



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2007

COMMUNICATION SKILLS Certificate in Marketing Skills

General Comments

The module Communications Skills, while dealing with the practical and skills aspects of interpersonal relationships, is based on academic research and established principles. The exam process seeks to establish whether the student has learned and can apply these principles. In this year's paper, too often the exam responses were based on opinion rather than reflecting any learning from the programme. Any student, on rereading their answer, who discovers that they could have given the same answer without ever having participated in this Communications Skills programme, should be concerned. There is a good chance that they have based their answer on their own personal opinion rather than applying some principles from the programme to the question under review.

Section A (50%)

Case Study: *First Impressions*

This year's mini-case study focuses on a new recruit's interpersonal style. There are a number of concerns around her appearance, her listening skills and her habit of jumping to conclusions. Together these behaviours may mean that she will be poor at building rapport with customers. A considerable number of candidates treated this as a very general question rather than basing their answer on Unit 5 which deals specifically with the steps towards creating rapport.

In part (a) students were asked to outline a one day training programme to help the trainee learn the key steps in building rapport with customers. As outlined in Unit 5, this required the trainee to consider the importance of making a strong first impression, as well as learning better listening and probing (questioning) skills. Many answers to this question were general and did not see the building of rapport as a process of steps that can and should be learned by anyone in a sales position.

In part (b) students were asked to outline the potential impact of poor listening skills. Most understood that poor listening not only damages the relationship but can also leads to misreading of the customer's needs as well as loss of additional selling opportunities.

Question 2

The characteristics of good communications are set out in Unit 1 of your module on Communications Skills. Some participants also outlined the purpose of internal communications and referred to the role of formal and informal communications, thus gaining some additional marks for providing a relevant context for their answers.

Question 3

A question on the role of the company representative in delivering customer service was very popular and, in general, was well answered. Many people quoted the saying 'People buy people, not products' and there were some very interesting examples provided by candidates of their own organisations.

Question 4

A question on dealing with aggressive behaviour in handling complaints was very well answered. Many candidates first went through the proper steps in dealing with complaints before addressing the issue of an aggressive customer. This was a good framework for answering the question. Most understood the importance of not becoming aggressive and of seeking means to de-escalate the problem. Some very good answers also reproduced the behavioural matrix, mapping out the different types of behavioural styles.

Question 5

A question on report writing, though very straightforward, did not prove popular among the candidates. Those who did attempt the question performed well, outlining the key elements in a properly written report. Some also discussed the importance of clear, professional writing and presentation.