



EXAMINER'S REPORT

AUGUST 2006

COMMUNICATION SKILLS Certificate in Marketing Skills

General Comments

The standard of scripts, while of a same standard to that achieved in the May paper, was down somewhat on the high standard achieved in 2005, the inaugural year of the programme. Nevertheless, the examiner found many examples of students whose performance was such that they should be encouraged to pursue further studies in marketing.

While exam tips are the same for students from one year to the next, the fact that students continue to make the same basic mistakes in exam technique suggests that these exam tips are worth repeating. Even if you think you have prepared less than well for an exam, it is important to make sure that on the day you do as well as you possibly can with the information you do have. Check all diagrams to ensure that they are properly labelled. Spend plenty of time marshalling your thoughts before you begin to answer the question. Don't just produce lists, develop your points fully and support your answer with examples. Leave space at the end of each question so that if you want to add another point, you have the room to do so. But most important of all, before you start, make sure you are preparing the answer to the question in the exam paper. Even while you are writing your answer, check the question once more to ensure that you are tailoring your answer to the context of the question. Some questions have a more practical orientation than others. The answers should refer to the specific example given in the question.

Case Study: Customers from Hell

The issues of staff demotivation and high staff turnover levels were examined in this case study. These twin problems have a direct impact on customer service, which in turn has an impact on customer loyalty and ultimately the profitability of the business. Students were required to advise the company on how to deal with aggressive customers, a major source of employee dissatisfaction in a busy call centre. They were also required to analyse the impact of high staff turnover on the quality of customer service.

Most students were able to provide a very good set of guidelines for dealing with aggrieved customers. The majority of answers provided a step-by-step framework for dealing with all customer complaints, with some added advice on how irate customers should be managed. The course notes provide a template for dealing with customer complaints. A number of students also pointed to the fact that this is a key moment of truth for customers and so each call must be handled with extreme care.

The second part of the case study required students to examine the impact of staff turnover on the quality of customer service and customer loyalty. Few referred to the 'people' element in

services marketing as being a critical component on the quality of the service. It was clear from the case study that staff required a high level of skills and knowledge to perform their job properly. These skills are constantly being eroded by high turnover so service standards cannot be maintained. The long-term impact of this problem could be loss of customers, the only source of revenue to any business, and finally, a closure of the business.

Question 2

The majority of candidates were able to discuss the most important types of questions, in particular, open and closed questions. The stronger candidates provided examples of each and were able to describe their respective value in shaping the course of a discussion.

Question 3

A straightforward question on three feedback channels for customers provided good answers from students. Few were able to fully develop their answers, however, to comment on the particular role each channel plays, so that a company should offer customers a variety of routes to give feedback to an organisation.

Question 4

A question on the four stages of team development (forming, storming, norming, performing) produced a wide variety of answers in terms of detail. Some students, while identifying all four stages of a team development, were very poor at explaining why each phase occurs and how it is possible to guide the team on to a more productive phase.

Question 5

In the final question, students were required to write a letter, using the AIDA communications model, to invite customers to a presentation on new banking services. The AIDA model (Attention, Interest, Desire, Action) was used by some to good effect, however, there were too many examples of letters that focused too strongly on the facts of the invitation rather than showing customers why attendance at the event would be good for their business. You can only achieve attention and interest through explaining to the customer WIIFM – ‘what’s in it for me’.