customer, do not answer the phone and interrupt that service without appropriate warning/explanation.
- Use official phone log pads to record complete and accurate phone messages consistently for others.
- If transferring a call, be sure to understand the needs of the customer first. Tell the customer to whom you will be transferring them (name & extension), and remind the customer s/he can call you back if there are any further questions. (Give your name, area & extension.)
- If you have to provide an HR colleague phone and/or email contact for a customer, be sure you have informed that colleague of your expectations and have made them aware of any likely issues that may need attention.
- When transferring a call, whenever possible handle via a “warm transfer” by contacting the coworker you are transferring to, speaking with him/her directly and giving a brief summary of the situation (with name of customer) before connecting the caller. Ensure this is the appropriate area/person to respond to the customer before hanging up.
- Before transferring the customer, find out if s/he is comfortable leaving a voicemail. If not and the receiving staff person is not there to accept the transfer call, get back on the line and record the information yourself to give to your coworker (via email or in person).
- Front-line customer service areas will check voice-mails at minimum on an hourly basis and always immediately after returning from breaks, meetings, etc.
- Make a commitment to answer all messages by the end of the work day or within 24 hours.
- While on the phone, do not – eat, drink, chew gum, have side conversations, drum fingers, sigh, surf the net, answer your personal cell phone, play music that is too loud/distracting, or type on our PC while talking on the phone (unless it is related to the case your are working on).
- Be mindful of other coworkers in your work area who may need a proper professional atmosphere to conduct business. (For example, s/he may be on the phone or in the next cubicle and need to hear his/her customer.) Please ensure your voice, actions or behaviors do not interfere with colleagues who are conducting business close by.
- If you are talking to a friend/coworker about personal issues or if your work conversation is not time-sensitive, customer phone calls or walk-ins should take precedence.
- Remember to indicate you will be gone for extended periods of time by setting up your “out of office” messages in both voicemail and email.
- Remember to update your “out of office” greeting on phone and email promptly when you return from your absence. Should you notice a colleague has forgotten

to turn their “out of office message” off when they return, give them the courtesy of a polite reminder.

When Interacting with Customers:

- Actively “listen” to your customer. Do not make assumptions.
- Exercise patience.
- Follow up in a timely manner.
- Use positive body language – focus eyes appropriately on customer, arms/legs uncrossed, lean in slightly, nod occasionally to show interest & understanding, write down notes as customer describes situation, etc.
- Do not – eat, drink, chew gum, have side conversations, drum fingers, sigh, surf the net, answer your personal cell phone, play music that is too loud/distracting, or type on our PC while interacting with the customer (unless it is related to the case you are working on).
- Be mindful of other colleagues in your work area who may need a proper professional atmosphere to conduct business. (For example, s/he may be on the phone and need to hear his/her customer.) Please ensure your voice, actions or behaviors do not interfere with colleagues who are conducting business.
- Repeat facts of situation back to customer to insure your understanding; this also emphasizes to them you have been truly listening.
- Be aware of the customer’s body language and tone in order to react appropriately in an attempt to lessen his/her frustration, anger, etc. Do not contribute to magnifying or worsening the situation.
- Be respectful of customers’ differences and diverse backgrounds (e.g. age, race, gender, education/literacy level, language, position type/title, disabilities, sexual orientation, economic status, etc.).
- Avoid assessing blame to customer for his/her mistakes or lack of knowledge.
- Use immediate resources available for assistance – coworkers, supervisors, managers, directors; web pages, phone books, etc.
- Refer to your unit’s Standard Operating Procedures (SOP’s) for details regarding how your unit works and how to resolve customer issues.
- Avoid making negative and critical comments about coworkers within HR and others throughout UK.
- Help find solutions.
- Recognize every situation as a learning opportunity.
- Apologize sincerely when we make a mistake and avoid over-explaining which may appear as if you are “making excuses.”
- Avoid the use of acronyms with which the customer is unfamiliar. If using acronyms, explain what they are.
- Never say, “*That’s not my job.*” It’s appropriate to say, “*That’s not my area of expertise and I don’t want to give you the wrong information. So, let me find out who you need to talk to.*”

*In Handling Sensitive Situations:*

- Convey empathy by indicating your awareness of frustration, anger, confusion, fear, etc., but be aware not to sound condescending. Be sincere.
- Have tissues available at your work station(s) in case the customer needs them.
- When giving “bad news” to a customer, attempt to explain rules/laws/regulations that may be limiting our flexibility which may help the customer understand the “bigger picture.” But beware not to go into so much detail this effort becomes an additional frustration for him/her.
- Be aware of the customer’s body language and tone in order to react appropriately in an attempt to lessen his/her frustration, anger, etc. Do not contribute to magnifying or worsening the situation.
- Be aware of safety-sensitive areas where it may not be appropriate to escort customer (e.g. Unemployment, Disability, Employee Relations). It may be more appropriate to leave the customer in the lobby and contact the coworker to come out and meet the customer in a public area.
- Be well informed of HR procedures to (a.) discreetly ask for assistance from others in order to de-escalate an angry customer, and (b.) alert the division and building regarding a high risk and dangerous workplace situation.

*We will strive to provide EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE in the following ways:*

- Make every interaction with HR as pleasant as possible, even if the answer is one the customer does not like.
- Look for ways to provide options for the customer so s/he feels like they have a choice for action.
- Take personal responsibility for problem-solving and exceeding customer expectations.
- Be proactive and look for solutions the customers did not identify.
- Advocate for the customer when it is the right thing to do for the customer and U.K.
- Provide additional follow-up as a courtesy to confirm resolution was reached with his/her issue (especially in cases where s/he was passed on to another UK employee or department).
- Escort our customers to their physical location within your building, whenever possible.
- Make efforts to learn about the expertise in other HR areas.
- “Reach out” to other UK departments for information for our customers.
- Demonstrate teamwork beyond the job by working beyond your normal job function, either within or outside your unit.
- Collaborate within HR or with others within UK to arrive at best possible solutions.

- Walk customers through first-time experiences so the “next time” will be more comfortable for them.
- Take additional Customer Service training on an annual basis (offered through HR T&D, other areas on campus, or locally/regionally) to improve your skill set.
- Take pride through action in your work and how you represent HR and the University of Kentucky!