

Retail
Education

Communication

For Retail Professionals

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Communication For Retail Professionals

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Preface

Retail communication is always associated with the process of helping customers as and when they visit retail stores. But there is much more to retail communication than merely assisting a retail customer walking in to shop. Retail business has been witnessing an explosive growth in modern times and retailing is booming as can be seen by the increase in the number of shopping centers, multi-storied malls and the huge shopping complexes in different parts of the country, including small cities and townships. Retail communication systems have been keeping pace with this growth. These systems vary from face to face communication with the customer at the retail stores' shop floors to official websites, e-retail business, online shopping malls, automated attendant, customer call routing (CCR) and interactive voice recognition (IVR). All these modes of communications are deployed to serve the customer and enhance his/her satisfaction. The major purpose and objective of the entire retail communication is to quickly and efficiently service the needs of the customer as expected by him/her and at the same time maximise return for retail business.

In fact, effective communication skills have become critical to the survival and success of every retail business because the retail industry has become more diverse, competitive and result-oriented. It is important for retail professionals to understand as well as to internalise aspects of communication that can ensure increased sales, stronger customer relationships, better customer retention, quicker problem solving, enhanced professional image, and steadier work flow. The fast growth of retail chains, coupled with the development of sophisticated communication technology, has put the focus on fast, interactive and result-oriented forms of communication. Moreover, retail professionals today face new communication challenges. These challenges can be handled by using new skills such as ability to

understand, analyse and prioritise product information and relate it to customer needs, knowledge of high-tech communications capabilities, ability to understand and appreciate customer sensitivities, skills to analyse and handle difficult sales situations, and ability to handle difficult customer interactions.

This book has been written with special emphasis on utilising human elements and all other technical communication enhancements to facilitate the process of retail communication at all levels. The book will serve as a training tool for all retail professionals engaged in the service of retail customers. We have included the retail customers' communication experiences with both the technical systems as well as the human elements in the form of short case studies in the beginning of each chapter to further elucidate the importance of clear and concise communication in retail business.

This book is going to help you develop the needed confidence in communication that you need to become a successful retail professional.

Authors

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CHAPTER ONE

1

Retail Scenario in India

Let us Understand

Kailash was working in a big super market in Mumbai. He was reporting to Mr Anindya Sinha, the General Manager of the super market. Kailash was unhappy with Mr. Sinha because he wanted Kailash to discuss the new cosmetic products with Ms. Rupali Malhotra, who was a regular customer of cosmetic goods. Rupali ran a chain of beauty parlours in Mumbai suburbs. Kailash had interacted with Rupali before and knew her as a very arrogant customer who never cared for anybody's ideas. He did not want to waste his time with Ms. Rupali. He went to Mr. Sinha and told him that he did not want to talk to Ms Rupali because it appeared to be a waste of time. Mr. Sinha looked at Kailash, smiled and said, "Kailash, you need to understand the importance of customers in retail marketing."

Kailash was confused. Of course, he understood the importance of customers but Rupali was just one customer like many others and he could not understand why Mr. Sinha was giving her so much of importance.

What according to you was the Kailash's Problem? Just think.

The problem with Kailash was his inability to realise that, it was important for him to do everything possible to keep a loyal

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customer happy because, in retail business, real profit comes from a long-term relationship with a customer. Retailing is not merely 'selling goods and products', it is cultivating and nurturing a life-long relation with a customer to get a 'life-time value'. He failed to understand that effective retailing involved turning one-time customers into loyal customers, who could not only buy products on a regular basis but could also generate sales by giving positive referrals to other customers.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you

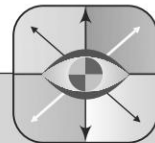
- ✓ Understand the Indian retail scenario
- ✓ Identify the challenges and prospectives in retail sales
- ✓ Appreciate the finer aspects of retailing as a career
- ✓ Become familiar with the basic communication skills for a retailing career.

INDIAN RETAIL INDUSTRY

Retailing is a significant commercial activity that involves the sale of goods or merchandise from a fixed location, which may include a department store, a shopping mall, a street shop, a moving shop, a super market, or even by post in small or individual lots for direct consumption by the end users. It is, therefore, a process in which the retailer may directly or indirectly buy goods in large quantities from manufacturers or importers and then sell them directly to the end users. Retailing may include a number of subordinated services, which are meant to facilitate the process of buying and selling. As retailers are at the end of the supply chain of goods and products, retailing is an integral part of the distribution strategy of manufacturing and importing marketers. Since the number of manufacturing and importing marketers as well as the number of retail purchasers in India has been increasing, retailing has become one of the fastest growing industries in India.

India is a growing economy and the consistent economic growth and the hike in average income and salaries will lead to an increasing rate of consumption, which in turn will increase the number of end users of goods and products. Despite the economic slowdown in India which is a result of the subprime crisis in US, the retail industry in India will grow as the changing social needs and the growing hunger for better life style among a large number of middle class Indians has triggered a demand for new and innovative products. As per the India Retail Report 2009,

compiled by research group Images F&R Research, the rising economic growth of the country is going to fuel the growth of industry and it may touch Rs. 18,10,000 crore by 2010. According to the report organised retail is expected to constitute 13% of it, i.e. Rs. 2,30,000 crore. The report is very optimistic about the generation of employment as a result of modernizing retail and says that it might generate employment for 15 million people in different activities. Most of the reports on Indian retail present, the country's retail scenario in a very positive light as the indicators are highly encouraging.



Global Management Consultancy Firm, McKinsey's report on the retail sector says that the country's overall retail sector will become a \$450 billion industry by 2015. This would place it among the top 10 retail markets in the world. It also says that organised retail will create 1.6 million jobs in the next five years. This transformation will take place from a very low base.

At present, organised retail accounts for only five per cent of India's annual retail business with an estimated 12 million mom-and-pop stores garnering the bulk of retail trade. By 2015, organised retail is expected to have a share of fourteen to eighteen per cent of business. According to the McKinsey, study, there are several things going for the retail revolution, including a huge growth in the number of people with disposable income.

The growth of big retail stores is a welcome trend. Besides the potential to generate significant employment, there are other benefits that could accrue from organised retail. Firstly, standardised goods and cheaper prices for consumers. Secondly, better prices for farmers. There are studies that show that agricultural producers are getting a better deal since big retailers directly do business with them, eliminating the middlemen who cut into the farmers' profits.

However, it won't be smooth going for big retailers. Small traders, who form a crucial support base for political parties in urban pockets, have been resisting big retail stores. Reliance has shut down its fruits and vegetables outlets in Uttar Pradesh and Orissa because of protests. Other companies are rethinking their plans to expand. High rentals, too, are a problem. At the same time, companies like the Future Group have been expanding rapidly with its Big Bazaar stores set to cross hundred in number. In West Bengal, where there has been conflict over big retail, the way has been cleared for German wholesale major Metro Cash & Carry to begin operations.

So it's a mixed picture at best. A study by ICRIER, a think tank, says that though mom-and-pop stores are hit by direct competition from organised retail, less than half the stores that down shutters do so due to competition from big retail. So, we need not assume that all mom-and-pop stores will go out of business with the entry of big retail. Significantly, the McKinsey's report says that 64 per cent of buyers don't mind paying more for convenience. Some small stores are also teaming up to buy goods jointly so as to cut purchasing costs. There is a message here: innovation and not violent protests can help mom-and-pop stores survive.

Source: Editorial, *The Times of India*, 30 September, 2008

Although many of these reports do ignore some of the new developments in Indian economy due to the large scale panic created by the economic slowdown, it is clear that Indian retail industry is a growing industry with a positive future. This is substantiated by developments in this industry and retail professionals need to understand the role of this industry in India's growing market.

RETAIL SALES: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

The Indian retail industry is the largest among all the industries and it has emerged as one of the most dynamic industries in the country. As a retail professional, you need to understand and analyse the challenges and prospects of this industry. In particular, you need to understand the performance of the retail sector in India. You should find out the long-term underlying trends in retail in India and should try to know whether they have fundamentally changed in recent years. You should also understand the challenges and prospects for retailing.

Retailing is booming as can be seen by the increase in the number of shopping centers, multi-storied malls and the huge shopping complexes in different parts of the country including small cities and townships. As most of these shopping complexes offer shopping, entertainment and food all under one roof, the total idea of shopping has undergone a complete transformation. Moreover, the purchasing power of the Indian middle class particularly the urban consumer is growing. This has led to remarkable changes in shopping patterns and buying behaviour of the urban Indian consumers, who are accepting branded merchandise in categories like food, beverages, cosmetics, apparels, shoes, etc. as common lifestyle products. This change is being encashed by Indian retailers who are introducing innovative techniques for building the brand equity of their goods and products with the emphasis on retail as a brand rather than retailers selling branded products.

However, retail industry in India faces real challenges. The five key challenges are given below:

1. **Economic Challenge:** Heavy initial investments to sustain retail business and difficulties in getting investors due to economic slow down.
2. **Internal Challenge:** Recruiting and retaining the right talent.
3. **Internal Competitor Challenge:** Competition from unorganised retail sector.
4. **External Competitor Challenge:** Large number of players in the market including international players.
5. **Customer Challenge:** Demand for quality and changing needs.

Heavy Initial Investments and Economic Slow Down

The most obvious challenge is the heavy initial investments needed to enter in this market in order to compete with the existing retailers. The growing cost of real estate and its unavailability has made it really difficult to sustain a profitable retail business.

Moreover, the global financial and economic crisis keeps getting worse and the impact is being felt in every business sector. Although the official estimates of GDP growth for the first two quarters of 2008 stayed above 7.5 percent, there has been significant decline in almost all the sectors including retail after September 2008. The implications of this slowing down of the economy for the retail sector are serious. Difficulties in getting investors, high expectations of investors, and falling investment returns are all real bottlenecks to be handled.

Recruiting and Retaining the Right Talent

As access to a high-quality skill pool is a precondition for successful retail operations, recruiting and retaining the right talent in retail industry is a challenge. Indian retail companies will need to recruit a significant number of retail professionals, who are having the right qualifications as well as the right training. Although a number of professional institutions have started need-based courses and programmes for retail professionals, the number is still not sufficient to cater to the growing manpower needs of the retail industry. Many of the trained professionals that these institutes produce every year do possess the high quality and competency needed in the industry. However, the salary and perks that are commonly offered are not enough to attract the best. The big players may manage to attract better talent than general retail players in the retail sector because of better pay packages. In fact, the attrition rates are very high in most of the retail companies because of the mobility of manpower due to poaching by competitors and frequent job hopping by retail professionals looking for better job opportunities.

Competition from Unorganised Retail Sector

In India, the organised retail sector faces severe competition from the unorganised retail sector, which has been the cornerstone of Indian retail. Organised retail sector is growing fast but it is being challenged mainly because unorganised retailing named as 'mom-pop stores' has been there in India for centuries. These 'mom-pop stores' depend on relationships, which are very strong. To develop such relationships at the local level is a big challenge for the organised retail sector, which mainly depends on formal organised and systematic sales. Thus, the advantage of informal and personal familiarity with the customer that unorganised retailing enjoys is absent in organised retailing. Moreover, the low cost of infrastructure, low maintenance cost, low employee costs, and low taxes make unorganised sector more profitable and competitive than the organised retailing. Dealing with this internal challenge is important in retail industry.

In order to face the growing competition from unorganised retailing, retail companies involved in organised retailing need to be innovative in order to build their brands as retailers. They have to work hard in order to reinforce their market positioning and to communicate quality as well as value for money. Each company has to work on a systematic brand-building strategy that involves building a positive

image based on core business values, building long-term relations with customers, selling quality goods at a reasonable price, and retaining their customers with customer-friendly initiatives.

External Competitor Challenge

Every year a number of new players, both big and small, enter the market. The number of shopping centres, multi-storied malls and shopping complexes has been increasing. Even the small cities and towns are witnessing the retail revolution, they all need to compete with each other. Thus, Indian retailing industry is becoming increasingly competitive. Surviving as well as thriving in business is a real challenge that retail businesses face. International players with big brand names are also making it difficult for the local players to get success. Thus, big and reputed retail companies like Pantaloon Retail, Shoppers Stop, Reliance, etc. with their huge resources and large scale operations have been doing well in India while small local retail companies are finding it difficult to survive.

Customer Challenge

As retailing involves all activities that lead to selling goods to end users for their personal, family and household use, it involves organising the availability of goods and products needed by customers on a relatively large scale and supplying them to customers on a relatively small scale. This is a big challenge due to increasing demands and expectations of customers. It requires keen understanding of what the customers may need and also how customer requirements are changing. Catering to needs and requirements of customers in such changing times is difficult because it is not possible to develop a set of processes for identifying such needs accurately. Moreover, the customers want quality at a reasonable price. The market is, thus, facing a price war in retail sector. Every retail company is adopting innovative ways and means to convince the customers that they are selling the best at the cheapest price. Although it sounds contradictory this is what is happening in the retail sector. Retail companies have no option but to face this challenge of selling the best and yet charging the least.

RETAILING AS A CAREER

The rapid growth of the retail sector as well as its expansion in urban and semi-urban India has increased the manpower needs in this sector. The industry needs a workforce that is skilled, competent, and dynamic and is ready to take on the retail revolution in India. There is definitely a big demand for the retail management professionals in all the areas of retail management. The industry needs competent professionals to achieve store sales and profitability, manage new stores, effectively process all the purchases, develop customer relations through effective relationship management, and make positive communication with the clients to satisfy them.

There is, however, a huge gap between the requirement of skilled manpower in retail industry and their availability.

The increasing manpower needs of the retail industry has led many professional colleges and institutes in India including the Birla Institute of Management Technology in New Delhi, RPG Institute of Retail Management, Indian Retail School to launch several need-based retail management courses. These courses have been launched to address the retail industry's consistent demand for skilled professionals. It is expected that organized retailing will grow as the retail market is set to double in three years. Large number of jobs in retail is expected to be created by 2010. Thus, retailing offers a promising career with good salary packages and opportunities for growth.

With several Indian and international companies like Reliance, Wal-Mart, Big Bazaar, Pantaloons, RPG Group, Westside, Titan, Raymonds, Food World, Bata, Trent, Pizza Hut, Adidas, Nike, Dominos, Kodak, Benetton, Sony, Sharp, etc. intensifying their presence in the retail market, large number of vacancies for qualified retail professionals are available and will be generated in future. These vacancies are available from the entry to the senior management level. You can have a very satisfying career in retail by focussing on any specialised area of retailing such as retail sales, product development, store management, retail design, merchandise planning, retail finance, supply chain management, retail marketing information, electronic retailing, etc. There is no dearth of good and highly paid jobs for people who are hard-working, dynamic, competent, and trained.

Basic Communication Skills for a Retailing Career

Retailing is a people-oriented business and your job requires that you have to be in constant contact with customers. Communication skills are very important as retail jobs involve selling or buying. As a retail professional, you need a few communication skills that are important to your professional success. These skills include effective listening, team communication skills, oral communication, non-verbal communication skills, handling difficult customer interactions, assertiveness, and feedback skills.

Effective Listening

Listening is probably one of the most important skills that you need in order to be successful in your professional pursuits. As a retail salesperson, you have to listen to informal customer remarks, formal statements and comments, complaints, arguments (not necessarily logical), uncalled for questions, professional as well as non-professional discussions, sales interactions, customer feedback (both positive as well as negative), and so on. The list is unending.

Once you join the retail profession, one of the most important things that you have to do is to listen with patience and understanding. And believe me, it is easier said than done. Listening to an irritated customer can sometimes be very frustrating

especially if you are new to the retail profession. The customer might sound totally unreasonable and too demanding and, you might feel like kicking him or her but you can't do that, because your job requires you to listen and empathise. In addition to listening to the customers, you are required to listen to your colleagues (both senior as well as junior) and peers. You may be required to listen to discussions in meetings, pre-recorded talks, telephonic conversations, teleconferences and videoconferences, etc. In fact, it is hard to imagine any professional or business work that does not require efficient listening skills.

Moreover, you need effective listening skills as it is a state of receptivity that permits understanding of what is heard and grants you full partnership in the communication process. You cannot become an effective communicator unless you are an effective listener. In any oral communicative situation, listening is of special significance because oral communication cannot be complete without listening. Your response in an oral communication situation largely depends on your ability to understand and appreciate your speaker's perspective. You require quick, efficient and imaginative listening techniques in order to achieve professional success because your performance partly depends on quantity and quality of listening. By listening to your colleagues and peers and professional interactions, you acquire the professional knowledge and expertise needed to excel in your profession.

The importance of listening also lies in its multi-purpose functions. As a purposeful communicative activity, listening serves individual needs and aids in implementing oral communication goals. There are many ways by which decisions are made in an organisation: by discussion in meetings and conferences, by negotiation in business dealings, by voting in democratic processes, and so on. In each instance, listening plays an important role as it aids in analysing a problem, understanding the possible solutions and making a decision. In brief, listening in retailing

- makes sales interactions and negotiation possible;
- aids in effective buying and selling;
- develops information and understanding essential for selling and buying in retail situations;
- aids in decision making in meetings and one-to-few interactions;
- stimulates customers to act to achieve sales objectives; and
- promotes maintenance of personal professional long-term relations with the customers.

Team Communication Skills

Team communication skills are significant for retail professionals because these skills help in facilitating unification between the activities of individual retail professionals as a work team, towards achievement of common business, professional or organisational goals of the retail company. You need these skills to be successful in your team efforts. In fact, every professional or business work requires effective teaming. Whether you are involved in the process of buying or selling, you need to

work in a team and you need effective team communication skills in order to take an active part in the team processes.

Thus, you require team communication as it can do wonders for you. You will not only get professional success but, will also become popular and influential in the organisation you serve. You may get the respect of your customers as well as employers and colleagues. Team communication involves several skills such as the ability to take initiatives during a team interaction, ability to persuade your group members, the ability to present your personal views in an effective way, develop your ideas logically, analyse and respond to the views expressed by other members, and emerge as a natural leader of the group.

Oral Communication Skills

The growth and expansion of retail industry in different parts of India has also increased the significance of oral competence for retail professionals. Retail professionals thus need to develop oral skills if they are to be successful in their careers. Oral communication skills are the single most important criterion in hiring sales and marketing professionals. Most of the professionals are hired through a selection process, which involves speaking skills in the form of group discussion/case discussion/personal interview/oral presentation or some other form of oral communication.

The increasing reliance on oral communication forms such as oral interactions, telephone sales calls, customer meetings, product discussions, sales conferences, and other forms of oral interaction in retailing today has given increased significance to the need for effective speaking skills for retail professionals. Oral Communication not only makes professional interaction possible, it develops long-term relationship with the customers essential for sustainable retail business.

As oral communication is a tool of professional and business interaction, you should be able to use it fluently, effectively and confidently. You should know how to

- *ask and answer questions,*
- *express opinions and comments,*
- *ask for opinions,*
- *express criticism, objections and doubt,*
- *express general comments,*
- *agree and disagree,*
- *seek suggestions,*
- *give suggestions,*
- *state points of view,*
- *interact with customers,*
- *discuss with customers and peers,*

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- *invite to discuss/initiate discussion,*
- *initiate topic shift,*
- *give information,*
- *make oral presentations,*
- *orally describe and interpret non-verbal data, e.g., graphs, tables, diagrams, charts, plans, maps, etc.,*
- *persuade, and*
- *use visual aids effectively.*

Nonverbal Communication Skills

Your nonverbal communication should be highly effective as nonverbal messages are an essential component of face-to-face retail communication. It is not only what you say during a communication that is important, but it's how you say it and what kind of nonverbal messages you convey. It is important for you to be aware of your body language as well as the impact of paralinguistic features in your communication. You should be aware of your nonverbal behaviour during your interaction with customers, colleagues, and suppliers. First, an awareness of your nonverbal behaviour will allow you to understand your communication better. You will improve your ability to send messages that reinforce your relationships. You will also become better receivers of others' messages and you will understand the nonverbal messages as effectively as you understand verbal messages. It is going to increase the level of understanding as well as the degree of the perceived psychological closeness between you and your customers/colleagues/suppliers.

The four major aspects of body language that you need to improve are your posture and body movements, gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions. The essential paralinguistic features to be improved are tone of the voice, pausing, and pacing.

Handling Difficult Customer Interactions

One of the most important communication skills that you need to learn is the ability to handle difficult customer interactions. A difficult customer interaction may result from many sources. Not all customers are pleasant and friendly and you may have to handle difficult customer interactions where, you may have to face customers who are unhappy and angry with you and your services. Such customers may not want to be friendly or pleasant and they may be keen to argue with you about anything that they do not like. They are the ones who might cause your blood pressure to go up and may sometimes make you really frustrated with your job. It is very difficult to interact with such customers but in retail business your customers are one of your most important and valued assets. You cannot take them lightly or ignore them.

When a difficult situation crops up between you and your customer, you are normally at the receiving end. If you don't deal with such difficult interactions wisely

and tactfully, you may face many problems including strained relationships with the customers, wasted time, and declining sales, bad reputation, and so on. It is, therefore, important for you to handle difficult customers interactions effectively.

Handling difficult interactions effectively does require hard work and practice. But it is important for your job success. By handling difficult customer interactions positively, you achieve certain basic objectives that go a long way in achieving your professional goal. It may enable you to:

- understand your customers better,
- prevent difficult situations from escalating into bitter fights,
- retain customers,
- be sensitive to customer needs and requirements,
- strengthen your customer relationships,
- engage in more productive customer interactions,
- have a sense of self-respect, and
- encash the “life-long value” of customers.

Assertiveness

Assertiveness is an important skill that retail professionals should learn because it is crucial to sales and marketing particularly to retailing. Assertiveness is the ability to express your ideas, feelings, and emotions with confidence and without being aggressive. An assertive sales person knows what he or she wants from his or her customers and he or she is able to express his/her needs, concerns, and interests without being aggressive or manipulative. He is able to sell his ideas as well the products and goods that he or she wants to sell without making the customers feel that wants to do so.

Assertiveness is, therefore, a set of behaviour patterns that holds own ground and finds reasonable compromises, so there are no losers. Assertiveness leads to a win-win situation for all those involved in the process of communication. It is all about positive thinking. Every assertive person is a positive thinker. In fact, assertive behaviour reduces the negative aspects of all kinds of persons including passive, passive aggressive, and aggressive people. It gives one the right to say what one thinks and feels calmly and clearly, without giving offence and denying the rights of others to have different views or expectations. You may describe it as being about what you say... and especially about how you say it.

Perhaps the most important benefit of being assertive for you will be that, you will be able to build long-term realtions with people and that is going to be an asset in your professions. It will also reinforce your positive self-image. Assertiveness requires that you use positive language and practice active listening; you respect others and you have high emotional intelligence. It demonstrates that your respect for relationships and concern for people is significantly high.

Feedback Skills

You definitely want to be competent in what you do and the basic purpose of feedback is facilitating the process of learning and improving. You need to give feedback effectively as well as you should be able to receive feedback positively. Retail profession is a highly competitive one and you need to improve every day. Even a simple feedback given either by your customer or by your colleague can improve your performance if you take it in the right spirit. If given accurately, feedback can be an effective tool of motivation and if received positively, it can be a great tool for self-improvement and change.

Many people do not want to give feedback because they are afraid of an emotional reaction which they do not want to handle. They do not want to cause embarrassment and discomfort to the person they want to give the feedback to. Not many people take feedback in the right spirit and negatively react to it discouraging the person giving feedback. Moreover, people need to learn the appropriate skills of giving and receiving feedback. Feedback skills include a set of communication skills that can improve the quality of feedback that you give and make you more receptive to feedback.

CHAPTER REVIEW

India is a growing economy and the consistent economic growth and the hike in average income and salaries will lead to a growth of the Indian retail industry. The industry is the largest among all the industries and it has emerged as one of the most dynamic industries in the country. The boom in retail is evident from the increase in the number of shopping centers, multi-storied malls and the huge shopping complexes in different parts of the country, including small cities and townships. Purchasing power of Indian middle class, particularly the urban consumer is growing. However, retail industry in India faces many challenges, which include heavy initial investments to sustain retail business and difficulties in getting investors due to economic slow down, recruiting and retaining the right talent, competition from unorganized retail sector, competition for large number of players in the organized retail market including international players, customer challenge.

This rapid growth of the retail sector as well as its expansion in urban and semi-urban India has increased the demand for the retail management professionals in all the areas of retail management. With several Indian and international companies intensifying their presence in the Indian retail market, large number of vacancies for qualified retail professionals are available and will be generated in future. Thus, retailing offers a promising career with good salary packages and opportunities for growth.

Retailing is a people-oriented business and your job requires effective communication skills. As a retail professional, you need a few communication skills that are crucial to your professional success. These skills include effective listening, team communication skills, oral communication, nonverbal communication skills, handling difficult customer interactions, assertiveness, and feedback skills.

ACTIVITIES

Explore it Further

In order to understand the topics discussed in this chapter, you need to read further and check websites to answer the following questions:

1. What are the trends of the Indian retail industry?
2. How is the recession affecting Indian retail?
3. What are the opportunities in this industry?
4. Which are the companies and organizations that offer career opportunities for retail professionals?
5. What are the different courses and programmes that are run for retail management?
6. What are the soft skills that retail professionals need to learn to get professional success?

Experience It

In order to get a feel of the retail industry, you need to talk to a few senior retail professionals. Discuss with them the topics and sub-topics presented in this chapter. This will give you a first hand experience of some important issues.

APPLICATION EXERCISE

Assess your understanding of the key points discussed in this chapter by answering the following ten questions:

Question 1 Which of the following is not TRUE about retailing?

- (a) Retailing is a process in which the retailer may directly or indirectly buy goods in large quantities from manufacturers or importers and then will sell directly to the end users.
- (b) Retailing includes a number of subordinated services, which are meant to facilitate the process of buying and selling.
- (c) Retailing is a activity that involves only the sale of goods or merchandise from a moving location.
- (d) Retailing is an integral part of the distribution strategy of manufacturing and importing marketers.
- (e) All
- (f) None

Question 2 Which of the following can not be said about Indian Retail Industry?

- (a) The retail industry in India will grow as the changing social needs and the growing hunger for better life style among a large number of middle class Indians has triggered a demand for new and innovative products.
- (b) The India Retail Industry has emerged as one of the most dynamic industries in the country.
- (c) The growing purchasing power of Indian middle class has led to remarkable changes in their shopping patterns and buying behaviour.
- (d) Indian retailers are introducing innovative techniques for building the brand equity of their goods and products with the emphasis on retail as a brand rather than retailers selling branded products.
- (e) All
- (f) None

Question 3 Which of the following challenges of the Indian retail industry is aggravated by the economic slow down?

- (a) Recruiting and Retaining the Right Talent.
- (b) Heavy initial investments to sustain retail business.
- (c) Large number of competitors in the market including international players.

- (d) Demands for quality and changing needs of customers.
- (e) All
- (f) None

Question 4 Why is recruiting and retaining the right talent a challenge in retail industry?

- (a) Access to a high-quality skill pool is not a precondition for successful retail operations.
- (b) The salary and perks that are commonly offered are enough to attract the best.
- (c) There is no dearth of good highly paid jobs for people who are hard-working, dynamic, competent, and trained.
- (d) There is a gap between demand and availability of skilled persons as the number of skilled professionals is not sufficient to cater to the growing manpower needs of the retail industry.
- (e) All
- (f) None

Question 5 Which of the following is not a real disadvantage of organized retail sector in India?

- (a) Unorganised retail sector has been the cornerstone of Indian retail as it has been there in India for centuries.
- (b) Developing long-term customer relationships at the local level is a big challenge for the organised retail sector.
- (c) Informal and personal familiarity with the customer that unorganised retailing enjoys is mostly absent in organised retailing.
- (d) The low cost of infrastructure, low maintenance cost, low employee costs, and low taxes make unorganised sector more profitable and competitive.
- (e) All
- (f) None

Question 6 The Indian retail industry needs competent professionals for various reasons.

Which of the following is not one of these reasons?

- (a) To achieve store sales and profitability.

- (b) To effectively process all the purchases.
- (c) To develop customer relations through effective relationship management.
- (d) To make positive communication with the clients to satisfy them.
- (e) All
- (f) None

Question 7 Retail professionals need effective listening skills for various reasons.

Which of the following is not one of these reasons?

- (a) You cannot become an effective communicator unless you are an effective listener.
- (b) Effective listening permits understanding of what is heard and grants you full partnership in the communication process.
- (c) You need to understand your customers.
- (d) You need to empathise with the customer.
- (e) All
- (f) None

Question 8 Which of the following does not justify the significance of oral communication for retail professionals?

- (a) Oral communication skills are the single most important criterion in hiring retail professionals.
- (b) The increasing reliance on oral communication forms such as oral interactions, telephone sales calls, customer meetings, and product discussions in retailing today has given increased significance to the need for effective speaking skills for retail professionals.
- (c) The growth and expansion of retail industry in India has been negatively affected by recession.
- (d) Oral Communication not only makes professional interaction possible, it develops long-term relationship with the customers essential for sustainable retail business.
- (e) All
- (f) None

Question 9 You should be aware of your non-verbal behaviour. There are many reasons for it.

Which of the following is not one of those reasons?

- (a) Nonverbal messages are an essential component of face-to-face retail communication.
- (b) An awareness of your nonverbal behaviour will allow you to understand your communication better.
- (c) You will improve your ability to send messages that reinforce your relationships.
- (d) It is going to negatively affect the perceived psychological closeness between you and your customers.
- (e) All
- (f) None

Question 10 Handling difficult interactions effectively has several advantages.

Which of the following is not one of these advantages?

- (a) It helps in customer retention.
- (b) It makes you sensitive to customer needs and requirements.
- (c) It strengthens your customer relations.
- (d) It prevents difficult situations from escalating into bitter fights.
- (e) All
- (f) None

KEY TO APPLICATION EXERCISE

- Q.1. (c)
- Q.2. (e)
- Q.3. (b)
- Q.4. (d)
- Q.5. (a)
- Q.6. (f)

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Q.7. (e)

Q.8. (c)

Q.9. (d)

Q.10. (e)

CHAPTER TWO

2

**Retail
Communication
and Management**

Let us Understand

Ravi knew Mr Sumit Mitra for many months as Mr Mitra was a frequent visitor to the mall. Mr Mitra was always nice and pleasant to him but today he was surprised to see the reaction of Mr Mitra to a simple question that he asked him. Mr Mitra had bought a remote control car a few days before and came with the complaint that he was given a defective toy by Ravi. The remote control car was not working. Ravi thought that the batteries might not be working and so the toy did not work and he innocently asked Mr Mitra a simple question "Did you check the batteries?" Mr Mitra got very angry and shot at Ravi, "Do you think I am a fool?" Ravi did not know what went wrong.

What according to you went wrong? Just think.

Well, Ravi asked the wrong question. His question hinted that Mr Mitra was not intelligent enough to check the batteries. He should have asked Mr Mitra, "Can I check the batteries Sir?", and the response of Mitra would have been different.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you understand

- ✓ Importance of Communication for Retail Professionals
- ✓ Retail communication forms
- ✓ Challenges of retail communication
- ✓ Fundamentals of communication for retail salespersons
- ✓ Communication needs of customers
- ✓ Role of good communication in overall store performance
- ✓ Barriers to effective retail communication.

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION FOR RETAIL PROFESSIONALS

Communication is very important for retail professionals. Whether you are a highly skilled salesperson selling electronic goods in a retail chain or you are just a starter working in a big mall, you need effective communication skills in order to be successful. The changes that have taken place in the retail business world reflect several developments in the way communication skills can be viewed by retail professionals. Although product knowledge and sales efficiency are important, yet this knowledge will be useless if you do not know how to communicate with your customers. In fact, success in the highly competitive retail environment today will depend not just on your product knowledge and sales efficiency but on your ability to analyze, organize, and communicate that knowledge effectively.

The retail industry in India has become more diverse, competitive and result-oriented. It is important for retail professionals to understand as well as to internalize aspects of communication that can ensure increased sales, better customer retention, quicker problem solving, enhanced professional image, stronger business relationships, and steadier work flow. When you improve your communication skills, you gain the ability to add value in numerous ways to various aspects of your organisation. You also develop the capacity to build more effective professional relationships.

As a matter of fact, with the expansion of retail business in India along with growing competition in it, effective communication skills have become critical to the survival and success of every retail business. What a retail professional communicates is definitely important for a customer but how he or she communicates it is more important, because effective communication leads to stronger customer relations and strong customer relationship is the key to success in retail business. We should understand that at the end of the day everybody sells the same things at almost the same prices. What differentiates one retail outlet from the other is the way the customers are treated and handled by the retail professionals in that outlet.

Communication is, thus, the essence of retail business and a pre-requisite to effective retail management. The list of its multi-purpose functions is very long. It not only makes business interaction possible but also directs the flow of information and knowledge for the guidance of customers and stakeholders. It stimulates new businesses and motivates retail sales persons to act, to achieve individual as well as organizational objectives and develops information and understanding essential, for effective professional functioning. Moreover, it leads to unification between the activities of individuals as a work team and helps to foster positive attitudes required for motivation, co-operation and other important organisational processes. Finally, it ensures free exchange of information and ideas and promotes a positive business culture and maintenance of good professional relations.

RETAIL COMMUNICATION FORMS

The fast growth of retail chains coupled with the development of sophisticated information technology, has changed the way we communicate to attract and retain customers. We prefer fast, interactive and result-oriented forms of communication such as email, fax, online shopping, automated attendant, a web site, custom call routing (CCR), interactive voice recognition (IVR), voice-mail, telemarketing transmissions, intranet transmission, etc. to the traditional and slow forms of communication such as letters, notices, and newsletters, etc. You may find a range of interactive technologies for communication today.

Each form of retail communication has its merits and demerits. While some communication forms are very effective in attracting customers to your retail outlet, a few forms help in providing immediate feedback and promotes better understanding while some other forms might be more effective in retaining customers. For example, most retail stores use a web site, email, fax, online shopping, automated attendant, custom call routing (CCR) and interactive voice recognition (IVR) to assist customers prior to trekking to the store. These forms work effectively. Some stores effectively use email and internet to keep in touch with the customers and keep the customers well informed about the new arrivals in the store.

Nowadays many retail stores are equipped with the latest automated attendant and custom call routing features. Although a call management system and similar technology-dependant retail communication forms can yield significant benefits to the retail organisation, it may be noted that these technology-dependant forms can sometimes be very frustrating for the customers if they are not used carefully and efficiently. Effective retail communication must involve a concise retail communication management system (RCMS) to qualify the exchange of information between the retail outlet and the customers. The choice of an appropriate form of retail communication may depend on the sender-receiver relationship and the over-all goal of the communicative situation. In fact, all these modes of communications should serve to enhance the customer experience, as the ultimate goal is to quickly and efficiently service the needs of the customer while maximising a return.

CHALLENGES OF RETAIL COMMUNICATION

Communication is an important aspect of any business as it is a central factor in the emerging global business society, where business people in different areas face new communication challenges. These communication challenges are the result of several factors such as market liberalization and globalization, technological advances, global interconnectivity, growing intercultural business transactions, etc. These communication challenges are multiplied in a multi-national business world. This is as true in India and other Asian countries as it is in any other part of the world. Thus, retail professionals need to identify and handle these challenges by learning new skills, which include:

- ability to understand, analyse and prioritise product information and relate it to customer needs,
- knowledge of high-tech communications capabilities,
- ability to understand and appreciate customer sensitivities,
- skills to analyse and handle difficult sales situations,
- ability to handle difficult customer interactions, and
- intercultural communicative competence.

Analysing and Prioritising Product Information and Relating it to Customer Needs

One of the most difficult challenges faced by a retail professional is to analyse and prioritize product information and then to communicate it to the customer in such a way, that the product seems to fulfill customer needs. The customer may face information overload if you bombard them with large amounts of product information. You may know everything about a product that you have to sell but you need to understand the fact that the customer does not need to know everything. You will have to be able to decide what product information is most important, how much of it is important, and how much the customer should know about it. Therefore, you need to analyse essential product information to customize your communication. A customer needs to know whether the product in question does fulfill his or her requirements or not. You should never forget that you have to sell them what they need and not what you have to sell.

Knowledge of High-tech Communications Capabilities

A retail professional needs to possess high-tech communications capabilities because information technology has changed the way we communicate to attract and retain customers. Retail outlets need to use the web to sell products, provide support, offer services, investigate the competitive market, and link to suppliers. These days even very small retailers have realised that they can tap the sales potential of retail markets with the help of e-mails, the internet, fax machines, a web site, custom call

routing (CCR), interactive voice recognition (IVR), voice-mail, telemarketing transmissions, intranet transmission overnight delivery services, etc. In this situation, effective retail communicators should have detailed knowledge about the newly developing communications capabilities that are occurring all the time. They need to know what communication tools are available and what their strengths and weaknesses are, and what means of information transmission can be used to quickly convey important information to potential or regular customers as well as suppliers.

Appreciating Customer Sensivities

Every customer is unique and you can not generalise customers. As a professional retail sales person, you need to understand customer sensitivities and address them properly. Some customers may want you to listen more than speak, while some others may love to listen to you. Some may be very keen to ask questions while some may be happy with whatever explanation you give. All of them are different and they are definitely sensitive to certain things. You have to understand and appreciate these sensitivities in order to avoid conflict with customers and be effective in your job.

Analysing Complex Sales Situations

One of the reasons for emphasis on the value of communication skills in retail is the increasing complexity of the sales situations due to growing competition and the fight for the survival of the fittest. You may be an expert salesperson with the ability to handle difficult situations but you may still be stuck up with a new situation that challenges all your knowledge and experience about customers. It is important that you are able to understand and appreciate the complexities involved in retail sales today. As an effective retail persons, you should be able to analyse complex sales situations, develop alternatives, arrive at decisions and present them in a coherent, objective format suitable for the situation. In fact, analysing complex sales situations and articulating coherent, concrete and workable solutions in complex situations is an integral part of effective retail communication today.

Handling Difficult Customer Interaction

One of the challenges faced by retail communicators today is the growing need to handle difficult customer interactions. A difficult customer interaction is the one that leaves you baffled, frustrated, and angry. Such difficult interactions are very common and you should be ready as well as prepared to face them. You may get a customer who would be arguing with you about something that you are not concerned with and you have no control over. Another customer may attack you verbally during negotiations. There might be another customer who may make unreasonable demands on you or will make sarcastic remarks to you if you do not listen to him. All these situations are routine in retail business.

Intercultural Communicative Competence

One of the most obvious communication challenges faced by retail communicators today is to avoid the danger of miscommunication during intercultural business interactions. Exchanging business messages with customers, co-workers and peers, and suppliers who come from culturally diverse backgrounds poses serious communication problems because, intercultural differences may lead to miscommunication by creating misunderstanding and misconception in various business communication situations. The divergent socio-cultural realities of the speaker and the listener often render messages uninterpretable. Thus, to be an effective retail communicator, one will require intercultural communicative competence that involves cultural awareness capability, the ability to recognise and accommodate cultural differences in the marketplace, and the ability to minimise cultural barriers among customers, clients, and peers.

FUNDAMENTALS OF COMMUNICATION FOR RETAIL SALESPERSONS

Effective retail communication largely depends on your ability to adjust to the customers and your positive attitude. In order to improve your retail communication skills, you will have to follow some basic tips and learn effective interaction techniques. You should also learn how good preparation can improve retail communication, and explore the role of body language in retail communication and discover the best ways to communicate in both formal and informal sales situations. The following fundamentals of communication will help you improve your ability to communicate effectively in different situations:

Be an Active Listener

Learn to be an active and efficient listener. You can never be an effective retail communicator without being an effective listener. When you talk to a customer, to your colleague, or to a supplier, listen to the person carefully and attentively. You can not respond to the person unless you listen and understand. Do not interrupt the person while he or she is speaking. This is unacceptable and reflects bad manners.

Speak with Clarity

Speak clearly and effectively. Use effective speaking techniques. Take care of articulation and pronunciation and speak more distinctly focussing attention on your message. Take care of your voice quality, accent and intonation. If you talk in hindi or any other Indian language, take care of your language. You need to articulate clearly for others to understand you.

Be Simple

It pays to be simple during a sales negotiation or during any conversation. Never think that you can impress the customer by being complex, vague and abstract. Use simple and familiar language while talking to the people. You may use informal vocabulary with a customer who is very familiar with you. However, use formal language and vocabulary with a new customer or with someone you are not familiar with.

Be a Subtle Speaker

Be careful about what you speak and how you speak it. Do not just speak whatever comes to your mind. Never tell things that you are not supposed to tell. Be pragmatic and always think in terms of the results of what you are telling. Use an appropriate style of speaking because 'the way you speak' forms your image during a conversation.

Use Appropriate Pauses

Do not speak too quickly because the listener may not understand. This will result in confusion. Do not challenge the listening skills of your customers. Speak slowly with appropriate and effective pauses.

Show Interest

You should be interested in the customer or anyone you are interacting with. Moreover, your behaviour and attitude should reflect your interest. Maintain eye contact with the speaker or listener and contribute to the conversation in a lively manner. Some people remain lifeless during a conversation. They just listen without contributing anything to the conversation. That might show a lack of interest. You should never do that. Take active part in the conversation by contributing to it in a meaningful way.

Be Polite

Politeness is the key to good conversation. Someone rightly said that good conversation is good manners. Never be rude and impolite. Be courteous and use polite expressions and phrases during oral interaction.

Be Friendly

It is easy to talk to friendly people. If you are dogmatic and unfriendly during conversation, the other fellow talking to you might find it difficult to continue the conversation. By the way, no one likes to talk to unfriendly people. So, be friendly. Be cheerful and smile. Make the other person comfortable. Avoid making a remark that might hurt the other person. It is important to understand the point of view of

the other person. Do not jump to conclusions. Do not be in a hurry to make judgements. As a general rule, do not make generalizations such as “All business people are cunning” or “Women are foolish”. They might lead to arguments. Use moderate statements.

Be Positive

Express positive feelings during a conversation. Avoid criticizing others. Learn to appreciate the good and positive qualities of other people and express your appreciation.

Be Flexible

Be flexible during a conversation. A good conversationalist is always flexible. Rigidity goes against the spirit of good conversation. So, be flexible in approach, attitude and style. Don't be rigid. You may need to change your approach to a topic of conversation or even the topic itself if you are getting bored or if it is leading to hot conversation or too much argumentation.

Be Tactful

You need to be very tactful during conversation especially when you are talking to your teacher, boss, senior colleague, or someone who matters. It is better to think before you speak than to suffer afterwards. Choose your topics carefully. Avoid controversial issues that may lead to unnecessary arguments.

Do Not Argue

Most people argue for the sake of the argument. They go on arguing without realizing what they intend to achieve by it. They just waste their strength and time. However, a good conversationalist never argues during a conversation. So, do not argue. You may disagree with the person you are talking to but there is no need to impose your point of view on the other person. Everyone has a right to express his views. So, respect the views expressed by other persons and express your disagreements and reservations in a friendly way.

COMMUNICATION NEEDS OF CUSTOMERS

Identifying and meeting the communication needs of your customers must be one of your most important agenda items. You need to develop an effective customer communication strategy, which should be comprehensive as well as innovative. In order to improve your services it is important that you understand specific needs of your customers and identify ways and means to communicate with them. This information that you share with your customers should be used as an opportunity to improve your customer relationship and it must enrich your customer experience.

Customers need to be informed about goods and products and different details regarding new arrivals. You have to keep in touch with the customers to know their needs. You may use different communication channels like e-mails, web page, product brochures, phone calls, and other effective ways to send the needed information to the customers.

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE RETAIL COMMUNICATION

As communication is a complex process, it is desirable to take care of communication interference and the barriers of communication that may hamper the smooth flow of effective retail communication. These barriers may emanate from either the sender/receiver or the circumstances of communication. However, you need to identify these barriers and handle them effectively to become good communicators. In real communicative situations, any interference or noise has the potential to complicate the communication process and interfere with your message. Communication barriers arise during communication process and may confuse the listener or the reader, create misunderstanding and confusion and may sometimes lead to communication breakdown.

A careful analysis of communication barriers reveals that they may be created by several factors that include physical distractions, improper encoding, frame of reference, psychological and emotional interference, bypassing, or cultural differences. Even one factor is enough to create a problem. Sometimes several factors may combine to block communication. Now let us discuss some of these barriers to retail communication in greater detail.

Physical Distractions

Physical distractions can easily disrupt communication. For example, you are trying to provide product information to a customer on phone but there is a network problem and the customer is not able to listen to you properly. The customer's discomfort may cause communication failure because a person who is physically uncomfortable can be neither a good speaker nor a good listener. You should avoid any discomfort before starting up a communication.

Improper Encoding

Improper encoding is the recurrent barrier in the process of communication. Since there is a lack of understanding on the part of the receiver, it leads to confusion and misunderstanding. You should present your message in a linguistic code familiar to your audience. You must consider the cognitive knowledge that the receiver has of the communicative code that you are using. If you use a language/dialect that your audience is not able to follow, a communication breakdown will definitely occur. You should use English if the customer is comfortable with it; otherwise, you may use the local language or the mother tongue of the customer if you can speak that.

Frame of Reference

Your weakness to view others with your frame of reference may also lead to confusion and misunderstanding. The moment you interpret others' point of view from your angle, you allow your preconceived notions and prejudices start working for you. Your frame of reference is individual to you as it is based on your experiences, exposure, education, personality, and several other elements peculiar to you. In order to avoid communication failure, you have to be sensitive to this fact and try to put yourself into the other person's position.

Psychological and Emotional Interference

Any psychological or emotional turbulence or disturbance can prove to be a barrier to effective communication because it leads to lack of interest and concentration. Feelings of sadness, fear, anger, anxiety or jubilation influences our reception and receptivity to others' ideas. Communication is a purposeful activity based on rationality and reason and you must ensure that you are not emotionally charged (e.g., *very* excited/angry/nervous) before you take part in a communicative interaction. You may find it difficult to concentrate on the content of the message if you are emotionally charged. Over arousal of emotions may adversely affect both encoding and decoding. Whether you are a sender or a receiver, it is necessary that you try to focus on the content of the message.

Bypassing

The term 'bypassing' refers to misunderstanding resulting from missed meanings because of the use of abstract words and phrases on which both senders and receivers do not agree. Bypassing is probably the most common communication barrier that you have to deal with. Words mean different things to different people. Age, education, and cultural background are three of the more obvious variables that influence the language a person uses. In order to avoid bypassing, you should use familiar words with concrete meanings so that there is no scope for confusion. Moreover, it is also necessary to know the background of your audience.

Intercultural Differences

As noted earlier, cross cultural differences can be a challenge in retail communication because it is the receiver who assigns meaning to message, clues and meanings are assigned in terms of a receiver's frame of reference. This interpretation of meaning can create misunderstanding during intercultural communication because the sender and the receiver belong to different cultures and share different values. In fact, our values are our personal guides to thought and behaviour, and exert a strong influence on us. You should be sensitive to cultural differences and take into account the values of your listeners/readers while communicating to them.

CHAPTER REVIEW

Effective communication skills have become critical to the survival and success of every retail business. The retail industry in India has become more diverse, competitive and result-oriented. It is important for retail professionals to understand as well as to internalize aspects of communication that can ensure increased sales, better customer retention, quicker problem solving, enhanced professional image, stronger business relationships, and steadier work flow. The fast growth of retail chains coupled with the development of sophisticated communication technologies has put the focus on fast, interactive and result-oriented forms of communication such as email, fax, online shopping, automated attendant, a web site, custom call routing (CCR), interactive voice recognition (IVR), voice-mail, telemarketing transmissions, intranet transmission, etc.

Retail professionals face new communication challenges. These communication challenges can be handled by using new skills such ability to understand, analyse and prioritise product information and relate it to customer needs, knowledge of high-tech communications capabilities, ability to understand and appreciate customer sensitivities, skills to analyse and handle difficult sales situations, ability to handle difficult customer interactions, and intercultural communicative competence. Moreover, identifying and meeting the communication needs of the customers must be one of the most important agenda items for retail professionals.

There are several barriers to effective retail communication. They include physical distractions, improper encoding, frame of reference, psychological and emotional interference, bypassing, or cultural differences.

ACTIVITIES

Explore it Further

In order to understand the topics discussed in this chapter, you need to read further and check websites to answer the following questions:

1. How do marketing professionals in general and retail professionals in particular feel about the importance of communication?
2. What are the different forms of communication used in retail industry?

3. What makes these forms appropriate or inappropriate?
4. What are the challenges of retail communication? What makes retail communication different from the rest of business communication?
5. What are some of the thumb rules of communication for retail salespersons?
6. How can the communication needs of customers be assessed?
7. What are the retail organizations doing to understand customer communication needs?
8. How can you identify and handle communication barriers?

Experience It

In order to get a feel of the significance of communication retail industry, you need to talk to a few senior retail professionals. Discuss with them the topics and sub-topics presented in this chapter. This will give you a first hand experience of some important issues.

APPLICATION EXERCISE

Study the following retail communicative situations for identifying communication barriers in them. If the situation involves a Communication barrier, tick YES but if it doesn't involve a barrier, tick NO.

1. One of your customers has argued with you about a product that was not good. He was not satisfied with the product. He was very upset with you because you did not give full information about the product to the customer and he bought it on your suggestion.

Yes/No

2. Your Director Sales is very angry with you because you did not submit an important report as per the deadline set by him. You want to explain the reasons for the delay. You go and meet him personally.

Yes/No

3. One of your colleagues has misbehaved with you. You are very upset and you want to complain to the Director of your company.

Yes/No

4. Suppose you are working in a retail store and you have thought of a brilliant idea to attract customers particularly the government servants who got sixth pay revision. You are, however, not sure whether your colleagues will agree with your ideas or not. You are very nervous as you do not know the response of your colleagues. However, you want to share your ideas with all your colleagues and you are going to present your ideas.

Yes/No

5. A friend wants to know why you are working in Pakizah Retail and not in Treasure Island which pays more. You are not very clear about the reasons for working in Pakizah Retail but you would like to respond to his query.

Yes/No

6. You want to propose major changes in the customer entertainment facilities in the mall in which you work because you feel these facilities are not adequate. You want to share your innovative ideas with all the colleagues.

Yes/No

7. You have some problems with one of your assistants working under you. He has insulted you. You are very angry and upset, and immediately want to express your feelings to your immediate boss.

Yes/No

8. You have to attend a product launch meeting which you have been waiting for long because you have to present a proposal. However, you are very disturbed because your father is very sick. However, you have to attend the meeting.

Yes/No

KEY TO APPLICATION EXERCISE

1. Yes
2. Yes
3. Yes
4. No
5. No
6. No
7. Yes
8. Yes

CHAPTER THREE

3

Communication Challenges for Retail Salespersons

Let us Understand

It was a rush hour at one of the retail megamall showrooms. Although there were an adequate number of salespersons taking care of the customers, the waiting time to gain the attention of the salesperson was building up at the counter selling readymade suits for ladies' wear. The sales assistant Mrs. Tiwari had been helping the customers one by one. She had been demonstrating a piece of blouse to an elderly lady customer who had walked in first. Then Mrs. Tiwari moved over to the group of young college students who had been demanding to have a look at jeans and tops. The salesperson who had been manning the counter for saris was equally busy attending to some more customers. Mrs. Tiwari pointed towards the hangers on which jeans and tops were placed. She asked the young students, "If you do not mind looking at these, I shall be with you in a second". She moved over to the elderly lady who had now wanted to know the price of the product. At exactly the same time one of the young students too wanted to know the price of the jeans and tops. Mrs. Tiwari who was not attentive to the other group could not hear the question put up by one of the members from the group. She felt that the old lady as

an elderly person deserved better attention. This act of Mrs. Tiwari was taken as an insult by the group of young college students, who had walked out of the retail store under protest. They were accusing Mrs. Tiwari of neglecting her customers.

What is obvious is that the retail store had lost a sale of may be a few numbers of jeans and tops from college going youngsters but what the whole episode implies is that somewhere it has also been a communication failure on the part of the salesperson Mrs. Tiwari.

What according to you had lead to this failure?

The salesperson Mrs. Tiwari had started off with customer no. 1 and placed items in her hands for inspection. She should have been little more attentive towards customer no. 2. She should have also been able to answer the query of the young customer asking for the price of the jeans and top there. And if she had been trained into the art of handling several customers at one go at the store, it would have prevented the group of young customers walking out of the showroom.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you understand

- ✓ The communication challenges retail salespersons face
- ✓ The diversity that prevails amongst communicator and communicatee population
- ✓ Pre-sales communication modes that can be used by retail salespersons to overcome challenges
- ✓ Handling of cross-cultural communication in retail stores
- ✓ How to handle problems in facilitating retail sales interactions
- ✓ Post-sales communication issues
- ✓ Handling customer complaints.



Photo: Ramneek Kapoor

INTRODUCTION

The sales in retail stores are handled when the prospects and the salespersons come face to face with each other across the counters or in more modern expressions they enter into communication with each other. This stage of selling is the most decisive stage of marketing as it is only now and here that the customer will either buy the product or simply move out of the store if communication is not handled in the desired manner. The prospect will not be buying anything if the communication used by the counter salesperson does not make an impact with the prospect. This is also the exact moment when the other promotional efforts of the retail store and the manufacturers of various goods displayed at the store are put to test along with the communication skills of the retail salesperson. It results into profitable sales for the retail store if the communication succeeds. It becomes the win-win situation for the customer and the manufacturer both. However in case many such communications fail successively it becomes a cause for introspection for the retail stores' management. It also means that a prospect's search to buy a product for meeting his or her need and to reach some satisfaction level too, gets challenged by this failure. There are many challenges a retail salesperson faces while he or she is communicating with the customers visiting the retail store. It is important that these challenges to communication for retail sales professionals are understood and overcome successfully. It is the duty of the retail salesperson to match the product displayed at the store to the need of the customer and sell products to the customers each time they visit the store which he or she will be able to achieve only if the communication succeeds.

UNDERSTANDING THE DISTINCTIVE PROCESS OF RETAIL SALES

When it comes to the act of selling, all salespersons are expected to understand the customers' problem, identify his or her need, and offer a solution to the customer in the shape of product that matches the need and ensure a post purchase satisfaction, that could delight him or her to ask for such a product again and again. The salesperson in doing this service to the customer also tries to take care of the post purchase dissonance in the customers' mind.

A missionary salesperson approaches customers at their place of work or residence by finding about the customers in advance through prospecting research. This way the missionary salesperson gets enough feedback on the problem, need, purchase habits, distinct personality and other likes and dislikes of customers to some extent in advance. The salesperson on a missionary assignment thus gets enough opportunity to formulate and modulate the communications to be used accordingly.

In retail stores, on the contrary the retail salesperson does not get any prospecting research benefit to know in advance about the customers. The customers generally come to the retail store which they frequent regularly and are familiar with the

salespersons too. Such customers when they come to store are usually already mentally, financially, and emotionally prepared to buy something. It is up to the retail salesperson to subtly use his communication skills to come out with some product from his assorted range of collections that matches the need of his customer and convert this footfall into actual sales. It is a process that presents a big communication challenge to the retail salesperson.

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES RETAIL SALESPERSONS FACE

It is an acceptable fact that the retail salesperson must know everything and every fact about his store. He must be fully aware of the store policies to deal with all kinds of customers walking into the store. He is expected to know in detail about the merchandise his store carries as well as their price, their quality, their performance and their being in vogue or out of fashion at all times. The customers expect him to be their shopping guide in the store unless they come with the predetermined sales in their minds. This poses following communication challenges to the retail salespersons.

The Diversity of Customers

We have seen above that the retail salesperson does not get the opportunity to get into any kind of prospecting about his customers. During a day's period from the time when the store opens till the time the store closes for the day, customers from many kinds of socio economic background, ethnicity, nationality, religion, cultural diversity, age groups, educational levels and financial background come to the store. These customers visit the stores on account of the pull created by the advertising campaigns conducted by the stores and mega malls management. They are also attracted to visit the store on account of window display undertaken by the retailers to attract additional traffic from the side pavements and walking aisles. However, the salespersons employed to service these prospects and customers do not have much detail about these customers' profiles, their needs, their buying preferences, prejudices, and purchasing powers. The retail salespersons can simply assume that any and every customer walking into the store is coming in to the store to solve a problem. They are here to complete some need and will buy one thing or the other. Such a situation *definitely* poses a big challenge to the communicating ability of the salespersons. The retail salespersons' communication with the customer has to begin with the observation and experience that may come with passage of time. At the initial stage a smiling welcome and a polite and courteous greeting may help in disarming the customers walking in. The communication challenge will be to wait for a while till the customer opens up and the salesperson is able to get some feel of the need of the customer.

Understanding Diverse Buying Motives of the Customer

The retail salesperson has to communicate with a customer to become aware of the buying motive of the customers he or she is attending to. For example, the store selling clothes and dress material for ladies will obviously be attracting customers to buy clothes. Some of them will need clothes for daily usage, whereas, some will ask for party wears and many of them may have come to purchase their wedding trousseau. It poses a challenge for the communication skills of the retail salesperson to find out what are the buying motives of the customers coming into the store. In a short duration of few minutes the salesperson has to assess not only the motives but also what colour, feel, range, price, quality, assortment, the durability and association will be able to meet the demand of the customer and provide much needed satisfaction. The retail salespersons should know that the customers buy products for prestige, status, self-importance, convenience, beauty, fashion, health reasons, pride, comfort, romance, and safety, association, affiliation to a group or number of groups, durability, profits, and economy in addition to the actual need of the product to meet a basic demand. When they want to buy a product to meet their basic need they will also be looking for price, quality, standard institutional approval and some kind of better satisfaction for having rejected a substitute and selecting the product bought.

The salesperson attending to the prospects in retail stores obviously gets a very shorter duration of face to face and cerebral contact with the customer. Many a times the customer may not be even willing to give away any kind of clue, but the salesperson has to accept this as a challenge and (through the better use of communication skills) has to understand the motive behind the intended purchase by each one of the prospects visiting the store. The retail salesperson then has to mould his or her communication story accordingly to make it sound interesting, reasonable and appealing to the ideas that the prospects are already having in their minds about the



Photo: Ramneek Kapoor

product and the store. The retail salesperson's communication skills are put to test when the customers themselves are not clear on their buying motives. It has often been observed, that many a times a large amount of fanciful buying takes place at the self service retail stores, supermarkets and the megamalls. It is during such a spontaneous buying that the customer refuses to open up on the motive of buying. Such kind of impulsive buying poses a big challenge to the mind and behaviour reading abilities of the retail salespersons. We will be studying within this chapter, what kind of presales forms and modes can be used by the retail salespersons to know about the motives of buying.

Understanding Diversity of Customers' Wants

The major challenge for any retail store person is always to understand (after the motive had been somewhat worked out) as to what exactly is it that the customer wants, so that he can offer those merchandise to the customer that precisely matches what the customer wants. The salesperson obviously has to literally use the AIDA formula to generate sales from a prospect where none may exist. He has to get the attention of the prospect by way of an initial opening about the merchandise. He also has to create an interest in the merchandise offered by him, and then create or speed up a desire which may have already been there, because at the first stage that is what the customer came to the store for. Calling for buying action on the part of customer for the product will ask for very intelligent handling of the customer.

PRE-SALES COMMUNICATION MODES

Some of the following pre sales communication approach can be used by the retail store salespersons to study and determine the want of the customer.

(A) Power of Observation

In modern retail stores where the products speak and advertise for their own selves through an attractive display, it is but natural that the salesperson has to practice the art of keen observation to understand the buying behaviour of his customers, coming to the retail store. Such a keen observation will also help him know about the cultural, demographical, and ethnic background of the visitor to the store. Some of the basic rule could be to let the customer stroll around in the store and look, feel and touch the products in display at the retail store. He must keep a close watch on customers' reaction to different merchandise, their price tags, and the other ambience etc. at the store. The salesperson will find enough clues, guidelines, and indicators about the need of the visitors. He can also through a very minute observation make a rough guess about the buying intentions of the prospect i.e. whether the prospect has come for only window shopping or is in a mood to spend money. The facial expressions of the prospect can also give away the liking for colour and design etc. It is not difficult to distinguish a delightful expression on the face which could

be different from a mocking dislike. The salesperson can find out if the customer time and again checks only a select band of products, colours or even brands as to what could be the either immediate or the latent requirement. The salesperson's power of observation will be enhanced and sharpened only by practice over a passage of time. The salespersons from the retail stores run on the old system of gaddi in many of the old towns in India, have mastered this art of keen observation over a number of years vast experience. They can simply tell by observation what could be the need and choice of the customer. They offer such products to the customer and it is seen that their judgement seldom fails.

(B) Power of Listening

The retail salesperson has to develop a very sensitive and keen sense of listening to all the remarks made by the visitors to the store. Some of the remarks will indicate to the salesperson what products the customer are looking for to meet their need. While it could be little difficult to do such an exercise for a single visitor. It becomes very easy when a group of customers come together to the store. Salespersons' keen sense of listening will also tell him as to who could be the decision maker in this group. He can accordingly address his communication to the decision maker amongst the group, of course without letting the others feel that they are being slighted or neglected. The salesperson can offer to show the merchandise being admired by the customer in order to help the customer open up with his remarks. The salesperson must remain ever alert to analyze such reactions and observations and even small comments. He should be smart enough to form his communication vocabulary accordingly and try to extract further information about the immediate problem and need of the customer.

(C) Power of Headlining

We have earlier said that the customer should be allowed to wander in the store for a while. But for how long that should happen will depend on the sharp observation of the retail salesperson. It is advisable that the salesperson should find the most appropriate time and opportunity to give positive feedback about the products to the customer, that he or she has been admiring. Such headlining however must be absolutely truthful as otherwise a customer can be put off by false claims that the salesperson may make about the product. Most of the products have some Unique Selling Proposition (U.S.P). The U.S.P. will definitely extract some response from the visitor. The salesperson can add to the U.S.P. by extolling upon the good experiences of earlier buyers of the same product. He should also be in a position to identify features, advantages and benefits of each product that the store sells and use either one of such features to generate further interest about the product in the mind of the customer.

(D) Power of Questioning

The salesperson eventually has to persuade the customer to come out with his actual need. There cannot be a better way than to ask visitor himself about his need, and how the store salesperson can help him. The retail salesperson should politely ask the visitor about the customers' need. He can definitely ask for the purpose for which merchandise are needed if it is not clear to him, it will be stupid to ask further details from the customer however if he has stated an obvious requirement. The retail salesperson can definitely ask the customer to tell him about the material needed; the range and the style too can be asked. However, a direct question related to the price of the product can be many a times quite offensive, so the question in a more civilized way can be addressed as to what variation and range the customer is looking for. For example, in a showroom selling televisions it is advisable to check with the customer if he is looking for black and white or the colour range. Then again the size of the television and the other features the customer wants to find in the television set can be checked by simple questioning. It will be inappropriate to offer a much higher priced range of plasma television to the customer if he has come to buy a normal price range of television. The same principal applies to the other products.



Photo: Ramneek Kapoor

Finally the questioning should be handled very professionally, and politely.

PROBLEMS IN FACILITATING RETAIL SALES INTERACTIONS

It is generally observed that the retail salespersons try to adopt the same mode of communication with all customers visiting the store. The retail store as we have seen

above will get many diversified kinds of customers from morning till evening. They will not be from the same group or band of personalities. Some could be very accommodating type, accepting the advice of the retail salesperson in a very supportive way. Some on the contrary, could be aggressive and outgoing type personalities, who could be decisive also. For them anything the salesperson recommends could be a challenge to their own personalities. We cannot therefore typify all kind of customers. The salesperson and the store have to look at all the customers as individual personalities in their own typical way. The behaviour of the same customer too can vary from time to time. The salesperson while interacting and facilitating sales transaction has to keep the fact in mind that every time he has to treat an individual visiting the store as an opportunity to understand and serve the customer in a novel and different way.

The salesperson should realize over the passage of time that he normally gets to interact with three distinct customer profiles in the store on any normal working day:

- (a) Informed customer who knows what he wants to meet his need.
- (b) Ignorant customer who wants to buy something but does not know what will meet his need.
- (c) A casual visitor who could be window shopping. His visit can result into spontaneous buying.

1. Interacting with Informed Customer

He is such a customer, that as soon as he enters the store he will straight away head for the counter on which he can find the products displayed that will solve his problem and fulfill the need. The retail salesperson may not have to spend much time on this customer. The salesperson will notice that if he has to interact with such informed customer he would not need much of the sales stories. The salesperson will help him reach a decision by using only brief and to the point answers. He will be able to make the use of all other tools of communication e.g. a story, use of U.S.P, power of observation, listening and questioning only if the customer has to be upgraded from the existing choice to an upgraded option of a product. There too the informed customer will be able to make a fair comparison between the two products hence, he should be provide only the facts that can be held valid about the product.

2. Interacting with Ignorant Customer

Here is a customer who is interested to buy something. Such a customer is definitely interested to find some solution to a problem. He wants to identify the means to fulfill some particular need. But the customer does not know how to and what guidance and help they can expect from the retail sales staff at the store. The sales staff will have to help such a customer in pinpointing his problem and help him select merchandise that could take care of the problem. The retail salesperson will

have to use his all the three powers to understand this customer i.e. the use of listening power, the observation power and the power of questioning. Once the retail salesperson has been able to pick up the clue to the visitors' problem, he should immediately start showing the merchandise to the customer. The merchandise can range from the least expensive to the high priced ones to enable the customer reject a few and settle for the few probable out of which the retail salesperson can help him select the final buy. The truth remains that once the retail salesperson has demonstrated the merchandise to the customer; the customer will start opening up. Soon the latent need of the customer becomes an apparent opportunity to sell. Thus the retail salesperson can make the best use of the pre sales communication modes to convert an undecided customer into a profitable situation for the store.

3. Interacting with a Casual Visitor

Many customers come to the retail stores for window shopping. They are just casual visitors but their visit to the store can result into spontaneous buying. The retail salesperson can proceed to deal with such window shoppers in any of the two communication modes:

- (a) Start with the assumption that the visitor has not decided to buy anything and is simply having a look to pass time. Such a window shopper needs to be left alone for a while and will be approached only when there is a doubt raised by him. Otherwise may be someday he will come back again. However retail salesperson may have to provide him the information when he asks for it.
- (b) The second assumption could be that the visitor is trying to understand the price, quality and merchandise range available at the store. The sooner he would be approached by the retail salesperson the better it will be to engage him into a conversation, to understand if he has been able to identify merchandise that could solve his problem.

The retail sales person will have to interact with such window shoppers in the manner that does not make them feel that they are being pushed into buying anything. The retail sales person will have to take care that he does not offend their sensibility. He can offer them to walk inside the store and take them for a guided tour of the store. Once the visitor starts looking at the merchandise demonstration, the salesperson could provide additional information to raise further interest for the product. But such a service is possible only during free hours when there are not many customers in the store.

It has often been observed, that the some of the customers will raise their buying defenses if a sales person approaches them with the product, such customers should be allowed to walk on their own for a while and the merchandise should be offered only after it is felt they have made themselves comfortable.

It may happen that, many a times the stores will have some contests, sales discounts or schemes running on merchandise. The salesperson should refer the casual visitors to such counters to generate some kind of interest and goodwill for the store.

The retail sales person will have to be with the customer yet discreetly at some distance to let the visitor understand that he is available to provide any assistance when needed but at the same time he is not intruding upon his privacy to look at the products too.

4. Interacting with Several Customers

We had started this chapter with the short story of Mrs. Tiwari, to understand as to what happens in a retail store when the retail salesperson has to interact with the rush of many customers together. Several customers will be asking for the attention of the salesperson during peak business hours at the stores. Similarly whenever the stores will run some special campaigns', discount schemes the rush of customers just double up even during nonpeak hours. Such a situation calls for not only an absolute alertness and promptness but also a patience of the highest order in the mindset of the sales staff. Each customer being the most important person for the store, no one should be given the cause for complaint of neglect against the retail staff. The retail sales person besides having a great patience will have to have the mobility and the ability to interact with many of them during such peak hours. How can it be done?

- (a) The first principal of communicating with the customers during rush hours will be to prioritize the customers. Customer no.1 that entered the store will be accorded the first priority. This customer should not be neglected at all.
- (b) Then the salesperson has to make sure that he serves the customers in turn. This is somewhat like many numbers of customers walking into a restaurant during rush hours. The customer who came in first gets the first priority to be served, and then the one who had walked in next and then third and so on.
- (c) The salesperson, whenever the next group of customers walk into the store has to extend a warm welcome to them and use the phrases like “welcome sir/madam, I will be right with you” or “welcome sir/madam, I will just take a minute”. The easy way will be to offer some merchandise to the first customer to have look at it and when he is doing so, walk to the next customer, ask for his requirement so that he can be directed to the right counter or display rack.
- (d) Salesperson can then go back to customer no. 1.

5. Interacting with Groups of Customers

The retail stores attract all kind of customers. Sometimes only single customers come in, but majority of times people come into groups of family or friends for shopping. It becomes fairly difficult for a salesperson to find out as to who is the influencer decision maker. The customer who will be buying obviously will have influence on the entire group prevailing upon him. Although the main task will be not to ignore the wishes and opinions of the other members of the group. The use of all the three presales communication modes e.g. power of listening, power of observing, and the power of questioning by retail sales person will soon make it clear as to who is the leader of the group. The salesperson can now focus all his major sales efforts on this

leader. He can of course allow other members of the group to express their opinions and comments as well in between. In case of difference of opinion amongst the group members the sales person should always express his opinion as to what could be the right choice of merchandise politely and without offending anyone of the group members who might have been from the disagreeing group.

6. Interacting while Demonstrating

The act of product demonstration in itself is a separate chapter and we will need much space to delineate on the art of demonstration. The major task here will be to understand as to how the retail sales persons can empower the act of demonstration into the major communication tool for selling. The sales persons have to be good at demonstrating the products and at the same time being effective communicators too. The powerful impact of the demonstrations will be felt by the customer only when the demo is organised in best lighting, live position and advantageous ambience of the store. The sales person will have to simultaneously make use of the story to match the product advantages described by the manufacturers. The sales person should not shirk away from doing a complete demonstration of the product, should the customer ask for it within the decency maintained. But it is observed that, the customers themselves ask for the minimum required part of the product to make an intelligent decision. The demonstration is also an early sign of communication, to understand whether the customer will buy or not and the salesperson should try to make the best use of this situation.

7. Handling Customer Objections

When a customer walks in to the retail store he walks in only with one certainty in his mind that he has to find merchandise that could satisfy his need. All other component of a sales transaction at this stage remains very uncertain. These uncertain components can be read as the product, its price and the time of sale. That is why the customers walk out of the stores stating that “they will come back” or that “they have not decided yet and will like to explore further”. All such statements including the ones like “we will think about it”, “we will discuss” point out towards one fact that there are objections to the way the sales communication in this transaction so far has taken place. That there is no complete agreement to the act of buying as yet in the mind of the customer. The retail sales staff has to take care of all such objections to convert the visit into an agreement for sales between the two. He can do so by removing objections on the uncertain components of the sales transaction i.e. the product, the price and the time.

The objection to the product can be overcome by offering the most appropriate product that could meet the need of the customer as closely as possible. He must point out the product’s capability of providing features, benefits and advantages and satisfaction the customer is looking for in the product. That should be close to

removing any doubts the customer has about the efficiency of the product and its price. This could also be overcome by way of the demonstration that had been undertaken by the sales staff. The retail staff could also add the other added features e.g. after sales guarantee, or after sales warrantee to weaken the resistance to buying on account of price.

In case the salesperson has been able to break the objection to the product and price, the objection to the time should be handled by offering the advantage of getting the product delivered free of cost within the town, reserving the product for the customer against nominal advance, replacement or the return policy of the store. Many a times the customer will not agree to mere oral assurances. If the store offers a written assurance, the retail salesperson can offer the same in writing in order to reach an agreement on the time. However, if the sales person is still not able to handle this objection and the customer still says no, there is nothing this sales person can do except to tell the customer politely, "Please do visit us again".

8. Interacting at the Close of Sales

The close of sales at the retail stores are indicators of the success or failure of the communication used by the retail salespersons at the stores for interacting with the customer during all stages of his visit to the store. In case the customer's actions speak that he or she is now ready for the close of the sales and has made up his or her mind, to pay for the merchandise selected the retail salesperson should do the following:

- (a) Exhibit confidence in the product by positive and convincing body language.
- (b) Exhibit control over the situation by demonstrating that a correct decision has been made.
- (c) Maintain poise. Do not be in a hurry nor let it be shown that the customer is being pushed into closing.
- (d) Ask for customer agreement on the merchandise selected and final decision.

In case of undecided customer who has so far shown agreement during all steps of pre and in sales interaction modes, the retail salesperson will have to make him reach a decision by the following ways

- (i) Remove all other assortment from the counter except the final two that the customer had liked.
- (ii) No new merchandise should be offered to the customer.
- (iii) Ask for the customer agreement that the retail salesperson has liked the best.
- (iv) Either way the customer will have to pick up either of the two.
- (v) Congratulate the customer on his excellent choice.

POST-SALES COMMUNICATION ISSUES

After a Sale

Once the sale has been finalised the salesperson can do the following—

1. Record the sale in a sales invoice.
2. Get the merchandise wrapped in the store's standard carry bags.
3. Assure the customer by way of using words like “an excellent selection” or “a good buy” or “it was wonderful to have you as a customer”.
4. Ask the customer to fill up the visit and comments register if there is one maintained by the store. The register comes handy for future references.
5. Issue a warm “thank you”, and “please come again”.

After a No Sale

The issue becomes clear in case the sale has been finalized. However, the issues need to be settled differently if the sale has either been postponed or cancelled for future trial. The salesperson has to understand that every customer has two basic rights when he walks into the retail stores (i) He can postpone a decision to purchase. (ii) He can still ask for some more merchandise to be demonstrated to him. The sales person's efforts to feel resentful towards the customer on account of either of these two actions by the customer can be damaging to the store's reputation. When the sales person is certain of the no sale scenario, he or she can do the following:

1. Brief the customer on all kinds of material and merchandise that the store sells in the product line the customer asked for during this visit.
2. Summarise the advantages of the products displayed and ask the customer to come back after comparing the same with competition.
3. Try to get a probable appointment for the next visit.
4. Hand over some informative material e.g. a store visiting card, product catalogue or personal visiting card to remind the customer to come back to the store again.

Suggestive Selling

If nothing else materialises the retail sales person will try to sell the merchandise the customer had not planned for. The suggestive selling can be utilized in both the situations i.e., whether the customer has already bought something from the store or not. This suggestion can be utilised in the following positive fashion:

- (I) Extend a reminder to the customer as to what all is available at the retail stores.
- (II) Make it appear a better solution to the problem the customer has been facing.

- (III) Make it a combo offer for example if the customer has bought shoes offer him socks and polish to go along with the shoes. Or to a person who has bought a suit the obvious offer will be to offer him a shirt and a necktie.
- (IV) Festival offers, seasonal offers, special discount offers, gift schemes, membership point clubbing can be all used as suggestive selling.

The process of suggestive selling should be handled very cautiously and to let it appear without aggression and forced selling. The customer should always be allowed to decide on the finalisation of his own products or merchandise he had come to the store to look for. It is only at the time of final billing that the efforts should be made to try suggestive selling of the type mentioned above.

HANDLING CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS

It has been observed that a long term relationship is established between the retail store and the customers. The customers will prefer going to the same store in their neighborhood. Even in the megamalls the customers tend to patronize the same stores to visit time and again. The simple fact is that if a customer feels delighted by the behavior, ambience merchandise, and fair dealing of the store, he will prefer to come back and shop at the same store. It saves him the trouble and hassle of finding a sales person and a store again that could understand his language and problems. The customer is too easy to please. What a customer looks for is a fair deal, good value for his money spent, recognition by the store and its staff, speedy and polite service and an appreciation for the purchases made at the store. Yet the complaints do exist and the stores end up losing good customers when their complaints are not attended to and solutions not found to the shortcomings of the retail stores. We give hereunder a suggestive list of customers' complaints that make them quit their regular stores:

1. Indifferent Attitude of Retail Sales Staff

Many a times the retail staff is too engrossed in their own problems and they do not pay the required amount of attention to the customers. That obviously results into the customers moving away. All efforts should be directed in training the persons in the art of customer handling. Nothing pleases a customer than the fact that the sales person recognizes him by name and face and that, the sales person over a passage of time has made efforts to learn about the likes and dislikes of customer.

2. Pressure Selling Tactics

An un-camouflaged attempt at trading up or substitution will always meet with stiff resistance from the intelligent customers. Hence, the retail salesperson will have to use kid gloves to deal with the customers who come to the store with predetermined sales in their minds. Such people will always resist someone telling them to change their mindsets.

3. Uninformed Sales Person

While customers resist a sales person who is bullying them to change their mindset, they do appreciate a genuine approach by the sales staff to help them solve their problem by providing them the much needed information. And when such customers do not find the information needed by them at the stores they treat this as a very casual approach of the sales staff.

4. Misrepresentation of Facts about Merchandise

A customer does not mind being told “sorry we do not have it or we do not store it” but he will not like it definitely if a sales person provides wrong information on the goods and merchandise demanded by the customer.

5. False Promises and Commitments

Promises on matters like delivery date, alterations, repairs, claim warrantees and finally transparency of prices are some of the factors on which false commitments and promises are not liked by the customers.

6. Returned Goods

The complaints of returned goods do not reflect any thing on the personal behavior of the retail sales person. He or she has to just follow the policy established by the store management about the return of goods. But if the goods are returned because a trade up or unacceptable substitution had taken place then it is obvious the retail salesperson will have to do some soul searching in this regard. Customers otherwise may return goods on account for faulty material, wrong packing, wrong order from filling, damage in transit or delayed delivery, expiry dates etc.. In all such cases the policy of the store need to be followed.

It has been established that a good sales person should know almost every customer visiting the store by name and as a first hand acquaintance. The sales person is also expected to know the other details like the date of birth and other important dates of their customers’ lives, their sizes and material preferences etc. While it can be done for a select list of customers it is not possible to do so for all customers that visit the showrooms in megamalls and hypermarkets. The ideal situation is to maintain a record of all the customers making their purchase from the stores by asking them to fill the information forms and registers. The sales persons can then open their records to see complete data of the customer every time they visit the store. That can assure the sales person giving a personalized treatment to all important customers visiting the store. We will study the use of such customer relationship management records in our chapter on Customer Relation Management in this book.

CHAPTER REVIEW

Whenever a customer buys merchandise, he does not buy a product alone. Along with the product the customer also buys a complete package consisting of the product, the retailer, the sales person and the manufacturer and also the satisfaction of the mind. The customer for this peace of mind will depend upon the help guidance and the support provided to him by the retail sales person. The interaction between the salesperson and the customers can be facilitated only if they establish a good communication with each other at different stages of the selling activities. The bonus of establishing a clear and appreciative communication entirely lies with the retail sales person. He has to understand the challenges to the establishment of communications and take steps to overcome these challenges. This chapter has dealt with the steps, modes and the interaction the retail sales persons can take to establish a satisfactory communication with the customers visiting the stores. Unless the manpower deployed on the shop floor of the retail store succeeds in selling merchandise to the customers visiting the store, we cannot say that a complete communication has been established between the two. The chapter makes an attempt to establish such a communication through the various stages of in store selling.

ACTIVITIES

Explore it Further

In order to understand the topics discussed in this chapter, you need to read further and

Check websites to answer the following questions:

1. What are the communication challenges retail sales persons face during heavy rush hours at the store?
2. What are the pre sale modes a retail sales person can adopt to know more about the customer visiting the store?
3. What are the problems in facilitating retail sales interactions? Discuss in detail any two such problems.
4. What do you mean by post-sales communication issues? Name any two such issues and the way to handle these issues.

5. Why is it important for a retail salesperson to adopt the power of listening? How will it help him establish the communications with the customers?
6. How will you handle a group of customers who have come in to the stores during very heavy business hours when you already have your hands full with other customers? Explain with examples.

Experience It

In order to understand the importance of communication and the challenges for effective communication with a retail customer you should visit a retail store during evening peak hours. Find out from the senior retail sales persons of such a store what problems he or she faces to understand the diversity of motives of buying.

APPLICATION EXERCISE

Assess your understanding of the key points discussed in this chapter by answering the following ten questions:

- Question 1** Which of the following is not TRUE about establishment of a communication challenge
- (a) It relates to the diversity of customers visiting the store.
 - (b) It relates to the understanding of the distinctive process of retail sales.
 - (c) It relates to the understanding of diverse buying motives of the customer.
 - (d) It relates to understanding of the diversity of customers' wants.
 - (e) It relates to understanding of the product policy of the store.
- Question 2** Which of the following is not a pre-sales communication mode?
- (a) Power of observation.
 - (b) Power of listening.
 - (c) Power of headlining.
 - (d) Power of questioning.
 - (e) Act of Billing.

- Question 3** What is not one of the problems in facilitating retail sales interactions?
- (a) Interacting with informed customer.
 - (b) Interacting with several customers.
 - (c) Interacting with groups of customers.
 - (d) Interacting while demonstrating.
 - (e) Interacting after the close of sales.
- Question 4** The usual customer complaints in a retail transaction do not pertain to
- (a) Indifferent attitude of retail sales staff.
 - (b) Pressure selling tactics adopted by the sales person.
 - (c) False promises and commitments made by the sales person.
 - (d) Sales person's invitation to the customer to visit the store again.
 - (e) Misrepresentation of facts about the merchandise.
- Question 5** A retail sales person can make use of the suggestive selling when
- (a) the customer has just entered the stores.
 - (b) the customer has come to the store during rush hours.
 - (c) after the customer has finally decided about the purchase of the merchandise that he already had in his mind.
 - (d) when the customer is window-shopping at the store from the outside.
 - (e) when the customer is complaining about the earlier experience.
- Question 6** The act of suggestive selling in a retail store does not pertain to
- (a) offering a better solution to the problem the customer has been facing.
 - (b) extending a reminder to the customer as to what all is available at the retail stores.
 - (c) making it a combo offer.

- (d) indulging in pressure selling tactics.
- (e) informing the customer about festival offers, seasonal offers, special discount offers, gift schemes.

Question 7 After a visit of a customer has resulted into no sale, the retail salesperson should undertake any of the following steps.

- (a) Brief the customer on all kinds of material and merchandise that the store sells in the product line the customer asked for during this visit.
- (b) Summarise the advantages of the products displayed and ask the customer to come back after comparing the same with competition.
- (c) Try to get a probable appointment for the next visit.
- (d) Hand over some informative material e.g. a store visiting card, product catalogue or personal visiting card to remind the customer to come back to the store again.
- (e) All of these.

Question 8 In case of undecided customer who has so far shown agreement during all steps of pre and in sales interaction modes, the retail salesperson will have to make him reach decision and close the sale by way of.

- (a) Removing all other assortment from the counter except the final two that the customer had liked.
- (b) By not offering any new merchandise to the customer.
- (c) By asking for the customer agreement on the merchandise that the retail salesperson has liked the best.
- (d) By congratulating the customer on his excellent choice.
- (e) By undertaking all the activities mentioned above.

Question 9 After the salesperson at the retail store has been able to successfully achieve a sale he should undertake the following steps:

- (a) Record the sale in a sales invoice.
- (b) Get the merchandise wrapped in the store's standard carry bags.
- (c) Assure the customer by way of using words like "an excellent selection" or "a good buy" or "it was wonderful to have you as a customer".

- (d) Ask the customer to fill up the visit and comments register if there is one maintained by the store. The register comes handy for future references.
- (e) All of these.

Question 10 In case the customer, actions speak that he or she is now ready for the close of the sales and has made up mind, to pay for the merchandise selected the retail salesperson should do the following:

- (a) Exhibit confidence in the product by positive and convincing body language.
- (b) Exhibit control over the situation by demonstrating that a correct decision has been made.
- (c) Maintain poise.
- (d) Ask for the customer's agreement on the merchandise selected.
- (e) All of the above steps.

KEY TO APPLICATION EXERCISE

- Q.1. (e)
- Q.2. (e)
- Q.3. (e)
- Q.4. (d)
- Q.5. (c)
- Q.6. (d)
- Q.7. (e)
- Q.8. (e)
- Q.9. (e)
- Q.10. (e)

CHAPTER FOUR

4

**Communication for
Customer
Relationship
Management**

Let us Understand

Mr. Mathur had to leave for Mumbai by the morning flight of Jet airways. In spite of the fact that he had instructed the driver to come in early to drop him at the airport, the driver had reported very late. There was panic prevailing in the household of Mr. Mathur that he might miss his flight if he is not able to report for the flight one hour before takeoff. But Mr. Mathur was just not worried. The airlines had sent him SMS informing about a few minutes delay in his flight. He had already tele-checked in himself for the flight. He had been allotted a seat number of his choice too by the operator on the 24 hours call lines of the Jet airways.

To his surprise, when Mr. Mathur arrived at the airport he was given a refreshments coupon and told to visit the restaurant upstairs till he waited for his flight, which the hostess at the check in counter told him had been delayed for a few minutes. It seemed to him that the lady luck had been smiling on him today as they also had upgraded his travel to the business class, free of charge where he could travel in the comfort of a much wider seat. He

knew that, he will be treated to a royal breakfast during the course of the flight.

What is obvious is that Mr. Mathur had a wonderful experience with the airlines from the time he had telechecked in to the final landing at the destination.

Why according to you was he given this royal treatment?

It is not that Mr. Mathur had won a lottery ticket with the airlines. He had simply become a member of the frequent fliers club of the airlines, floated by the airlines under its CRM programme. The CRM programme had been developed by the airlines to not only understand customers' need and behaviour but also to improve its responsiveness which ultimately results into profitable retention of customers on a long term basis.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you understand

- ✓ Relationship between communication and CRM
- ✓ How to find out and define customers' need and behaviour
- ✓ How does communication help in improving customer responsiveness
- ✓ How does CRM help in developing customer loyalty
- ✓ CRM optimisation with effective communication.

INTRODUCTION

CRM or customer relationship marketing has always been very important for a retail business. The traditional business style of *gaddi* system has always been very particular to maintain customer relationship by the way of knowing the customers very intimately. It was traditional for a jeweller, or a *kirana* store or even a cloth seller to keep a record of personal particulars and important events and dates of their key customers. They would make use of these special events to exhibit to their customers that they really cared for these customers and that they were maintaining the family relationship with such important customers for generations together. While dealing with these customers they would always take care of the vital aspects of marketing e.g. service, quality, customer retention activities and other relationship building exercises from time to time. They even participated in the important family function of their important customers. Similarly they also took care of broader aspects of macro marketing of their business when they actively participated in relevant social issues to take care of the existing customers and future prospects. But customer relationship

marketing has been accorded much wider dimensions in the recent times with the advent of internet, world wide web and other forms of media e.g. mobile telephony, call centers and business process offices. The customer relationship marketing has today been extended from the intimate one to one relationship to that of database marketing. The extension of CRM runs from B2B TO B2C on the data based statistics managed by third parties. We will in this chapter undertake the study of historical journey of customer relationship marketing, along with a study of the communication vehicles and tools adopted by the retail marketers to keep their customers delighted by way of loyalty programmes and reward systems.

COMMUNICATION AND CRM

Customer Relationship Management is a nomenclature given to all activities undertaken by the business organisations to delight their loyal customers beyond mere satisfaction levels derived from the core product or the core service. In other words, while it is easier to satisfy a customer by giving him a basic value for the price paid for the product, but he does not necessarily feel delighted. To attain the delight of the customer a business unit has to offer value plus in the shape of additional services and activities which are much beyond the realm of simple buying and selling. All these activities and strategies that the organisations undertake to provide additional benefits to the customers beyond the price paid for the product can be categorised under a single head of Customer Relationship Management. And to keep the customers constantly interested in all these additional benefit activities, the business organisations take the help of communications channels. These channels range from the developing loyalty programmes and, progression of the customers to different stages of loyalty programmes as per the business given; to rewarding customers with many goodies for having stayed with the retail seller. The rewards may vary from the lavish treatment of the customer by way of air tickets, hotel stays, and foreign tours to the encashment of reward points earned in the shape of cash as well as kind.

The channels adopted will also many a times include a personal identification of being the most important customers and/or belonging to the elite groups of customers so created by the organisations to inflate the personal ego of the buyers. Thus, customer relationship marketing is a step ahead of the other marketing activities undertaken by the organisations. While the other marketing activities are undertaken by the organisation to attract all kind of current and future customers, the customer relationship marketing activities particularly focus on the development and maintenance of long term relationships through high levels of communication about the organisation's commitment to customer care.

COMPONENTS OF CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

The most important aspect of customer relationship management is based on the understanding that the retail organisation must establish direct communication channels with the customers to let them feel a part of the total business. It is on this account that the data is collected by the retail organisation whenever the customers come in contact with the points of sale of the retail organisation. This data is then collated to maintain individual identity kits of the customers for building up of the relationships through regular communications. These communications are different from the mass mailings and mass contact programmes of the retailers.

The other components refer to the establishment of direct and personal information system, establishing and allotting a personal identification, VIP treatments and the benefits of loyalty programmes. This way customer relationship marketing becomes a success mantra of the retailing industry as the customer is made to come back for his purchase at retailer's sales points again and again. Airlines, hotels, shopping centers, mega malls, organised individual retailers, clothiers, beauticians and even food retailers have all developed some CRM programme or the other to build up their customer relationship marketing. We will have a look at the customer relationship pyramid below to understand how successively each component contributes to the success of the other and build up customer relationships.

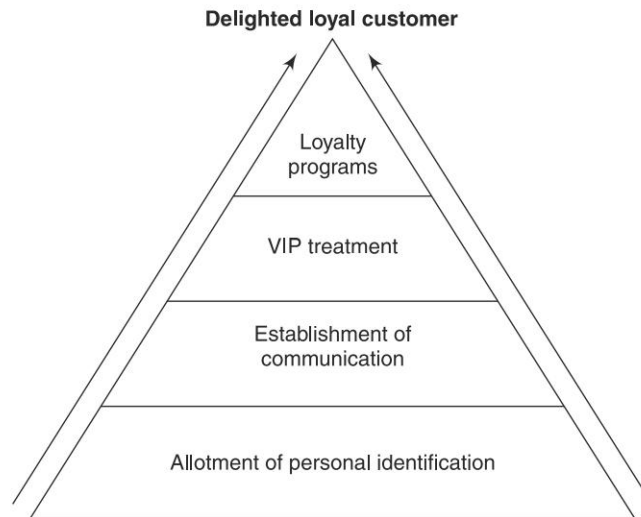


Figure 4.1 Customer Relationship Management Pyramid

Establishing Customer Data Base and Allotting a Personal Identification

It is apparent that to establish a long term relationship the retail seller will have to institute a system of maintaining personal relationship with the buyer. This is possible only when the buyer comes in contact with the seller at the time of his first

purchase. There the customer is encouraged to provide his details to the seller to become a member of some loyalty programme or the other instituted by the retailer. The membership is generally offered free of charge but only after the shopping of a specific amount at the retailer sales point. The customer is made to feel a part of the family by way of naming him with labels such as Jet Privilege club, Indian frequent flier, Pantaloon green card holder, Elite Globus club member and King club member for Kingfisher airlines. There are many more such attractive names allotted by the retailers to the customers of these clubs to make them feel socially important. The customers subscribing to these programmes are allotted an identification number and an ID card relevant to the status is allotted to the customer. The identification so allotted makes the customers treated in a way as if they are known to all the staff of the stores. The frequent usage of the personal sir names and many times the first names makes him feel that he is a very important person to the business. The routine communication with the customer becomes an advantageous communication for the store as by use of only basic courtesy the customer is made to feel very happy. It in a way makes him feel delighted to come back to the store time and again.

Establishment of Communication

The major benefit of being on the list of customer relationship programme of the retailer relates to being recipient of regular communication about the business, its social events and the other benefits that the retailer will be running from time to time. Such constant effort of the retailer to keep the customer in touch with the latest and this thing leaves a very positive impact on the relationship building exercise between both the important elements of business. The customer at no times is allowed to feel that he is away from the mind and heart of the retail business.

Mode of Communication

The method of communication used for remaining in touch with the customer may vary from the use of telephone for important events and invitations through the personalised emails and SMS for most part of the year. The retailer also makes use of providing in-house publications, magazines and special product catalogues for communicating about the activities of his business. The customers are also extended special invitations to an exclusive buying day or buying hour where only the members of the elite programmes are face to face in touch with the store staff. During such exclusive meetings, the stores make use of the multimedia channels to communicate with these made to feel important customers.

The communication vehicles will always include sending greeting cards, birthday cards, wedding wishes and other good wishes on other national and international festivals and days. The customers stand to gain in terms of feeling special and part of the whole festive affair. They are also informed in advance about the new arrivals, discount schemes, promotional schemes and various events to be organised by the

store. Communication is also used to inform the customer about his status in the loyalty programme and other contests run by the stores and their partners.

Advantages of Establishment of Communication

- (a) The data based so managed by the retail stores can throw much light on the purchase and other behaviour of the loyal customers. The spending patterns of the loyal customers and their other likes and dislikes for the products and services marketed by the store become predictable over a period, when stores can plan both their events and inventories.
- (b) Similarly the frequency of information about repeated events run by the stores also can help the customer know more about the behaviour patterns of the stores in declaring its events, benefits and other purchase related advantages in favour of the customers. The customer can accordingly plan his purchase too.
- (c) Communication channels so used add to the perception building activities of the store on a level much higher than the regular advertising campaigns. It gives a kind of exclusivity to the store when it communicates with the elite and loyal customers as the attention of the customer while reading such communication modes cannot be divided or diversified to other brands.
- (d) It leads to the building up of a long term relationship based on reciprocated trust and confidence for both the parties.
- (e) It is a very strong mode of customer education, as many of the business organisations publish articles related to self developments and self grooming and other socially and internationally events related to customer education and empowerment.

V.I.P. Treatment and Custom-Made Handling

We saw in the opening vignette of this chapter how Mr. Mathur had been made to feel a very important person much before he actually undertook the journey on the airline's flight. Such a selective and custom made management of service to a guest is possible only when the retailer has been able to know in advance about customers. The collection of data enables the retailer to categorize the customers into different categories i.e. the loyal, the regulars and the casual purchasers. The retailer is well aware that the bulk of his business will be coming from the loyal and the regular customers hence he does not have to accord the same treatment to every customer. Accordingly he provides the preferential treatment to the customers whom he wants to feel important and key to the growth of his business. The gratitude may be provided in the shape of exceptional waiting lounges, shopping arenas, free add-ons and individual shopping hours. The recognitions are also extended by offering invitation to special events organised by the retailers.

Maintenance of quality of service though is imperative for any and every customer who comes to the retailer but the levels of attention provided to the loyal

customers differentiate it from the normal routine service. Furthermore, the loyal customers are given the additional benefits of gifts vouchers on birthday, wedding days and other important festivals. Imagine walking into your favourite restaurant and being presented a bouquet of flowers because it just happens to be your birthday or just think how you and your spouse will feel delighted if you're offered a two days free stay at the hotel on your wedding anniversary, in order to honour your loyalty to some retail business entity.

This and many more small luxurious treats are offered by the retailer to make the loyal customers feel important and wanted for the growth of his business. It is significant to mention here that all these business promotion activities are undertaken as a prelude to the establishment of long term customer relationship marketing and ensuring consistent customer loyalty.

Developing Customer Loyalty

Developing customer loyalty by way of instituting rewards is the fourth level of activity undertaken by the retailers for ensuring customer delight. This activity though has its beginning in the first stage itself when the retailer makes all efforts to collect personal data about the customers coming in contact with the sales points of the retailer during their purchase activity. Although the membership to all the loyalty programmes is voluntary at this stage but the customers are lured by information provided to them on the benefits attached to the loyalty programme. The rewards for the loyalty are provided in the shape of encashment of points earned either in the next purchase or offering them altogether different kind of benefits and services.

The loyalty programmes are of two kinds:

1. **Simple loyalty programme:** A simple straight forward benefit of the allotment of the points earned for the purchase made against the membership card during the year. The value of the purchase made is converted into the points and credited to the account so created for the customer. The value allotted may be a point per hundred rupees spent in case of some retailers and for many others e.g. hoteliers and travel business it could vary from the amount spent to the nights stayed in the hotel or the miles travelled by the airlines.
2. **Progressive loyalty programme:** The customer is given entry at the initial stage as a primary member. He is progressively upgraded to better benefits as the amount of his purchases accumulate and the total count of points earned in a given period go up. For example, in many airlines the entry card will be known as the blue or any other colour card, progressively moving to the next stage the customer gets the membership to silver card. The benefits attached to the silver card make him feel as if he has been promoted to a higher level of relationship with the retailer. The ultimate level of the gold or platinum card boosts his ego as a very important customer for the organisation. The rewards at this stage take him to a different realm of service efficiency, with access to exclusive lounges with sumptuous snacks, availability of on line check-ins, prior

intimacy about flight positions and up-gradation to business class travel, in addition to the availability of free tickets against the points earned on the business given to the airlines.

Advantages of Customer Loyalty Programme

The basic advantage will always be as the building up of long term relationship with the customers. But behind all the activities, the fundamental reason is to get more business from the committed lot of customers. The retailers establish loyalty programmes in order to get the following advantages to their business:

- (a) It helps build up a committed and captive universe of loyal customers for all promotional programme of the retailer. Many a times the members of the loyalty programme themselves will log on to the websites, or visit the retail stores to find out as to what new is happening at the stores.
- (b) The cost of communication is economical as compared to the large scale campaigns addressed to an unknown audience.
- (c) The profit realisation from such a dedicated buyer is higher as he is willing to pay much higher cost due to the hidden benefits of add-ons to his purchase
- (d) It ensures a progressive growth of business as the customers tend to spend more in order to fulfill their loyalty programme minimum base point conditions.
- (e) The retailer is benefited by way of attaining a good perception for itself amongst the loyal customers.
- (f) The loyal customers in turn act as brand ambassadors for the business of the retailer.

UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMERS' NEEDS AND BEHAVIOUR

We have seen in the four components of the Customer Relationship Marketing Pyramid that, all efforts of the retailer are directed towards the satisfaction and delight of the customers. But all efforts can go waste if the retailer does not understand the customer as an individual. He must understand why, all these customers come to his sales points and spend their money on the products and services sold by him. The why can be answered only by understanding the motivations behind these buying? Though it is not the intention to conduct a thorough research into consumer behaviour in this chapter but we must find out how important it is for a retailer to understand the customers' needs and their behaviour.

While we all understand that it is the motivation that controls the human buying behaviour, the key to understanding human buying behaviour has to come through the understanding of these motives that pull a customer to the retail store. *The motives are the inner urges, an inner sense of inadequacy that propels a consumer to look for a corrective step to fill this inadequacy, a step in the direction of finding a product or service to fulfill that inner gap. This activity of the consumer is also called finding a solution to fulfill a need.*

It is then established that every customer has an assortment of needs for which they have to buy products and service which are available through millions of channels. The retailers have to understand that while the motives of selecting a product to fulfill a basic need could be different. It may not be able to tell him as to how a customer decides as to which retailer to select. The retailer has to understand the following complete process of customer buying behaviour before the customer can actually send him the signal of having been delighted and extending any kind of loyalty.

(a) Understanding the Beginning of the Actual Need in the Mind Set of the Customer

The retailer has to understand that the need generation is a process that had begun much earlier in the mindset of the customer, much before he even had seen the product displayed at the retailer's sales point. The want had arisen first and got converted into need when the customer walked into the store to look at the products available. The retailer at this stage is only one of the many other sources where the customer can fulfill that need.

(b) Understanding the Process of Search and Information Gathering on the Product by the Customer to Fulfill that Need

It is only when a dissonance is created in the mindset of the customer about a gap between what he already has and what he requires in fulfilling the need that a customer will start gathering information about the product sold by the retailer and as to how it will fulfill his need.

(c) Understanding How a Customer Evaluates all Alternative Sources where Product is Available

The products available at different stores must have caused a kind of disequilibrium in the mindset of the customer. This is also the stage when the customer will be seeking more information on the product and the sources both. We will see it separately within this chapter as to what factors and criterion will influence the mind of the customer while deciding as to which retailer he should prefer to buy from.

(d) Understanding the Process of Purchase from a Particular Source

The buying decision will be completed only when the customer agrees to the price quoted by the salesman and he finally is willing to pay the price quoted. The customer by now has evaluated the product that he requires to fulfill his need and has agreed that at the quoted price the product will provide him the satisfaction

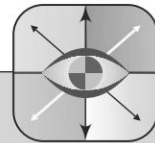
value equivalent to the price paid. If it offers him the value plus against the price paid it might even lead him to a delight.

(e) Understanding the Post Purchase Behaviour of the Customer and Preventing Dissonance

The customer can go either way after he has purchased the product. He can have a feeling of desire fulfillment and satisfaction achieved if the product and the purchase process meet his expectations. Or he can have a negative sense of dissonance if the product and the purchase process fail to fulfill his expectations. The retailer at this stage has to help the customer adopt the positive reinforcement of a good decision made in buying the product and in selecting the source from where it has been bought.

The retailer can adopt various modes to study his customers, in order to find out as to what makes them come to the retail store or what is it that the retailer can provide at his store that can fetch him the desired category of customers. He can do it by establishing direct communication channels with them by instituting loyalty programmes and other membership schemes wherein he can gather as much data as the customer is willing to reveal.

However, the customer may not be willing to reveal his inner psyche and other peculiarities. There are varieties of other modes a retailer can adopt to study his customers and their behaviour, in order to prepare a complete profile. Some of these modes are electronic surveillance, market research, use of questionnaire, survey forms, and direct observation at the sales points, consumption patterns, and sales scan projections.



Many international research companies in Europe, the United States and in some of the emerging markets where shopping malls are growing every day record sales and movement of goods data from the tapes and scanners attached to the billing counters. Transactions are recorded and analyzed for the day for each product. Information can be obtained on the movement of goods, on consumer preferences for size, packing, and for many other activities for example instant reaction at the point of purchase discounts sales offers, schemes, and point of purchase display effectiveness in addition such scanners are also used to record details of sales made throughout the week. Such scanners are not allowed by many stores

in order to maintain the privacy of the customer. In such an event, companies have their own customer panels that are issued identity cards which they have to present when they make their purchases in designated stores which enable the store to record data of select customers.

Home scanners are adapted to record the days shopping by a selected panel of customers at their own homes on the scanners provided by the research firm.

(Source: Justin Paul, Ramneek Kapoor, *International Marketing Text and Cases*, Tata McGraw-Hill, New Delhi, 2008, pp. 90-91.

IMPROVING CUSTOMER RESPONSIVENESS

The retail shopper is somewhat a lesser enigma in Europe and the west where many kinds of research methodology and surveillance systems have been adopted over a long time to understand the customer behaviour. In India however, the organised retail still has to make its impact felt. Barring the limited success of a few big stores like Big Bazaar, Pantaloons, Globus, Westside, Food World and a host of other such names in the metropolitan cities, the struggle is still on for majority of the retailers to understand as to what is it that will make the footfall go up and in turn a stupendous growth in business. The Reliance Fresh Stores and India Bull stores and many other are still trying to figure out as to what will make the customer respond. The emergence of smaller and mid size shopping malls in the B class cities is bringing about a steady and positive change in the buying psyche of the customers but, it will take a long time to fully understand the dynamic buying habits of the customers. We give hereunder a few of the features that customers look for while selecting a retail store.

Features that Customers Look for in a Retail Store

A retail store today has become a brand to associate with besides its being a place where the customer can conveniently find the products to fulfill his needs. There has been a dynamic change in the appearances of the even neighbourhood stores vying with each other to offer better amenities to the customers besides offering a wider range of merchandise these stores are dealing in, but the fact remains that most of the places cannot be distinguished from each other as they are all offering almost similar format and merchandise. How does a retailer make his place look different from the other in order to improve customer responsiveness is a moot question for all of them. We look at some of the features that can help retailers design programmes to improve customer responsiveness.

(a) Customers Look for Range of Merchandise

Initially a customer walks into the store to look for the products that could meet his need, but it is the range of merchandise that could offer him an assortment of choices. Hence, it is the range of merchandise that could make him patronise the store. When he notices that all his needs can be fulfilled under one roof and that he does not have to look for variety anywhere else he would like to come to the same store time and again. The range of merchandise could vary from meeting the daily needs to the availability for luxury goods, to meeting the need of entertainment and the leisure items. Based on this, the mega malls today are providing almost every product and service under one roof to make the customer spend his entire day or evening at the mall.

(b) Customers Look for Convenience of Shopping

The definition of the convenience of shopping today has become all encompassing.

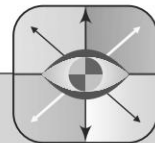
Besides the convenience the customer is also looking at the comfort of shopping. He does not want to search ten places to meet his ten different demands. The value of time has made him look for the fulfillment of all such needs at the place that is convenient to approach and is comfortable to be in. That is why the trend of self display stores in the neighbourhood of his office and residence are fast catching on. He prefers shopping from these shelves as these are very convenient and comfortable too during week days.

(c) Customers Look for Travelling Convenience

The cost of travel and the time taken to travel are the two major factors that affect a customer's decision to select a store. In metropolitans like New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore where distances and the cost of travel is too high, people will obviously patronize stores and outlets that are in closer vicinity to their residences and offices. Even in B class cities many of the malls that were started outside the city limits have realized that the novelty of a new place wears out faster if it is not within convenient reach.

(d) Customers Look for Affinity

Customers definitely look for a kind of fellow feeling. That means the socio, economic and ethnic factors definitely play a large role anywhere in the world. The customers will like to go to places that are in consonance with their thinking faculty, cultural proximity and economic background. If a retailer can understand this then he can accordingly decide to have his own audience who could feel comfortable and at home in his store. Many international companies had to change their approach on this after realizing that in Asian countries they will have to have stores that are based on Asian formats rather than replanting American or European format of food outlets.



McDonald is a good example of how global strategy has been devised to fit each individual country within the global plan by the food retailer, even though each culture has a different and diverse need... In India, the company advertises in Hindi, "*McDonalds main hai kuch baat*", and theme emphasis on advertising in India is family-oriented, a very important and dear to all, an aspect of Indian culture. Such advertising in local language appeals directly to the local culture. It uses local cultures' festivals

and fairs like the Kite festival in Gujarat, bhangra dance of Punjab, and bihu of Assam and pongal of Tamilnadu while adapting its global communication strategy through the local cultural environment, and advertises in Gujarati, Punjabi, Assamese, or Tamil Language.

(Source: Justin Paul, Ramneek Kapoor, *International Marketing: Text and Cases*, Tata McGraw-Hill Education, New Delhi, 2008, pp.115-116.

(e) Customers Look for Sense of Belonging

Even though the retailer would have provided all the ingredients that his customers look for in a good retail store, if the customer does not feel that he belongs to the place he will feel uncomfortable visiting that retail outlet again. The retailer undertakes all the customer relationship marketing exercise to make a customer believe that the stores belong to him and that he is in fact a part of the whole business. Sense of belonging will come by extending to him the familiar atmosphere, the familiar language, the necessary courtesy and plenty of feel at home ambience to make him come back to the store regularly the life styles stores catering to generation X are trying to do the same when they create the younger atmosphere by putting familiar smells and ambience through the constant playing of M.T.V music in their stores.

CRM OPTIMISATION WITH EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

It is very difficult to retain a loyal customer for long as the business environment is today very dynamic and ever changing. The exercise in customer relationship has to be constant effort to not only remain in touch with the customer but also to keep him informed as to his needs, his ideas and his aspirations are being taken care of by the retailer to optimise the solid relationship built between the two.

In order to achieve this retailer must find ways and means to manage and analyze the data on his customer base; evolve new opportunities to provide better services to his customer base and create longer lasting customer relationships. He must be always in touch with his customer through effective communication to optimise the customer relationship marketing. This is possible only when the retailer undertakes the following six point's strategic optimisation of the communication process.

(a) Objective Analyses of CRM

The CRM analysis has to be an ongoing objective analysis at the retailers' end to understand if the CRM platform designed by him still serves the same purpose for which it had originally been created. The customers' values, perceptions and expectations from the product, service levels and service standards keep changing. The retailer has to have an inbuilt appraisal system to critically analyze the effectiveness of all the four components of customer relationship marketing. He must evolve an effective communication strategy to successfully nurture new leads, manage the current lot of loyal customers by providing them the value plus of services. The retailer must also evolve a communication system to stay in touch with his loyal, regular customers on a consistent routine, and continue to attract the new entrants to the platform of loyalty programme instituted by him.

(b) Segmenting Customers' Data by Business Volume and Value

We saw in the loyalty programme above how a retailer many a times creates

progressive loyalty CRM programme to build up some base of volume and value business and then take it off from there to the next level of business volume and values. The segmentation of the customer data base will help him optimally use the information and communication tools and modes to reach the right universe, rather than aiming the one communication mode for all.

(c) Identify Customers' Influencers

All customers can not be influenced in the same manner. The retailer has to identify how to and which strategy designed by him will be successful with what levels of influencers that can move the customers' responsiveness. He has to accordingly devise the communication policy to address to the influencers.

(d) Appraise Each Customer's Affinity and Responsiveness

The retailer has to keep in mind that the optimization of the CRM and its communication will be achieved optimally only, if it has been received and understood by each of the customers in the same way in which it had been designed and conveyed for a message, product or service. That is why he has to devise and evolve a continuous appraisal system for each of the customers' affinity to the communication and his responsiveness.

(e) Appraise the Frequency of Contact

The retailer has to maintain only adequate and optimal communication with the components of CRM. He has to ensure that the communication addressed to the customers on customer relationship marketing and other loyalty programmes delivers the desired results by appraising the effectiveness of communication system set up periodically and reduce or increase the frequency of contact as the situation demands.

The retailer thus, has to perform a very detailed performance analysis of all the components of customer relationship and the communication models adopted to understand the efficacy of product and services basket that he is offering to his customers and the communication models that he has selected to reach these customers. A detailed cost and benefit analysis will also provide him an insight into the profit opportunities that may exist on the optimisation of current systems involved.

A farsighted approach however will tell a retailer that an objective analysis of CRM must be undertaken to:

- (a) understand the current position and devise the future strategies as the customer values keep changing and he has to keep pace with the change in customers values and perceptions.
- (b) Make the system of objective analysis a research into the exploration of new customer delight possibilities and profit opportunities.
- (c) Evolve a long-lasting and effective customer relationship strategy based on the constant objective analyses.

CHAPTER REVIEW

In this chapter we have elucidated on the management of communication for customer relationship marketing activities of the retailers in the current competitive environment. Customer relationship management as we mentioned in the beginning of this chapter refer to all those marketing activities that a retailer undertakes to build up and cement the business relationships with his most valued customers. These customers are also the back bone of retailers' sales turnovers and profits. A retailer will love to protect his loyal and most regular customers. It will be his prime task to constantly analyse, revise and update the customer relation management and communication strategies adopted by him to strengthen the customer relationship. Customer relationship management activity is as we saw based on four components that are referred to as the establishment of direct and personal information system, establishing and allotting a personal identification, VIP treatments and the benefits of loyalty programmes. The retailer can optimise the customer relationship management by undertaking six point's strategic optimisation of the communication process, i.e. objectively analysing CRM, segmenting customers' data by business volume and value, identifying customers' influencers, appraising each customer's affinity and responsiveness and appraising the frequency of contact.

ACTIVITIES

Explore it Further

In order to understand the topics discussed in this chapter, you need to read further and check websites to answer the following questions:

1. What is the importance of customer relationship management for a retailer? Explain with the help of examples of customer relationship activities undertaken by your neighbourhood store.
2. What are the major components of customer relation management programme undertaken by retail business? Explain each component in detail.
3. What are the advantages for a retailer of establishing a direct communication mode with loyal customers. Explain with examples.

4. What is a customer loyalty programme? Explain how a retailer establishes a progressive loyalty programme.
5. How can a retailer achieve optimisation of CRM through effective communication? Explain the six point agenda described in this chapter.

Experience It

In order to understand the application of customer relationship management programme through effective communication you should visit a retail store in a shopping mall. Discuss with the senior retail sales persons of such a store if the store has actually introduced some kind of loyalty programme. You should understand the components involved in this programme and discuss in the class room.

APPLICATION EXERCISE

Assess your understanding of the key points discussed in this chapter by answering the following ten questions:

- Question 1** Which of the following is TRUE about Customer Relationship Management programme?
- (a) It builds up loyalty of the customers.
 - (b) It offer value plus in the shape of additional services and activities.
 - (c) It is a step ahead of the other marketing activities undertaken by the organisations.
 - (d) It is undertaken to establish direct communication with loyal customers.
 - (e) None of these.
 - (f) All of these.
- Question 2** Which of the following is not one of the Components of customer relationship management programme in retail business?
- (a) Establishing customer data base and allotting a personal identification.
 - (b) Establishment of communication with loyal customers.
 - (c) Developing customer loyalty programme.

(d) Providing V.I.P. treatment and custom-made handling of loyal customers.

(e) Introducing stock clearance sale.

Question 3 Advantages of customer loyalty programme include the following:

(a) Building up a committed and captive universe of loyal customers.

(b) Economical cost of communication.

(c) Higher profit realisation from such dedicated set of buyers.

(d) Progressive growth of business.

(e) All of these.

(f) None of these.

Question 4 While understanding customers' needs and behaviour retailer has to understand the following:

(a) The process of the beginning of the actual need in the mind set of the customer.

(b) The process of search and information gathering on the product by the customer to fulfill that need.

(c) The process of purchase from a particular source.

(d) Post purchase behaviour of the customer.

(e) None of these.

(f) All of these.

Question 5 A retailer undertakes the objective analyses of Customer Relationship Management programme to understand:

(a) If the CRM platform designed by him still serves the same purpose for which it had originally been created.

(b) If customers' values, perceptions and expectations from the product, service levels and service standards have changed over the time.

(c) To have an inbuilt appraisal system to critically analyse the effectiveness of all the four components of customer relationship management.

(d) To evolve an effective communication strategy to successfully manage the current lot of loyal customers and nurture new leads.

(e) All of these.

(f) None of these.

- Question 6** Which of the following point is not one of the six points strategic optimisation of the communication process undertaken by a retailer?
- (a) Segmenting customers' data by business volume and value.
 - (b) Identifying customers' influencers.
 - (c) Appraising each customer's affinity and responsiveness.
 - (d) Appraising the frequency of contact.
 - (e) Objectively analyzing the customer relationship management programme.
 - (f) Providing attractive schemes.
- Question 7** A few of the features that customers look for while selecting retail stores are
- (a) Range of merchandise.
 - (b) Convenience of shopping.
 - (c) Convenience of travelling.
 - (d) Sense of belonging.
 - (e) All of these.
 - (f) None of these.
- Question 8** Some of the advantages of establishment of communication with loyal customers are
- (a) It helps in identifying customer need.
 - (b) It provides details on the purchase and other behaviour of the loyal customers.
 - (c) It strengthens store's customer relations.
 - (d) It provides the retailer with data.
 - (e) It leads to the building up of a long term relationship.
 - (f) All of the above.
- Question 9** The progressive customer loyalty programme refers to
- (a) A step-by-step promotion of customer to a higher level of relationship with the Retailer.
 - (b) Informing about the development in product performance.
 - (c) Informing the customer about different product designs available.

- (d) Providing higher level of discounts to customer.
- (e) Providing direct mailers about stores' events.
- (f) None of these.

Question 10 A retailer establishes customer relationship management programme to

- (a) Build up data base of loyal customers.
- (b) To delight their loyal customers beyond mere satisfaction levels derived from the core product or the core service.
- (c) To focus on the development and maintenances of long term relationships through high levels of communication about the organisation's commitment to customer care.
- (d) To provide the preferential treatment to the customers whom he wants to feel important and key to the growth of his business.
- (e) To keep the loyal customer informed as to his needs, his ideas and his aspirations are being taken care of by the retailer to optimize the solid relationship built between the two.
- (f) All of the points mentioned above.

KEY TO APPLICATION EXERCISE

- Q.1. (f)
- Q.2. (e)
- Q.3. (e)
- Q.4. (f)
- Q.5. (e)
- Q.6. (f)
- Q.7. (e)
- Q.8. (f)
- Q.9. (a)
- Q.10. (f)

CHAPTER FIVE

5

Customer Interactions

Let us Understand

Sunita is a senior sales manager in a successful chain of retail stores. She supervises a group of nine sales persons. Over the past year, business has been good and she has been very happy with her performance. The number of customers had been increasing and she was satisfied with the way things were going. Sunita was, however, very surprised when she received a memo from the company's Director asking her to train her sales staff to interact with customers positively. She was informed by the Director that many customers had complained against the way the sales persons interact with them. Sunita did not know what went wrong.

What should Sunita do?

Sunita should begin by talking with sales staff to better understand what might go wrong. She needs to get different perspectives of what happened. It is important for her to perform a communication audit of her sales staff to understand the way her sales people have been interacting with customers. She needs to sensitise the staff to the finer points of sales interactions.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this chapter, you'll learn

- ✓ The significance of customer interactions
- ✓ How to leverage the Internet
- ✓ Different steps in the oral communication process
- ✓ How to use effective conversation for customer satisfaction
- ✓ Elements of effective sales oral interactions
- ✓ Aspects of improving fluency and self-expression
- ✓ Importance of handling difficult customers.

CUSTOMER INTERACTIONS

Every retail business today needs to efficiently manage customer interactions, which may occur through many channels including face-to-face customer interactions, the web, manuals, catalogues, e-mail, etc. The success of these customer interactions—whether through face-to-face oral communication or through internet depends to a great extent on the retail organisation's understanding of the customer's wants and needs at the time of the offer.

It is important for retail professionals to understand the importance of these customer interactions for developing as well as sustaining their business. Intelligent marketing demands a better understanding and leveraging of these interactions as customers are keen to interact and are ready to express their wants and needs. Retail professionals must think of innovative ways of getting customers involved in interacting with and experiencing the products and services that they want to sell and promote.

LEVERAGING THE INTERNET

The internet has become a very important channel of customer interactions today. Large number of retail organisations receive more orders online than through their manuals and brochures. It is important that retail professionals are able to leverage the internet for transforming customer interactions into profitable business for their organisations.

Most of the customers with buying powers visit the internet sites to know and understand about products and services. Whenever these customers want something or need some information about a product or service, they become highly interactive. They not only visit the relevant websites but also download relevant information, brochures, videos in order to get the maximum information about the product

or service they are interested in. They also get involved in the process of multi-media marketing by sharing their opinions as well as experiences. They usually consult the concerned retailers or companies asking for more details. And it is at this point of time that the retailers can use these interactions to develop relationships with the right customers.

These interactions, thus, provide an opportunity to the retail organisations to develop relationship with a customer who is keen to share information regarding his or her wants and needs. In order to leverage the internet to the full, retail professionals need to take care of the following factors:

1. Create interactive websites for the customers providing all the information that they want in an interesting yet persuasive form.
2. Provide customers chances to effectively research products and services online.
3. Addresses the issues and concerns of the customers systematically by providing consistent customer interaction management.
4. Use these customer interactions to develop understanding of the consumer mind to customise the products and services.
5. Customers' willingness to become involved with the marketing process must be used to develop long-term relationships by helping the customers in their search for information.
6. Tune and customise your marketing plan as per the changing patterns of consumer behaviour.
7. Create a culture of developing consumer-driven products and services through effective consumer needs analysis.

FACE-TO-FACE CUSTOMER INTERACTION

Although the internet has become a very important channel of customer interactions, face-to-face oral communication with the customers remain the most significant channel to manage customer interactions. In fact, oral communication is a tool of professional and business interaction, and it is the most important medium for retail professionals. It is crucial to effective sales as retail professionals need to interact orally with their customers, colleagues, and clients at all levels. As part of their professional work, they are required to take part in team discussions, meetings, conferences, seminars, business presentations, telephonic conversations, teleconferences and videoconferences, etc.

Oral Communication Process

Oral communication is the purposeful process by which speakers, using audible and visible symbols, communicate meaning in the minds of their listeners. It is flexible, changing as well as complex and varied. Whether it is an informal conversation or a very formal business interaction, the function of sales oral communication is

creating messages that stimulate in listeners' meanings that bring about the desired change in their understanding or opinions. Let us look more closely at the **SALES ORAL COMMUNICATION PROCESS** (Fig. 5.1).

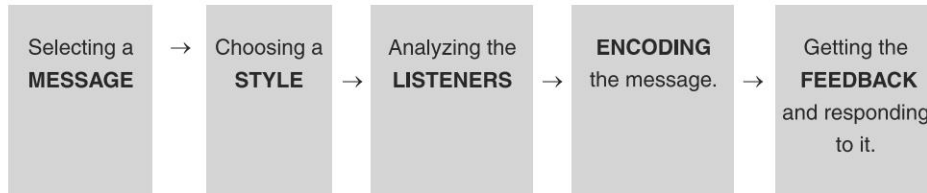


Figure 5.1 *The Sales Oral Communication Process*

Sales oral communication process (**SOCP**) is, thus, an interactive communicative process that involves speakers and listeners. While communicating a message orally, the speaker is concerned with five factors, i.e., message, audience, speech style, message encoding, and feedback. Each one of these factors is briefly described below:

1. The Message

The oral communication process begins with the selection of a message. The message includes everything that you do or say, both verbally and non-verbally. Here, you are concerned with the content of the specific message that you want to convey. It consists of ‘What’ of the oral communication. Your knowledge, experiences, abilities and the over-all objectives of speaking generally determine the scope of ‘the message’. You should be clear about what message you want to get across. In order to make your message make the desired impact, your content must be clear and relevant. In a professional retail sales situation, selecting a message might involve deciding about the type, scope and sources of information about a product to be sold.

2. The Audience

If you want to be an effective retail professional, you should know your audience, i.e., your customers and stakeholders. A retail professional has to be very sensitive to his or her listener because his professional success depends on understanding the audience and his/her needs and concerns. In fact, the newer the products and services that you are offering, the more important it is to know your listeners in order to decide how to sell the products or services to that customer. Professional situations such as promoting a new product or persuading a new customer may demand a more careful audience analysis.

3. The Speech Style

Speech style is the manner in which you present the content of your speech. It is the way you speak. It could be very formal as in a sales presentation, or very

informal as in a casual conversation with a customer. It depends on the purpose of speaking and the relation between you and the listeners. If you are going to present the advantages of buying an LG[®] product to a new customer who is a loyal Samsung[®] customer, you would need to be not only polite and formal but also very authentic. On the other hand, you can afford to be less formal if you are talking to an old customer who knows you well. However, most of the time you may choose a style that falls between these two extremes. You should choose a style that is appropriate to the type and nature of your content, the audience, as well as the occasion and setting.

4. Encoding

Encoding in oral communication involves selecting a language, an appropriate oral form, and positive nonverbal signals. Verbal messages need a common language code, which your listener may easily decode. If the listener can not understand the message, communication fails. For example, you can not speak in Hindi with a person who does not understand Hindi. You may have to use English or a language that the person understands. If you and your listeners share the same language as first language, you may use it in informal situations. However, you should use English in formal situations.

When you orally communicate, you may have the option to choose an appropriate oral form. These options include face-to-face interpersonal communication (meetings, conferences, discussions, panel discussions, interviews, etc.) or speaker-audience communication (speeches, sales presentations, seminars, workshops, symposia etc), electronic communication (teleconferencing and videoconferencing) or telephonic communication.

Encoding in speaking also involves using non-verbal signals. Non verbal communication includes body language, i.e., posture, gestures, facial expressions, body movement, and eye contact or paralinguistic features, i.e., tone, pausing, pacing, and voice modulation.

5. The Feedback

The feedback completes the oral communication process. It is the last step through which you receive information about how your message has been received by the listeners, and respond to those clues. The feedback process is not complete until you have responded to the listener.

EFFECTIVE CONVERSATION AND ORAL SKILLS FOR CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Conversation is probably the most important factor that makes social interaction possible. Every customer needs attention and wants that the sales person must be pleasant to talk to. It is, therefore, important for sales persons to improve their

conversation skills. Although the ability to converse well for customer satisfaction is so important, many salespersons ignore it. They rarely plan or prepare themselves for a conversation. Many of them are self-complacent or over-confident and believe that conversation is a natural process and they need not prepare themselves for this. There are some sales persons who find themselves shying from conversation with the customers because they feel inadequate in talking to others. As conversation links you with your customer, it provides you an opportunity to develop long-term relationship with a customer. It also establishes, maintains, improves, and consolidates relationship with customers.

As conversation is a tool of interaction, you should be able to converse well in both informal as well as formal situations. You should have the ability to start a conversation, pick a topic for conversation, help your customers to start, keep a conversation going, move smoothly from one topic to another, and conclude a conversation naturally. You should also be able to understand interlocutor, create coherent discourse, and take appropriate turns in conversations as well as the ability to negotiate meanings with others through creating reciprocity of perspectives on what is said. You should take care of simple things during a conversation. For example, while talking to someone, you use audible and visible symbols in order to communicate meaning in the minds of your listeners. You may use conversation to showcase the strengths of your business offerings, to express ourselves, establish our individuality, and show the world what we are. If you fail to express your feelings, reactions, responses, or views properly to the other person, we would fail as individual.

Types of Conversation: Formal and Informal

There are two types of conversation: formal and informal. As shown in Fig. 5.2, formal conversation differs from informal conversation in content, approach, style, attitude, and in language. Formal conversation is the type of conversation that we have in formal situations while informal conversation involves exchange of personal information with friends and relatives. Formal conversation may include making inquiries and exchanging information about goods and products, and the transaction of business, professional and other official work. Informal conversation, on the other hand, includes greetings, simple social exchanges and general inquiries during social interactions and everyday informal situations.

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE SALES INTERACTIONS

As the exchange of information, ideas, opinions, and feelings in a sales interaction takes place through speech, one of the pre-requisites of success in a sales interaction is the ability to speak confidently and convincingly. In fact, a vital part of every successful sales interaction is high quality oral communication. In brief, there are five elements to effective sales interaction. These elements include effective listening,

Formal Conversation	Informal Conversation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Formal content ● Always factual ● Formal words and expressions ● Accepted rules and customs ● Fixed norms of behaviour associated with the conduct of official matters ● Formal elements of conversational interaction ● Structured transitions and turns ● Always formal in style ● Objective approach ● Logically organised and structured 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Personal and emotional content ● May be emotional or factual ● Colloquial words and expressions ● No accepted rules ● No fixed norms ● No formal elements ● Abrupt transitions ● Both formal and informal in style ● Both objective and subjective ● Not always structured

Figure 5.2 *Differences between Formal and Informal conversation*

appropriate language use, clarity of expression, positive speech attitudes and adjustments, and positive nonverbal clues. They briefly are described below:

1. Effective Listening

As all comments and observations during a sales interaction must be heard and understood, listening skills are probably one of the most important communication skills that you need in order to be successful as a retail professional. When you take part in a sales interaction, you cannot contribute to the stated purposes of the communication unless you are listening properly. By participating as an active listener, you may contribute effectively to the sales deliberations. Moreover, active participation as a listener in a sales interaction and the discussions and deliberations that might follow can make you a successful sales leader because a good sales leader is a good listener.

2. Appropriateness of Language

A customer may judge your competence by assessing your ability to use appropriate words and expressions during a sales interaction. Appropriateness of language demands that there should be no errors of grammar, or usage and there is a *precision* in the use of words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs. You must be certain that you are expressing your ideas precisely and exactly so that your listener is able to understand you without confusion and misunderstanding. You should be simple and concise. Avoid difficult words, unfamiliar phrases or flowery language.

3. Clarity of Expression

Clarity is the art of making your meaning clear to your audience. The secret of clear expression is clear thinking. Sloppy, illogical, or incomplete thinking may cause lack of clarity during a sales interaction. If you are confused, you will confuse others. So, think clearly and positively. In addition, use direct, clear and specific language during. Never use roundabout constructions, indirect expressions, exaggeration, artificial eloquence, and ornamentation in your speech.

4. Positive Speech Attitudes

Your speech attitude is very significant during a sales interaction and it sometimes determines either your success or failure. The customer usually notices and evaluates your speech attitudes and adjustments. Are you a responsible communicator or a careless speaker? Are you mature and dignified or immature and apologetic? Are you positive towards your listeners or antagonistic to them? Are you a relaxed speaker or a tense one? Are you sincere to other speakers or just indifferent? The customer may closely watch these aspects. So, reflect positive speech attitudes and adjustments during a sales interaction.

5. Positive Nonverbal Clues

As nonverbal clues such as eye contact, body movements, gestures, facial expressions, etc. can speak louder than words, the customers interpret your nonverbal behaviour during a sales interaction. They generally evaluate the body language clues of the sales person to determine several factors such as accuracy of the information being shared, nervousness, cooperation, frustration, weakness, insecurity, self-confidence, defensiveness, etc. So, be careful while using nonverbal messages by recognising the power of nonverbal clues during a sales interaction, and use them effectively. Your body language must reflect your self-confidence, cooperation, positive attitude, openness of mind, and sincerity.

IMPROVING FLUENCY AND SELF-EXPRESSION

Fluency is the most important characteristic of effective speech. What does this term mean? What is fluency? You might have heard this term so many times. Your English language teacher might have told you that , “you are fluent.”, or “you are not fluent.”. Let us try to understand the term *fluency* and the skills that you need in order to achieve fluency in speech.

Fluency is the natural flow of words without any unnecessary pauses and repetition. This natural flow of words or smoothness of expression can come from the ability to compose and speak meaningful utterances by using appropriate vocabulary and grammar skills. Fluent and expressive speech normally depends on the range of vocabulary appropriately used, as poor vocabulary will cause lack of fluency. Fluency also depends on the appropriate use of macro-skills of grammar and pronunciation such as subject-verb agreement, tense formation, clause linkage, use of transitional words, basic intonation patterns, rhythm, etc. Moreover, you should be confident of the content of your speech in order to be fluent.

Moreover, in order to improve your self-expression and achieve desired clarity and fluency, you need to improve your articulation, pronunciation, accent and intonation, and voice quality. These four important aspects are briefly described below.

Clear Articulation

The quality of your voice and articulation plays an important role during a sales interaction. You can easily impress your listeners if you have a cheerful voice with good articulation. Avoid a slow or weak voice, a monotonous tone, and an indistinct articulation. Do not speak too fast. Be slow, clear and distinct.

In order to speak English fluently, clearly and confidently, you have to improve your articulation. Articulation is a set of speech habits established over a long period. It is basically your ability to modify voice or breath with tongue, teeth, lips, and other organs of speech in order to produce speech sounds. Good articulation helps you to speak more distinctly and focus attention on your message. These are the two essential conditions of effective speaking.

You should learn to produce English sounds correctly. Every language has a set of speech sounds. English has 44 speech sounds that include *twelve pure vowels, eight diphthongs, and twenty four consonants*. Some of these speech sounds might not be present in your mother tongue and you may find it difficult to articulate them. You need regular practice so that you are able to articulate them correctly. Practice articulation of difficult English vowel and consonant sounds. Change faulty speech patterns and practice appropriate and correct speech patterns. Moreover, you need to get proper ear-training to be sensitive to sounds.

‘Good’ Pronunciation

An important aspect of improving expression is learning ‘good’ pronunciation. Pronunciation is the way of uttering or speaking (words, sounds, etc.), and ‘good’ pronunciation is a way of speaking which ordinary people find easy to understand. You will naturally like to know what ‘bad pronunciation’ is. Daniel Jones defines ‘bad’ pronunciation as ‘a way of talking which is difficult for most people to understand’. I am not using the word ‘incorrect pronunciation’ here because there is nothing like ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’ pronunciation.

You should consult a good dictionary to find acceptable English pronunciation of words. As dictionaries give the pronunciation of a word in phonemic symbols, you should be familiar with phonemic transcription. If you know phonemic transcription, you can find out the pronunciation of a word by yourselves without asking the teacher. In addition, you should learn effective pronunciation techniques.

Accent and Intonation

You have to improve your accent. You should know that unlike most Indian language which are syllabic, English is a stressed language. In syllabic languages, such as Hindi or Bengali, each syllable receives equal importance. However, English pronunciation focuses on specific stressed words while the non-stressed words or syllables are spoken fast. This means that the stressed words/syllables stand out from

the rest, are usually said more loudly, on a different pitch, and are held for a longer time than the other word/syllable or words/syllables.

Intonation is the variation of the pitch of the voice. When you speak, you can notice the variations in the level at which your voice is pitched. Sometimes the pitch of your voice rises, sometimes it falls, and at other times it remains level. You should learn correct intonation patterns. It is essential to improve your self-expression.

Voice Quality

You should improve the quality of your voice and learn to adjust or vary the tone or pitch of your voice (i.e., voice modulation). As voice modulation gives variety to oral delivery, it can improve your expression during oral presentations, speeches, debates, conferences, group discussions and meetings. Having an impressive voice may be a gift of God but do not worry, you can improve the quality of your voice by proper voice training and regular practice.

You should first analyse the quality of your own voice by critically listening to your recorded voice, or asking someone to listen to you and comment on your voice. Then, identify the weak points of your voice, (e.g., your voice is too low, or too harsh, etc.) Try to remove those weaknesses. Take help of your friends, classmates, teachers, etc. Cultivate sensitivity to sounds and voices and get proper ear-training. Practise modulating voice according to meaning and intention and learn to vocalise your feelings.

HANDLING DIFFICULT CUSTOMERS

Who are Difficult Customers?

Difficult customers are simply those customers who are angry with you and your services. They do not want to be friendly or pleasant and they are keen to argue with you about anything that they do not like. They are the ones who might cause your blood pressure to go up and may sometimes make you really frustrated with your job. They might be rough. Any customer can become a difficult customer, and you have no choice. In retail business your customers are one of your most important assets. You cannot take them lightly or ignore them.

If you don't deal with difficult customers wisely and tactfully, you may face many problems including strained relationships with the customers, wasted time, and declining sales, bad reputation, and so on. It is, therefore, important for you to handle difficult customers effectively.

Why Handle Difficult Customers?

Many retail professionals will prefer to ignore a difficult customer rather than facing the situation because they believe that it is not worth trying. They may consider it

a waste of time as they feel that the customer will not change despite their arguments. They find it easy to accept the situation as it is because they are not prepared to positively manage the outcome of the situation. Well, you have to understand that handling difficult customers is challenging but it is worth taking that challenge. By handling difficult customers positively, you achieve certain basic objectives that go a long way in achieving your professional goal. Thus, effective handling of difficult customers enables you to:

- understand your customers better,
- build a sustainable relationship with customers,
- retain customers,
- prevent difficult situations from escalating into bitter fights,
- be sensitive to customer needs and requirements,
- strengthen your business,
- engage in more productive customer interactions,
- have a sense of self-respect, and
- encash the “life-long value” of customers.

Managing Difficult Customers

Customers are very important for you and you can not afford to ignore the difficult customers because they have the potential to negatively impact your brand as well as your business image. Research has established that an unhappy customer will express his or her unhappiness with your products and services to other customers and that can be very bad for your business.

There is no doubt that handling and managing difficult customers requires real hard work. But as a retail professional it is part and parcel of your job and you need to know how to do it. In fact, you *can* master this important professional responsibility. To do so, you need to:

- Identify difficult customers
- Understand your role in handling difficult customers
- Identify the problems and concerns of these customers and address them with sincerity and honesty
- Analyse the factors that lead a customer to get dissatisfied with your services and products
- Understand the emotions of unhappy customers
- Devise a strategy to communicate with disgruntled customers
- Explore various options for solving customer relationship problems
- Once you have identified the best solution to a customer relationship problem, implement it fast
- Take your team into confidence while dealing with difficult customers

CHAPTER REVIEW

Managing customer interactions effectively is an essential component of retail business. These interactions may occur through many channels including face-to-face customer interactions, the web, manuals, catalogues, and e-mail, etc. Although the internet is a very important channel of customer interactions, face-to-face oral communication with the customers remain the most important.

Sales oral communication process is an important form of customer interaction. It includes five factors, i.e., message, audience, speech style, message encoding, and feedback. It is, therefore, important for sales persons to improve their conversation skills.

There are five elements to effective sales interaction. These elements include effective listening, appropriate language use, clarity of expression, positive speech attitudes and adjustments, and positive nonverbal clues.

Improving self-expression and achieving desired clarity and fluency is also important for effective retail communication. You need to improve your articulation, pronunciation, accent and intonation, and voice quality.

ACTIVITIES

Explore it Further

In order to understand the topics discussed in this chapter, you need to read further and check websites to answer the following questions:

1. What are customer interactions?
2. What are the uses of different customer interaction channels?
3. How can internet be used to promote sales?
4. What are the opportunities that effective customer interactions provide?
5. How can oral communication be effectively used to develop long-term relationships with customers?
6. What are the oral communication skills that retail professionals need to learn to get professional success?

Experience It

In order to get a feel of customer interactions, you need to develop a project to make a consumer needs analysis of a few products that your organisation is marketing. Discuss the project with your colleagues and peers to get a more holistic view of consumer needs analysis as a marketing tool. Prepare the project and present it before your team members to get their opinions and suggestions.

APPLICATION EXERCISE

I. Assess your understanding of the key points discussed in this chapter by answering the following ten questions:

1. The success of customer interactions largely depends on
 - (a) the retail organisation's understanding of its own products and services.
 - (b) the retail organisation's understanding of the customer's complaints.
 - (c) the retail organisation's understanding of the customer's wants and needs at the time of the offer.
 - (d) the retail organisation's understanding of different channels of customer interactions.
2. Which of the following statements is not true?
 - (a) Consumers visit the internet sites in order to know and understand about products and services that they want to buy.
 - (b) Whenever these customers want something or need some information about a product or service, they become highly interactive.
 - (c) Consumers not only visit the relevant websites but also upload relevant information, brochures, videos in order to get the maximum information about the product or service they are interested in.
 - (d) Customers never get involved in the process of multi-media marketing.
3. Which of the following statements is not true?
 - (a) Effective consumer needs analysis can help in developing consumer-driven products and services.

- (b) Customer interactions provide an opportunity to the retail organisations to develop relationship with a customer who is keen to share information regarding his or her wants and needs.
 - (c) Customer interactions can be used to develop understanding of the consumer mind to customise products and services.
 - (d) Customers' willingness to become involved with the marketing process cannot be used to develop long-term relationships.
4. Which of the following does not describe the oral communication process?
- (a) It is the purposeful process by which speakers communicate meaning in the minds of their listeners.
 - (b) It involves the use of audible and visible symbols.
 - (c) It is simple but rigid.
 - (d) It creates messages that stimulate in listeners' meanings that bring about the desired change in their understanding or opinions.
5. Which of the following statements about the oral communication speech process is TRUE?
- (a) While communicating a message orally, the speaker is not concerned with the selection of a message.
 - (b) Speech style depends on the purpose of speaking and the relation between the speaker/s and the listener/s.
 - (c) Professional situations such as sales presentations, seminars, conferences, meetings, discussions, etc. do not need an audience analysis.
 - (d) Encoding in speaking does not involve using non-verbal signals.
6. Which of the following will make you an effective conversationalist?
- (a) Passive listening
 - (b) Flexible approach
 - (c) Difficult and flowery language
 - (d) Ability to argue aggressively

II. Study the following table and match different aspects of improving sales interactions (left column) with appropriate strategies (right column):

<i>Aspects of improving self-expression</i>	<i>Strategies</i>
A. Clarity of Expression	I. Express your ideas precisely and exactly and avoid difficult words, unfamiliar phrases or flowery language.
B. Language Use	II. Be relaxed, and project a dignified image while speaking by being positive and sincere towards your listeners.
C. Speech attitudes and adjustments	III. Your body language must reflect your self-confidence, cooperation, positive attitude, openness of mind, and sincerity.
D. Nonverbal Clues	IV. Use direct, clear and specific language and avoid roundabout constructions, indirect expressions, exaggeration, artificial eloquence, and ornamentation in your speech.

KEY TO APPLICATION EXERCISE

- I. (c), (d), (d), (c), (b), (b)
- II. A-IV, B-I, C-II, D-III

CHAPTER SIX

6

**Effective Listening
for Retail
Salespersons**

Let us Understand

Madan Chatterjee was working as a sales trainee in a big store in Indore. He was very happy when he saw Mr and Mrs Srivastava coming to the store, as they were regular customers and they liked Madan also. Madan immediately went to them and greeted them. "Good morning, sir, good morning madam. You are welcome to the store. What can I do for you?". The old couple was happy to see Madan as they liked him. "Morning my son, I have come to buy a lot of things from your store as we are going to visit our son in Pune next week and we want to take so many things with us," responded a beaming Mr Srivastava. "Sir, this is your store. We have everything and we have announced new discounts for our old customers. Please tell me what are the things that you need." Mr Srivastava replied, "I would first like you to listen why I want them". Suddenly Madan's mobile started ringing, and he picked it up. It was his GM's call who wanted him to meet him immediately. Madan did not know what to do. He just called Sheffali, a senior sales girl in the store and requested her to attend to the couple.

He told he would meet the GM and come back. Sheffali attended to the couple and Madan went to the GM. It took him almost half an hour as the GM wanted to inform him about a few new schemes that they were launching. When he came back, Mr and Mrs Srivastava were gone. He asked Sheffali about them, and Sheffali responded casually, "The oldman did not want to buy anything as he was not interested to listen to me when I was talking about all the interesting products that we are selling. He just went away. I do not know what went wrong". Madan knew what went wrong but he did not tell it to Sheffali.

What according to you went wrong? Just think.

First, Madan made a mistake when he left his customers to another salesperson. Second, he left them to Sheffali, who was more interested in talking about all the interesting products that the company was selling rather than listening to Mr Srivastava who needed someone who could listen to him before he decided to buy certain things.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you

- ✓ Understand the importance of listening skills for sales
- ✓ Identify elements of listening process
- ✓ Differentiate between hearing and listening
- ✓ Identify elements of effective listening for retail sales
- ✓ Analyse the impact of good listening on sales
- ✓ Describe the interrelationship between customer focus and listening
- ✓ Develop effective listening strategies
- ✓ Identify barriers to listening.

IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING SKILLS FOR SALES

Today's retail business is characterised by ongoing information exchanges between the retail professionals and customers. This one-to-one communication is very important for the success of the business. Understanding this information, as it flows within a dialogue between two people is fundamental to improving one's selling effectiveness and that is why listening plays a significant role in this one-to-one communication.

The objective of every retail professional is to convince the customer to buy a product while the objective of every customer is to get value for money. Although

there is no obvious conflict between the two objectives, it may sometimes lead to an explicit psychological competition between customers and sales persons. It can get worse if they do not listen to each other.

It is an established fact that we think faster than we listen. This may lead to a situation which can go against the basic purpose of selling. While an average customer is talking about his needs and concerns at an average rate of 100 to 125 words a minute, the average sales person is thinking at a much more rapid rate. It means that the salesperson's brain must be working with other ideas than the ones being expressed by the customer. And this is not a very happy situation for any sales person.

There are several studies that show that listening plays a much more important role in customer retention than perceived by many sales professionals. The better a sales person is at listening, the more the chances that he will be successful in his or her sales efforts. Customers are usually happy with sales persons who not only talk but also listen.

The challenge for all retail professionals is to learn how to focus hundred percent on what the customer is saying rather than being carried away by his or her own ideas. It is also important that the retail persons learn the art of not constructing their ideas and responses during listening. This is easier said than done.

THE LISTENING PROCESS

Listening is a process of receiving and interpreting the spoken word. It involves recognising what is said and comprehending the matter, i.e., understanding the main and subsidiary points as well as links between different parts of speech. This means that effective listening involves not only recognising unit boundaries phonologically, but also the recognition of false starts, pauses, hesitations, stress, intonation and rhythm patterns. While receiving and interpreting the spoken word, the listener is concerned with four factors, i.e., sensing, message decoding or interpreting, evaluating and response, as illustrated in Fig. 6.1.

Listening begins with physical hearing of the message and taking note of it. Sensing is, thus, the first step of the listening process. You hear sounds and concentrate on them in order to receive the message. You recognise unit boundaries phonologically as it is important for you to recognise phonological differences. Once you are able to recognise the sound patterns, you have to decode and interpret the message.

Decoding or interpreting in listening refers to the process of changing the coded message into information. It involves understanding the spoken language. Although interpretation of a verbal message may be influenced by your social, cultural, educational, professional and intellectual frames of reference, verbal messages use a common language code, which you can easily decode because if you are not able to decode or understand the message, communication fails. For example, if you do

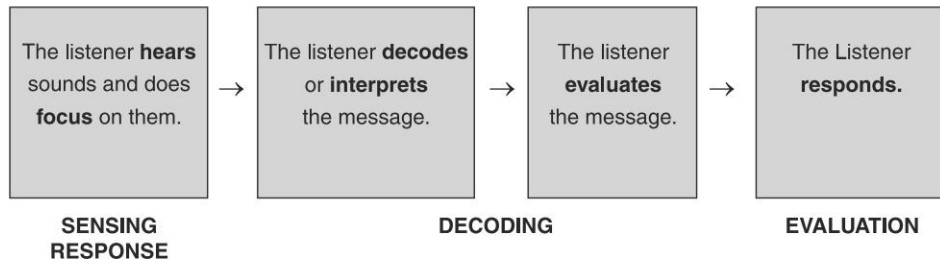


Figure 6.1 *The Listening Process*

not understand French, you can not decode a message encoded in French. The process of message decoding in listening also involves the recognition of false starts, pauses, hesitations, stress, intonation and rhythm patterns.

After you have decoded and interpreted a message, you evaluate its significance and draw appropriate conclusions from it. In order to evaluate a verbal message correctly, you have to separate facts from opinions, relevant information from irrelevant information, examples from ideas, and explicit information from implicit information. You have also to analyze and understand the intention and attitude of the speaker. When you listen, you have to construct a parallel message based on the sound clues received from the speaker. You should be aware of your own prejudices and biases so that you avoid making wrong conclusions.

Response is the action or reaction of the listener to the message. It is the last stage of listening. If you have analysed, interpreted, and evaluated the message correctly, your response will be appropriate. Your response makes the communication more effective as it clarifies the message and helps the speaker to know whether you have understood the message or not.

HEARING AND LISTENING

It is important to understand the distinction between *listening* and *hearing*. *Hearing* happens automatically as it is an involuntary physical act. It does not require the conscious involvement of the listener. When you move on a railway platform, you hear several voices. You do not listen to them. Suddenly there is an announcement of the arrival of your train. You listen to it. When you listen, you pay conscious attention to what is being said. Figure 6.2 summarizes the differences between listening and hearing.

LISTENING TO UNDERSTAND THE CUSTOMER

Today's successful retail salesperson is ultimately an effective persuader who can persuade the customer to buy the products that he or she is selling. This definitely requires a total understanding of the customer's needs, requirements, concerns, and feelings. Some of the sales persons have the wrong impression that they can sell a

Listening	Hearing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● voluntary ● requires conscious efforts ● active process ● the listener plays a very active part ● a two-way interactive process engaging the speaker and the listener 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● involuntary ● happens automatically ● passive process ● the listener plays a passive part ● a one-way process

Figure 6.2 *Differences between Listening and Hearing*

product by effectively presenting the product to the customer. However, it has been invariably found that how a sales person presents the product to the customer is relatively unimportant when compared to how and what they listen to. Thus the main purpose of listening is comprehension.

Comprehension is the act of understanding or the power of the mind to understand. Listening comprehension is the act of understanding an oral message. Being a complex process that involves perceiving and interpreting the sounds correctly, as well as, understanding the explicit and implied meaning of the oral message, listening comprehension includes several skills and sub-skills. In order to understand your customers better, you need to improve three sub-skills which include speech decoding, comprehending, and oral discourse analysis.

Speech Decoding

Speech decoding is integral to listening comprehension. It involves sound perception and recognition, word recognition, accent recognition.

Sound Perception and Recognition

Decoding of verbal messages requires the ability to perceive and recognise speech sounds and sound patterns accurately as well as the ability to recognise the way sounds combine to form syllables and utterances. You have to be attentive to the sounds that you hear because any lapse or mistake may lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding. Moreover, large number of competing sounds from the environment may interfere with your concentration and if you are not careful, you may not perceive sounds accurately.

Word Recognition

Speech decoding during listening also involves the ability to recognise words accurately, understand definitions of the words and phrases being used, recognise the way words are used in context, and identify discourse markers and attention signals.

Accent Recognition

In order to decode a verbal message, you have to recognise stress and intonation

patterns. In addition, you need to identify pauses, false starts, hesitations, and turn-taking in a conversation, discussion or other transaction involving more than one speaker.

Comprehending

Comprehending a verbal message involves the ability to

- identify the central theme, main ideas, and supporting details;
- concentrate and understand long stretches of talk;
- identify the level of formality;
- deduce incomplete information; and
- decode unfamiliar vocabulary.

Oral Discourse Analysis

Oral discourse analysis is the process of identifying relationships among different units within the speech or oral message. It includes critical skills, attitude analysis, and inferential skills.

Critical Skills

When you listen to a structured talk, speech or presentation, you need to analyse it in order to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information, factual and non-factual information, examples and ideas, etc. Critical skills are, thus, essential to effective listening comprehension.

Attitude Analysis

You may have to analyse a verbal message in order to understand the speaker's attitude to you and the topic under discussion. This is more important in meetings, discussions, and conferences. Attitude analysis includes the following skills:

- Understanding the speaker's attitude
- Identifying a speaker's attitude
- Evaluating a speaker's attitude

Inferential Skills

Effective listening comprehension involves understanding not only the explicit meaning of a verbal message but also the explicit meaning because the speaker may not speak everything so explicitly and clearly. Thus, you may have to analyse a verbal message in order to draw inferences and conclusions. This may involve interpreting the non-verbal clues and body language of the speaker.

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE LISTENING FOR RETAIL SALES

What is effective listening for a sales person? This is the most important question that a sales person must be able to answer. Anyway, the answer of this question has to do with what are known as the five A's of effective listening.

The first **A** of listening effectiveness is **absorb**. By absorbing what is said you work to consciously understand what the speaker is saying without judging it. We need to focus on the message by avoiding the natural tendency of approving or disapproving what is being said. The purpose is to absorb what is being said rather than to evaluate it.

Effective listeners concentrate on the important parts of the message that they listen. They think ahead, hypothesise, and **anticipate**. This is the second **A** of effective listening. Effective listeners try to anticipate where a talk/conversation/discussion/presentation is leading to so that they are able to determine the conclusion in advance of their required response. This allows them better absorption and understanding of the message.

The third **A** of listening effectiveness is **analyse**. By analysing what is said you work to consciously interpret what the speaker is saying and that makes you understand the message better and prepares you to give an effective response. You need to analyze what you listen in order to make mental commentary and develop a line of thought. You have to determine necessary action as the output is to perform some physical activity, make an oral response, impart or solicit information, etc. Analysis also refers to your ability to understand implicit messages as well as explicit ones without asking the speaker to repeat what he or she said. This adds clarity to the entire process of listening.

Effective listeners also pay attention to a speaker's speech and concentrate on the theme, main points, and supporting details of the message. By concentrating on the important parts of the message that they listen, they are able to **assimilate** what is being said. They mentally summarise the major points communicated by the speaker, and are able to reaffirm their interpretation of the points made back to the speaker.

Finally, effective listeners **appreciate** the message that they receive. This means that they are able to welcome the message by being grateful to the speaker for sharing information, ideas, opinions, suggestions, etc. Assimilation also involves paying attention to the speaker's body talk and appreciating the paralinguistic aspects of oral communication. This strengthens and completes the listening process as the listener is not only listening to words, he or she is listening to the non-verbal cues also.

The following table presents the differences between effective and ineffective listening. Study the following table to understand these differences:

<i>Effective Listening</i>	<i>Ineffective Listening</i>
You are aware of a clear specific purpose of listening and you are motivated to listen.	You have no clear purpose and you have no motivation to listen to the speaker.
You understand the language of the speaker.	You find it difficult to understand the language of the speaker.
The content of the oral message is accessible to you because of your familiarity with the content.	The content is unfamiliar and far removed from your knowledge and experience.
You pay attention to a person's speech and concentrate on the theme, main points, and supporting details of the message.	You do not pay attention to a person's speech and are not able to concentrate on the theme, main points, and supporting details of the message.
As you concentrate on the important parts of the message, you think ahead, hypothesise, and predict.	You do not think ahead as you pay the same amount of attention to all parts of the message.
You ask questions for clarifications to ensure that you have understood the speaker.	You do not enquire from the speaker whether you have heard accurately or not.
You have and use background information to help understand the lecture or speech.	You do not have or use background information.
You interpret and analyse while you listen.	You do not interpret and analyze while you listen.
You are able to use different strategies for different kinds of oral discourses.	You are not able to use different strategies for different kinds of oral discourses.

EFFECTIVE LISTENING STRATEGIES

Most salespersons do not work hard at developing effective listening strategies to understand their customers. They focus nearly all their energy on talking and describing what they want to sell and put less effort on trying to know and understand the needs, as well as, concerns of the customers. Moreover, they do not have a systematic approach to listening and, thereby, face difficulties in understanding a customer, a sales presentation or a discussion. They suffer from lack of concentration, ineffective listening and poor customer understanding.

Listening effectiveness largely depends on an efficient method of listening. As you have to ensure high degree of understanding and remembrance, you should follow a systematic approach to listening. For example, you are going to listen to a product presentation by a company that supplies you most of the products that you sell and you want to listen to it. In order to take full advantage of this opportunity, you need to follow a systematic listening method and apply appropriate listening strategies for better comprehension.

In order to improve your listening comprehension, you have to follow some basic tips of good listening and learn active listening techniques. In addition, you need to develop listening strategies for specific listening tasks such as presentation, comprehension, two-way interactions, group interaction, customer consultations, sales negotiations, discussions, etc.

TEN RULES OF THUMB FOR GOOD LISTENING

Remember the following *ten rules of thumb for good listening*. These suggestions can help you improve your listening effectiveness.

1. Talking	X
2. Thinking	X
3. Distractions	X
4. Mind wandering	X
5. Putting the speaker at ease	✓
6. Pre-judgement	X
7. Patience	✓
8. Being angry	X
9. Empathizing with the speaker	✓
10. Taking notes	✓

Figure 6.3 *Rules of Good Listening*

1. Stop Talking

Do not talk while you are listening. You cannot be a speaker and a listener at the same time. Accept your role of listener and allow the speaker to talk. Forget about your response to the listener and concentrate on the speaker's words.

2. Stop Thinking

It is not enough to keep your mouth shut while you are listening. You have to stop thinking too. You cannot listen effectively while you are thinking. You will not be able to focus 100 per cent on what the speaker is telling.

3. Remove Distractions

In order to focus 100 per cent on the person speaking, avoid all kinds of distractions. Do not create any distractions yourself and do not allow others to interrupt.

4. Do not let Your Mind Wander

One of the main causes of our listening inefficiency is the slowness of speech. We can listen faster than the speaker can speak. This lag time may make your mind wander or daydream. Avoid this by concentrating on each word of the speaker.

5. Put the Speaker at Ease

Provide a conducive environment to the speaker in order to enable him/her to be at ease. If the speaker is not comfortable, he/she will not be able to speak clearly.

6. Do Not Pre-judge

Give the speaker a chance to complete what he/she has to say. Pre-judgement closes the mind and does not allow you to perceive the speaker impartially. You can make proper judgement only after you have fully comprehended the information.

7. Be Patient

Allow the speaker sufficient time and do not interrupt until the speaker takes a pause and invites you to do so. Patience is the key to good listening. You may be in a hurry as you have to go somewhere, or do something but good listening demands that you listen to him/her patiently.

8. Do Not be Angry

Control your temper while listening. You may not like what the speaker is telling, or you may completely disagree with his/her point of view but good listening demands that you listen to him/her calmly without making any fuss.

9. Empathise with the Speaker

In order to understand the speaker's perspective and appreciate his/her point of view, try to put yourself in the speaker's position.

10. Take Notes

You should take notes if you want to keep a record of what was said and want to use it at a later stage.

CUSTOMER FOCUS AND LISTENING

Listening can be with Customer Focus (LCF) or Without Customer Focus (LWCF). Listening without customer focus is a passive listening process of just absorbing the message encoded in the spoken word without any involvement. In this kind of listening, the listener plays no role. On the other hand, Listening with Customer Focus (LCF) is active listening, which is a dynamic, interactive, communicative process in which the listener

- pays attention,
- shows interest in the customer,
- takes note of the customer's body language,
- avoids distractions, and
- responds non-verbally to encourage the customer.

Active listening is what you should strive at. As active listening is interactive and productive, it facilitates proper interaction and produces new understandings. It promotes more effective salesperson-customer relationships, and helps you take

advantage of opportunities you might miss by being a passive listener. Active listening requires conscious efforts on your part and demands concentration, involvement and responsibility.

In order to become an active listener, you have to adopt a set of listening practices that may help you understand the meaning of an oral message. Read the following guidelines carefully.

Attentive Listening

Unlike a passive listener, you should show interest in the speaker and the speech. Show desire to listen and be interested in what the speaker is telling. Do not show nonverbal signals such as audible snoring or rolling eyes that indicate that you do not want to listen. Your posture must reflect your interest and your body language should indicate your keenness to listen.

Listen to the speaker patiently and carefully. Be alert and pay attention while listening. Passive listeners generally listen to others in an unconscious manner without paying attention. By paying attention to both content as well as presentation, you can understand the speaker in a better way.

Using Nonverbal Skills

Use appropriate non-verbal skills to indicate interest and understanding. Maintain eye contact with the speaker. Help and encourage the speaker by giving positive body signals such as an occasional head nod or a smile. You may also send nonverbal signals to indicate comprehension. You should also pay attention to body language of the speaker in order to understand and interpret non-verbal clues for signs of stress, anxiety, excitement, enthusiasm, or boredom. This will help you analyse the verbal message in the right perspective.

Improving Speaker's Contribution

As an active listener, you should take appropriate steps to improve speaker's contribution. You should encourage the speaker to express his/her ideas clearly by indicating understanding and appreciation of his/her point of view.

Asking Questions

Asking questions forms an important part of the listening process as it leads to a good rapport between the speaker and the listener. By asking relevant questions you can get the maximum information from a speaker. Moreover, asking questions shows that you are listening and that encourages the speaker. Don't wait to be asked. Ask relevant clarifying questions.

You may ask open-ended or closed questions. Open-ended questions provide the speaker an opportunity to elaborate a point whereas closed questions ask the speaker to be more exact and specific.

Examples of open-ended questions

1. What are the advantages of this deal?
2. What's your personal opinion about the problem?
3. What do you think about this proposal?

Examples of closed questions

1. Is this deal acceptable to the management?
2. Are we facing this problem for the first time?
3. Will you accept this proposal?

While asking questions, do not argue or be rigid on a question. Give the listener the liberty to handle the question the way he/she wants. Here are some tips on how to ask questions:

- Ask questions at the appropriate points. Do not jump to questions. Wait for the right time.
- Choose your questions carefully. The purpose of asking a question should be to get clarifications and indicate comprehension.
- Use simple language to phrase your question.
- Ask one question at a time.
- Wait for an answer patiently.
- Listen carefully to the answer and do not jump to conclusions.

Clarifying

Clarify what the speaker is saying by paraphrasing what has been said or summarising your understanding of key points. This way you can show that you are listening carefully and paying attention.

Analysing

As an active listener, you should interpret and analyse what you listen in order to

- understand both explicit as well as implicit meaning of an oral message,
- differentiate between ideas, opinions, feelings and facts as expressed by the speaker,
- infer the meaning of unfamiliar words from contextual or internal clues, and
- draw inferences and conclusions from the speech.

LISTENING IN CUSTOMER INTERACTION

You may have to listen during two-way customer interaction that play an important role in the selling process. Listening plays a key role in these interactions as the output of listening in all these interactions is to make considered oral responses. You need to develop effective listening strategies for these communicative situations. The following suggestions can help you improve your listening effectiveness during face-to-face conversational interactions.

Work Hard at Listening

Most of us are not really good listeners. Thus, it is very important to work hard to become a good listener. In fact, every chance to listen to someone provides you an opportunity to learn something. Be actively involved and try to make every listening experience a memorable learning experience.

Listen for Conversational Signals

During a conversation, discussion, or other transaction involving more than one speaker, you have to take a turn at the appropriate moment. No body will ask you to do so. Sometime you may go on waiting for your turn to come and it never comes. You have to listen for conversational signals indicating the possibility of starting your own turn so that you are able to take a turn at the appropriate moment.

Be Careful while Labelling

Whenever you listen to someone for the first time, you start forming impressions about him/her. These impressions about the background, nature, qualities, social standing, character of the speaker may be true or false. As these impressions lead to changes in your behaviour towards the speaker, you should be careful while forming such impressions.

Use Attention Signals

In order to indicate that you are participating actively in a conversational interaction, you must use appropriate attention signals. These attention signals could be receptive expressions and utterances such as *'oh yes'*, *'yes'*, *'fine'*, *'of course'*, *'well'*, *'O.K.'*, *'That's fine'*, *'no problem'*, *'really'*, *'oh no'*, or just informal grunts such as *'uhuh's'*, *'mm's'*, *'un-hum'*, etc.

Adjust Your Pace of Listening

As mentioned before, the speed of listening is faster than the speed of speaking. This lag time may prove boring. This may lead to a lack of concentration and may result

in poor listening comprehension. So, you should adjust your pace of listening by reviewing what the speaker is saying during this lag time. Moreover, while you are waiting for a speaker's next idea, concentrate on the implications of what the speaker is talking about.

LISTENING TO STRUCTURED PRESENTATIONS

In order to understand a structured presentation (i.e., lectures, talks, speeches, oral reports, etc.) or any other formal oral discourse, you will require effective listening strategies in order to understand the subject-content and language patterns of the oral message. These techniques include pre-listening analysis, predicting, use of background knowledge, intensive listening, and ability to understand the links between different parts of speech. In order to become an effective listener, you need to learn and polish these listening techniques.

Pre-Listening Analysis

Pre-listening analysis includes determining the purpose of listening and knowing the speaker or presenter.

Determining the Purpose

The most important aspect of your pre-listening analysis is determining what you want to achieve by listening to the speaker. Do you want to listen to the speaker to get a broad understanding of a topic of your interest? Do you intend to obtain specific information? Do you want to be aware of the opinions and reactions of the speaker to a specific situation or problem? Do you want to understand specific instruction? Whether your purpose is to get facts or opinions, understand attitude or perspective, you must have a clear idea of what do you want to remember at the end of the conversation/talk/lecture/speech/presentation/seminar/workshop.

Knowing your Speaker

The next essential element in pre-listening analysis is analysing the speaker. If you know the speaker well, you will be able to make appropriate adaptations for better understanding. Is the speaker an expert of the subject, or just a generalist? What is his/her background and specific qualifications that make him/her fit for the presentation? Have you ever heard him before? Is he or she a native speaker? Answers to these questions will give you a fairly good idea of the speaker and help you in better understanding.

Predicting

Predicting is a listening strategy for lecture comprehension. It is the process of guessing the information that you expect to receive during a presentation or talk.

You should be able to think ahead, hypothesise and predict. Predictions about the content of a verbal message is generally based on the title, sub-titles, visual aids used by the speaker in the beginning of the talk, etc.

Predicting includes various micro-skills including the ability to:

- guess the information that the lecture contains,
- use the title of the lecture/talk/presentation to predict roughly the central theme and the focus of the verbal message,
- scan the use of visual aids in the opening part of the lecture to predict the nature and scope of content, and
- identify oral clues used by the speaker.

You should try to guess the overall content of the speech. Guess the information that you expect to receive. The more you are familiar to the content, the more you understand the oral message. For example, if you are going to listen to a presentation by the head of your organisation at the Annual day meeting of your organisation, you may ask yourself the following questions:

- What is he/she going to talk about?
- Is he/she going to talk about our organization in general?
- Is he/she going to talk about any problem that the company is facing?
- Will he discuss the plans of the organisation?
- Is he going to tell something that I already know?
- Is he going to talk about the growth of the organisation?
- How long is he going to talk?
- Will he ask questions?

Answers to such questions will make you develop the needed interest and motivation that are essential for effective listening. You should also develop a positive attitude to the listener and the topic.

Using Background Knowledge

Once you have guessed the information that you are likely to receive, you may recall related information. You should pool your 'background knowledge' to get a general idea of what you are going to listen. A familiar topic will make you more interested in the talk and you will actively listen to it resulting in total comprehension. For example, you are going to listen to a presentation on "New Marketing Strategies of the Company". If you use your background knowledge about marketing strategies being used in the company at present, you will find it easy to understand as well as to respond to the presentation. Even if the speaker introduces new ideas and concepts, you will find it easy to follow. Moreover, the whole exercise of using background information will provide you the needed motivation essential for an active listener.

Intensive Listening

Once you have determined your purpose, analysed your speaker, and used prediction techniques and background knowledge, you are ready to listen to the presentation. Most of the speakers organise the presentation into three segments: Introduction, body and conclusion. You have to concentrate on each segment to understand the overall meaning, focus and implication of the talk. Follow the guidelines given below:

Listening to the Introduction

1. Listen to the **opening** of the talk to get answers to the following questions:
 - (a) What is the position, knowledge, background, experience of the speaker?
 - (b) What is his/her credibility?
 - (c) What is the overall purpose of the talk?
 - (d) What is the central idea or theme?
 - (e) What is the overall organisational structure?
 - (f) What does the speaker intend to do? (describe, instruct, report, narrate, explain, argue, persuade, illustrate, etc.)
 - (g) What are the main points of the talk?
2. Concentrate on the **visual aids** if used by the speaker.
3. Identify the key words or phrases that the speaker might use to emphasise the main points.

Listening to the Body

1. As the body of a talk or lecture contains the main message, you should listen to every part of the body carefully.
2. Concentrate on the *verbal signposts* in order to recognise the organisation and main points of the oral message.
3. Recognise main supporting details of the oral message.
4. Concentrate on *visual aids* such as overhead transparencies, flipcharts, hand-outs, slides, multimedia visuals, etc. for getting a clear idea of the important points of the talk.

Listening to the Conclusion

- Listen to the **Closing** of the talk to understand the *main themes* of the verbal message.
- Recognise the speaker's *focus* of the talk.
- Concentrate on what the speaker wants you to do, or remember.

Understanding the Links between Different Parts of the Presentation

The most important aspect of lecture comprehension is identifying key points of a lecture. In order to recognise key points, you have to understand the links between different parts of speech. This involves recognising listening clues used by the speaker. Every speaker uses various techniques to indicate the listeners the relative importance of different parts of information contained in the talk. These techniques include identifying prosodic and syntactic features, oral discourse markers, and transitions.

Prosodic Features and Syntactic Features

Prosodic features include pauses, stress, intonation, and rhythm patterns. You need a proper understanding of English pronunciation and articulation in order to understand these features. You may refer to the chapter on “Speaking Techniques” in Part Three of the book for a detailed discussion of these topics.

Syntactic features comprise of grammatical structures such as subordinate clauses, noun complements, etc. Comprehending these syntactic structures during listening demands a fairly good understanding of English grammar. You should concentrate on these features to get the correct meaning of the message.

Oral Discourse Markers

Oral discourse markers include *signal phrases, logical connectors, and transitional signals*.

Signal Phrases

Lecturers and speakers use specific words and phrases to indicate major transitions and emphasis in their lectures. As illustrated in Fig. 6.4, they help the listener to understand the links between different parts of the talk.

As illustrated in Fig. 6.5, speakers use logical connectors to show logical organisation and rhetorical features of a talk.

Other Transitions

Apart from oral discourse markers, you should identify several other transitions that speakers might use to lead you from one idea to another. Identify the following transitions:

- 1. Visual transitions:** Some speakers may add a visual between regular visual aids in order to give a “visual” transition. Such visuals might give an important clue to understand a particular part of the talk or presentation.
- 2. Repetitions:** Speakers may use the same words, phrases or ideas twice to initiate a transition.

Purpose of the Speaker	Signal Phrases
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduces a topic 	Today, I'd like to talk about..., What I'm going to discuss is..., The main point of the discussion today is..., To begin with..., In the first place..., My first point is ..., At the start let me say that..., First I'd like to discuss..., Today I'd like to describe...', etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops an idea 	If we critically examine the situation..., As you know that..., The most significant point is..., The best solution to the problem is..., It is significant to note that..., Let's try to understand it..., It's very interesting to note..., This means that..., etc. As you are aware..., The crucial factor is..., The point to note is, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasises a point 	I am sure you'll agree with me..., No one can deny the fact that..., I'd like to emphasize..., The next point is crucial to my argument..., etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contrasts several ideas 	In contrast, On the other hand..., If we make a comparative analysis..., On the contrary, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows transition of ideas 	The next important point is..., The second significant aspect is..., Let's consider another factor .., My next point is..., etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concludes 	Finally, At the end..., That's all I wanted to discuss..., I'd like to sum up..., I'd like to conclude..., In conclusion..., etc.

Figure 6.4 Signal Phrases

Purpose of the Speaker	Logical Connectors and Transitional Signals
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adds a point 	Moreover, In addition, Next, Then, Furthermore, Second, Finally, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compares 	Similarly, Likewise, In the same way, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Makes a contrast 	In contrast, By comparison, In comparison, However, Nevertheless, If we make a comparative analysis, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows segmentation 	Right, OK, Well, All right, And, Now, That's fine, That's all, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exemplifies 	In other words, For example, For instance, Take for example, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporal 	Eventually, At that time, For the time being, As, After, Before, Since, Till, Until, When, As soon as, By the time, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explains/shows cause and effect 	Therefore, Thus, So, That is why, As, Because, Hence, For that reason, As a result, As a consequence, Consequently, etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows emphasis 	Obviously, As you can see, In fact, As you know, Actually, Naturally, Of course, You see, etc.

Figure 6.5 Logical Connectors and Transitional Signals

- 3. Questions:** Speakers may ask a question to make a transition.
- 4. Sequence:** A speaker may use sequence or Point-By-Point description to indicate transition (e.g., There are two important considerations...The first one is.. The second one is. etc.).
- 5. Flashback:** A speaker may use a flashback technique to start a new point (e.g., Do you recall my first observation ...?).

- 6. Pauses:** Some speakers effectively use pausing as a transition techniques because they give you time to think.

TEAM LISTENING

In view of the widespread use of oral communication in team management and decision making, there can be little doubt about the value of good listening skills in helping to achieve group communicative goals. When you take part in a group communicative situation, you cannot contribute to the stated purposes of the communication unless you are listening properly. By participating as an active listener, you may meet a personal need to contribute to the accomplishments of the goals of a group activity. Moreover, active participation as a listener in a group and its discussions and deliberations serves the group-centered needs of an individual. Finally, active listening meet your ego-centered needs by enhancing your status as a successful “communicator”.

Listening in teams is more difficult than listening to structured talks and well-organised lectures. While you listen to a talk, you get information in an organised and structured form. Understanding the main points is not difficult because the speaker may repeat them several times during the talk. The use of signposts and visual aids also make comprehension easier. On the other hand, when you listen to deliberations during a group discussion, meeting, or team interactions, you get information in a disorganised and unclear form. There are no repetitions of points, no visual aids to clarify points and improve comprehension, no verbal signposts to indicate organisation and main points in an oral message. It is, therefore, important that you take extra precautions during team listening.

Read the following suggestions carefully. They may help you improve your team listening skills.

Avoid Distractions

There are two kinds of distractions that might disrupt the listening process. The first of these distractions result from surrounding noise and physical disturbances. In order to avoid these external distractions during the process of listening, you have to ensure that all channels are free of noise during the time of communication. The second type of distractions may result from your disturbed state of mind. The best way to control these distractions is to avoid team listening while you are emotionally disturbed. However, if you can not avoid listening, you should focus 100 per cent on what other members of the team are talking about.

Avoid Negative Nonverbal Signals

Using negative nonverbal signals during group communication is not only rude but also against team spirit as it may lead to misunderstanding and mistrust between

team members. Do not use nonverbal signals to show disagreement, boredom, and lack of comprehension. It is better to express these feelings verbally. Avoid using fingers or negative head shaking to say 'no', or 'rolling eyes' to indicate that the speaker is a fool, or negative hand gestures to show that you disagree.

Don't Interrupt

It is impolite to interrupt a person who is speaking as it shows lack of respect and creates misunderstanding. You may have something important to say or may be very eager to give a quick reply or opinion but it is not fair to interrupt the speaker. It makes you over-eager and careless. Good team spirit demands better manners.

Be Involved

In order to be an effective team listener, do not just absorb the message encoded in the spoken word without any involvement but be alert and pay close attention while listening to your team members. Take conscious efforts with concentration, involvement and responsibility to improve your listening effectiveness as a team member.

Recognise Important Facts

It is important to recognise important facts during team listening because team members might express them informally in a casual manner. You have to obtain relevant information and identify the main ideas and supporting details. Although you have to listen carefully to everything that your team members say, you need to filter the information to identify the overall purpose, the central theme and the main focus of what they are saying.

Be Objective

Good team members avoid making subjective observations while listening to each other. Being objective will help you as well the team members in getting a clear picture of each other's ideas and feelings. Also, avoid giving judgement on what you listen. Expressions such as "I think your reasoning is inappropriate", or "I do not understand your attitude" are judgmental and should be avoided.

Make Notes

Make notes to retain and use the information that you receive during team listening. Do not rely on your memory. Refer to the next section for learning effective note taking techniques.

BARRIERS TO LISTENING

As listening is a complex process, it is desirable to take care of the barriers to listening that may hamper the smooth flow of oral communication. Awareness of

these barriers can help the listener adopt effective strategies to avoid them. The barriers to the listening process may emanate from either the speaker, listener or the circumstances of communication. In oral communicative situations, any interference or noise that interferes with the listening process can create misunderstanding and confusion and may sometimes lead to communication breakdown.

Barriers to listening could be physical, psychological, linguistic, or cultural. (Figure 6.6)

Physical Barriers	Psychological Barriers	Linguistic Barriers	Cultural Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noise • Physical discomfort • Physical distractions • Distance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotional disturbance • Anxiety • Over arousal of emotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improper message decoding • Ambiguous language • Jargon 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural differences • Different values • Different social norms

Figure 6.6 *Barriers to Listening*

Physical Barriers

Physical distractions and disturbances can easily disrupt the process of listening. Several barriers to listening could be the result of noise, physical discomfort, or any physical factor. Physical noise refers to a physical sound that disrupts the listening process. For example, you are talking to your friend on your mobile and a queer shrilling sound disturbs the transmission. When you try to talk to someone on a running train, bus or in a crowded market, several distractions in the surroundings disrupt the listening process. In order to avoid physical noise during the process of listening, you have to ensure that all channels are free of noise during the time of communication.

Physical discomfort can also easily disrupt the listening process because you can't be a good listener if you are feeling uncomfortable. For instance, you are listening to a business presentation in a conference room but the room temperature is very high and there is no air-conditioner. Your discomfort due to high room temperature may distract your attention and you may not be able to focus on the presentation. This can lead to poor comprehension. It is, therefore, important that you avoid any discomfort before you have to listen to someone.

In order to ensure a comfortable listening without physical disturbances, you should take care of the following points:

- Ensure that there is no distracting noise from outside. Close the door if there is some disturbing noise from outside.
- If it is a very important communicative situation like a meeting or conference, you should switch off your mobile.

- Be sure that the infrastructure such as seating arrangement is comfortable.
- As distance can sometimes become a barrier to effective listening, you should sit at a proper place. Maintain appropriate distance.
- Be at ease and comfortable.

Psychological Barriers

Perhaps some of the most common barriers to listening result from the listener's disturbed state of mind, i.e., they are psychological in nature. As listening is a purposeful activity, any psychological or emotional turbulence or disturbance can prove to be a barrier to effective listening because it leads to lack of interest and concentration. Feelings of anger, frustration, sadness, anxiety, or fear influence our reception and receptivity to others' ideas. Over arousal of emotions may adversely affect your ability to decode an oral message, and you may find it difficult to concentrate on what the speaker is saying.

Thus, you must ensure that you are in a normal state of mind before you take part in a communicative interaction. Be tension free and do not make yourself upset by too much thinking and speculation. For example, you have to face a job interview and you're too nervous. Just avoid such feelings of discomfort. Whatever may be the purpose of listening, you need to concentrate on the content of the oral message if you want to take an active part in the communication process.

Linguistic Barriers

Improper message decoding during listening is the recurrent barrier in the process of oral communication. Since the message is decoded incorrectly by the listener, it may lead to confusion and misunderstanding. While decoding an oral message, you should concentrate on the linguistic code. If you listen to something in a language or dialect that you are not able to follow, a communication breakdown will definitely occur. For example, if you do not understand French properly, you may not understand a lecture in French.

In order to avoid linguistic barriers, take care of the following points:

- Ensure that: the speaker is using a language that you understand.
- Sometime, the speaker may use difficult words, jargon, technical terminology, or unclear phrases. Feel free to ask for clarifications. No good speaker will mind it.
- If the speaker uses ambiguous language open to several interpretations, ask the speaker to clarify and explain.
- When you are in doubts, ask questions.

Cultural Barriers

If the speaker and listener belong to different cultures and share different values, listening could become a difficult process. In oral communication, it is the listener who assigns meaning to message clues and meanings are assigned in terms of a listener's frame of reference. This interpretation of meaning can create misunderstanding during intercultural communication due to differences in norms and values. Our values are our personal guides to thought and behaviour, and exert a strong influence on us.

In order to avoid cultural barriers during listening, you should be sensitive to cultural differences and take into account the values of your speaker while interpreting an oral message. Your weakness to view others with your cultural frame of reference may lead to confusion and misunderstanding. The moment you interpret others' point of view from your angle, you allow your preconceived notions and prejudices start working for you. Your frame of reference is individual to you as it is based on your experiences, exposure, education, personality, and several other elements peculiar to you. In order to avoid communication failure, you have to be sensitive to this fact and try to put yourself into the other person's position.

CHAPTER REVIEW

Listening plays an important role in sales. The better a sales person is at listening, the more the chances that he will be successful in his or her sales efforts. The challenge for all retail professionals is to learn how to focus hundred percent on what the customer is saying rather than being carried away by his or her own ideas.

Listening is a process of receiving and interpreting the spoken word. It involves not only recognizing unit boundaries phonologically, but also the recognition of false starts, pauses, hesitations, stress, intonation and rhythm patterns. While receiving and interpreting the spoken word, the listener is concerned with four factors, i.e., sensing, message decoding or interpreting, evaluating and response.

A total understanding of the customer's needs, requirements, concerns, and feelings needs effective listening. The five Rs of effective listening are **absorb, anticipate, analyse, assimilate, and appreciate**.

In order to improve your listening comprehension, you need to develop listening strategies for specific listening tasks such as presentation comprehen-

sion, two-way customer interactions, group interaction, customer consultations, sales negotiations, and discussions, etc.

As listening is a complex process, it is desirable to take care of the barriers to listening that may hamper the smooth flow of oral communication. In oral communicative situations, any interference or noise that interferes with the listening process can create misunderstanding and confusion and may sometimes lead to communication breakdown. These barriers to listening could be physical, psychological, linguistic, or cultural.

ACTIVITIES

Explore it Further

In order to understand the topics discussed in this chapter, you need to read further and check websites to answer the following questions:

1. What is the importance of listening skills for retail salespersons?
2. What is the process of listening?
3. How is *hearing* different from *listening*?
4. What are skills and sub-skills of listening that retail professionals need to learn?
5. What are the five Rs of listening effectiveness?
6. What is listening with customer focus?
7. What are effective listening strategies?
8. What are the different barriers to listening and how can you overcome these barriers?

Experience It

In order to get a feel of listening effectiveness, you need to develop a project to find out the relationship between active listening with customer focus with customer retention and sales. It would be definitely a very challenging assignment but it will be worth doing with long-term benefits.

APPLICATION EXERCISE**I. Analyse the following situations and identify effective and ineffective listeners:**

- (a) Laxmi is a junior sales girl in a super market in Chennai. She is taking part in a sales meeting. She is carefully listening to each member of the team. While listening to them, she is interpreting and analysing what they are speaking. She is trying to understand both explicit as well as implicit meaning of the verbal messages in order to respond to their views.

Effective/Ineffective

- (b) Satish is a sales manager in Treasure Island in Indore. He is listening to a presentation on "***Economic slowdown and retail business in India***" being given by a professor of Indian Institute of Management Indore. As he does not have much interest in economics, he is not interested in the presentation. Moreover, he is feeling sleepy and is listening in an unconscious manner without paying any attention to what he is listening.

Effective/Ineffective

- (c) Naina is listening to a business presentation by one of his subordinates. However, her mind is busy thinking about the questions that she will ask. She wants to show the audience that she knows much more than the speaker. So, she is not able to pay attention to the content or the visual aids that the speaker is using.

Effective/Ineffective

- (d) Sarfraz Khan is a senior manager in a big retail company in Mumbai. He is taking part in a meeting to discuss the strategies to retain customers. He is listening to one of the members, Anita Desai, who is a new sales trainee. Anita is nervous while expressing her ideas. Sarfraz is encouraging her to express her ideas clearly and is giving non-verbal signals to indicate comprehension. She stops to find words and he gives her words by saying, "I hope you are trying to say that introducing new schemes might not be a good idea to retain old customers at this point of time."

Effective/Ineffective

- (e) Kavita is listening to her manager, who is explaining different steps of a computer programming. She is not taking any interest in the lecture as she is amused at the hair style of the teacher and is wondering how he will look without any hair.

Effective/Ineffective

- (f) Niladri Dutta is working as customer relation manager in a retail company in Poona. He is listening to a presentation on “**The Use of Internet to Promote Retail Sales**” being given by a successful local businessman. Although Niladri has nothing to do with retail sales as CRM and he does not have a computer background, he is trying to understand the lecture by concentrating on the main points and supporting details. He finds the visuals used by the speaker very interesting and helpful.

Effective/Ineffective

- (g) Neha is a senior HR manager in a retail organisation which has its branches in all parts of the country. She is taking part in a meeting to discuss the policies regarding appointment of new sales trainees. She is listening to one of the members, Rahman Hussain, who is the new recruitment manager. Rahman is using abstract phrases and expressions. She tries to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words from contextual clues. She pays attention to the Rahman’s intention, and is trying to understand and interpret non-verbal clues and body language of the speaker.

Effective/Ineffective

II. Which of the following steps to overcome barriers to listening may not be effective:

1. You must avoid any physical discomfort before you have to listen to someone.
2. You should ensure that all channels are free of noise during the time of communication.
3. While listening to a lecture or talk, you should sit at a proper place and maintain appropriate distance.
4. If the speaker uses ambiguous language open to several interpretations, you should not ask the speaker to clarify and explain.
5. You must ensure that you are in a normal state of mind before you take part in a communicative interaction.
6. While listening to a presentation, you should try to be tension free and should not make yourself upset by too much thinking and speculation.
7. Whatever may be the purpose of listening, you need to concentrate on the content of the oral message if you want to take an active part in the communication process.
8. If the speaker uses difficult words, jargon, technical terminology, or unclear phrases, you should not disturb the speaker by asking questions for clarifications.

9. In order to avoid cultural barriers during listening, you should be sensitive to cultural differences and take into account the values of your speaker while interpreting an oral message.
10. You have to be sensitive to the fact that your frame of reference is individual to you as it is based on your experiences, exposure, education, personality, and several other elements peculiar to you.
11. You should be aware of your prejudices and biases.
12. In order to avoid communication failure, try to put yourself into the other person's position.

III. Which of the following is not an effective listening strategy during customer interactions?

- (a) Labelling
- (b) Listening for conversational signals
- (c) Too many informal grunts
- (d) Making social judgements
- (e) Using attention signals
- (f) Doing mental commentary
- (g) Using receptive expressions and utterances
- (h) Increasing your speed of listening

IV. Which of the following is not an effective listening strategy for understanding a presentation or talk?

- (a) Audience Analysis
- (b) Predicting
- (c) Use of background knowledge
- (d) Recognising key phrases
- (e) Concentrating on speaker's appearance
- (f) Understanding the visual aids
- (g) Recognising minor points of the oral message
- (h) Analysing the communicative situation
- (i) Speaker analysis
- (j) Understanding all the illustrations
- (k) Identifying key points of a lecture

- (l) Concentrating on the *verbal signposts* in order to recognise the organization
- (m) Determining the purpose of listening
- (n) Recognising the speaker's *focus* of the talk
- (o) Understanding the links between different parts of speech
- (p) Recognising listening clues

V. Which of the following listening practices will make you a better team listener?

- (a) Using negative nonverbal signals
- (b) Controlling external and internal distractions
- (c) Becoming actively involved
- (d) Listening between the lines
- (e) Interrupting
- (f) Asking questions
- (g) Rephrasing
- (h) Taking notes
- (i) Being subjective
- (j) Relaxing during lag time

KEY TO APPLICATION EXERCISE

I.

Effective listeners	Laxmi, Sarfraz, Niladri, Neha
Ineffective listeners	Satish, Naina, Kavita

II.

The following steps to overcome barriers to listening may not be effective:

4 and 8

- 4. If the speaker uses ambiguous language open to several interpretations, you should not ask the speaker to clarify and explain.

8. If the speaker uses difficult words, jargon, technical terminology, or unclear phrases, you should not disturb the speaker by asking questions for clarifications.

III.

The following are not effective listening strategies for customer interactions:

(a), (c), (d), (h)

- (a) Labelling
- (c) Too many informal grunts
- (d) Making social judgements
- (h) Increasing your speed of listening

IV. The following are not an effective listening strategies for lecture comprehension:

(a), (e), (g), (j)

- (a) Audience Analysis
- (e) Concentrating on speaker's appearance
- (g) Recognising minor points of the oral message
- (j) Understanding all the illustrations

V. The following listening practices will make you a better team listener:

(b), (c), (d), (f), (g), (h)

- (b) Controlling external and internal distractions
- (c) Becoming actively involved
- (d) Listening between the lines
- (f) Asking questions
- (g) Rephrasing
- (h) Taking notes

CHAPTER SEVEN

7

Team Communication for Retail Management

Let us Understand

Ashwani led a group of thirty sales staff in one of the outlets of Big Bazaar group. He was very happy leading the team as he knew everyone and each member of the team respected him. In fact, since he joined the team as the leader, he had worked hard to build trust and commitment in the team. He was successful and everything was going perfectly well. However, last month Kamal Kishore Jain joined the team of the sales staff. Somehow he was not welcomed by the team members as several team members considered him to be very arrogant and not even competent. Ashwani did not find any problem with Kishore as he found him very enthusiastic and ready to work hard. But several team members came to Ashwani and complained against Kishore. They found him unfit for the job and they were very unhappy with his arrogant manners. Ashwani was confused and did not know what to do.

What should Ashwani do?

Ashwani is the team leader. So, he needs to understand the situation and communicate his concerns effectively to his team members. First, he should meet all team members to find out their views about Kamal Kishore. It is important for him to get to the root causes of the problem by understanding and appreciating the concerns of the team members about Kamal Kishore. Secondly, he may convene a meeting of all the team members and should discuss these concerns with them in the presence of Kamal Kishore, who may also be given a chance to speak about his views and concerns. Finally, he may communicate to his team members the need to resolve this conflict to keep the team on target to achieve its goals. Open and transparent communication is essential for the healthy functioning of any team.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this chapter, you will learn

- ✓ how team-based retail management depends on effective communication
- ✓ how to improve communication among team members
- ✓ different elements of effective team communication
- ✓ seven steps to effective team communication
- ✓ team discussions skills for effective sales
- ✓ team interaction strategies, and
- ✓ effective participation in meetings.

IMPORTANCE OF TEAM COMMUNICATION

Team communication is a dynamic interactive process that involves the effective transmission of facts, ideas, thoughts, feelings and values among team members. As a team consists of individuals who are committed to a shared objective, communication plays a key role in making the team achieve its objective. In order to achieve the shared goal the team members have to interact with each other and with the team leader. The success of the team largely depends on this team interaction, which leads to better understanding of each other's ideas, views, and suggestions. In fact, the contribution of each member depends on the way they understand, analyse, and respond to the inputs given by other members.

Team communication is an important aspect of team formation and management. In fact, it is the pattern of communication that determines whether a group of individuals form a team or just a group. In a group, each member of the group

communicates to the group leader who in turn communicates to the concerned member. The group leader is the boss, and communication flows with strict protocol. In contrast, in a team each member of the team freely communicates with each member as well as with the team leader. There is no protocol of communication.

Team communication has become an increasingly important factor in business today as the vast majority of employers see team harmony as an essential factor for business success. In fact, team communication is an inevitable part of the process of establishing and developing a greater sense of collaboration and trust between team members. Moreover, the importance of team communication has increased in recent times due to its increasing role as an effective tool for *problem solving*, *decision-making*, and *group collaboration*.

In most of the organisations, companies, and institutions, team communication aids in problem solving and decision making. When a problem situation arises, the concerned team members need to talk about it and discuss it. They exchange their perceptions about the problem and brainstorm possible reasons of the problem. The alternative solutions are discussed and analysed and the best option is chosen by the team. Similarly, whenever there is a need to take a decision in a particular case, the matter is first discussed by a team and different aspects are analysed, interpreted and evaluated. This leads to effective decisions. Finally, group communication aids in effective group collaboration that contributes to team harmony.

Thus, the ability to contribute effectively to the team communication process is one of the most important skills that contribute to the professional success of a team. Whether you are just a member of a team or its leader, you need effective team communication skills. As a retail professional, you may have to take part in product discussions, meetings, group deliberation, interactive customer calls, or several one-to-few communication situations. All such situations require the ability to make significant contribution to group deliberation and help the group in the process of decision making. Effective team communication largely depends on your ability to adjust to other people and your good attitudes. In order to improve your team oral communication skills, you have to follow some basic tips and learn effective team interaction techniques.

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE TEAM COMMUNICATION

There are four elements to effective team communication. These elements can be summed up in an acronym *TEAM*. T stands for **Talk**, E stands for **Empathy**, A stands for **Assertiveness**, and M stands for **Motivation**. These four elements to effective team communication are described below.

1. Talk

The first element is the willingness to talk and share information with other team members. Some people believe that withholding information will increase their

power or importance. So, they may not share all the information. However, if a team member does not share information and keeps information to himself or herself, the team can never achieve its goals. Every team member must have the trust that the information shared will not be negatively used. Members in a team depend on one another's input to contribute effectively to the team.

It also involves willingness to talk and present our points of view. We may have different views and we have every right to differ but we must express our differences. If different opinions are not openly shared and discussed, it might lead to team conflict which can derail the team.

2. Empathy

The second element to effective team communication is empathy. Empathy refers to the process of understanding and appreciating the feelings and emotions of other persons. Understanding the feelings and emotions of other team members is essential for effective team communication. As empathy makes us capable of appreciating the feelings of other people, it leads to a deeper understanding of other team members.

3. Assertiveness

Assertiveness is the ability to express your ideas, feelings, and emotions with confidence and without being aggressive. An assertive person knows what he or she wants and is able to express his/her needs, concerns, and interests without being aggressive or manipulative. It is, therefore, a set of behavioural patterns that holds its own ground and finds reasonable working compromises, so there are no losers. Assertiveness leads to a win-win situation for all those involved in the process of communication. It is, therefore, essential for effective team communication.

An effective team communicator has to be bold and assertive without being offensive, aggressive and rigid. If you are mild and weak, you will be too eager to give up in the face of opposition and obstacles. In fact, a weak, submissive and passive person can never be successful as a team communicator. Assertiveness, is a desirable leadership quality that can make you successful during a discussion. If you are assertive, you can tackle obstacles and handicaps effectively. Your assertiveness can help you bring order to a chaotic group, encourage balanced participation, deal with conflict effectively, and lead the discussion to a positive end. By taking up a firm stand, you can control those members of the group who are more interested in sabotaging the discussion rather than contributing to the success of the discussion. It is always desirable that you should not take a rigid stand but you must be able to assert yourself during a discussion.

4. Motivation

Motivation is all about maintaining a positive and focused attitude in pursuing an

objective. Every effective team communicator is a positive thinker, who focuses on positive energy to charge his team with passion and enthusiasm. In fact, motivation is a leadership tool that might reduce the negative aspects of all kinds of persons in a team and can put the team on target.

Those determined to win are highly motivated and have the ability to motivate others. Motivation constitutes the base on which effective communication and leadership can grow. A person with motivation can work hard to do the best job possible and can achieve targets. You can display the quality of motivation by being an active and positive contributor to the process of team communication. By clarifying the topic of the discussion, explaining its different aspects, and providing enough material for other members to follow and discuss, you can motivate them to take an active part in the team deliberations. Moreover, by encouraging the shy ones to speak and promoting optimal participation, you can involve everyone in the team to achieve team objectives.

SEVEN STEPS TO EFFECTIVE TEAM COMMUNICATION

To ensure that your team achieves its objectives efficiently and effectively, you need to follow seven basic steps to effective team communication.

1. Communicate openly and freely with your team members.
2. Develop agreement on processes and procedures.
3. Communicate team goal(s) clearly to team members.
4. Motivate team members to have goal-oriented interaction and communication.
5. Cultivate a co-operative, supportive, friendly and cordial atmosphere.
6. Ensure an equitable distribution of team participation.
7. Develop shared leadership.

1. Communicate Openly and Freely with Your Team Members

As mentioned earlier, the success of a team largely depends on the effectiveness of communication among team members. It is important that team members keep the channels of communication open, and speak clearly and precisely using simple words, short sentences, correct articulation and appropriate pronunciation. They are direct and specific, and they try to avoid and check barriers to team communication. Moreover, they use non-verbal communication tactfully and correctly interpret the body language and paralinguistic aspects of communication of other team members. As they are active team listeners, they encourage others to speak.

Thus, open and free communication is essential for team harmony because teams cannot function effectively without open communication. One of the most obvious reasons of team derailment is lack of open and free communication among the team members. In fact, an effective team is the one where every member feels free to

express his or her ideas, opinions, suggestions, and feelings. Every member freely gives feedback to other members and gladly receives feedback. Open communication among team members enhances trust and team feeling.

2. Develop Agreement on Processes and Procedures

Developing agreement on processes and procedures is essential for team success because the participants of a successful team develop procedures to guide them. In order to ensure attainment of the team goals, they may develop norms of interaction. They may decide how they will function, how they may organise the presentation of individual views, how an exchange of the views may take place, and how they may reach a consensus on major decisions. If the participants of a team fail to do so, there may be anarchy, and the more assertive and aggressive members might dominate and monopolise the entire team. This may lead to derailment of the team.

3. Communicate Team Goal(s) Clearly to Team Members

An effective team begins with a purpose, which is shared and understood by all the team members. As the team members know and understand the team goal(s) clearly, they can concentrate better and can be more active in realising the team goals. They can smoothly work from a general purpose to specific goals. Moreover, the understanding and agreement on team goals brings clarity and provides direction to the team.

4. Motivate Team Members to have Goal-oriented Interaction and Communication

In successful teams, members motivate other members to have goal-oriented interaction. Effective team members are not only aware of the team goals but also work towards the attainment of these goals. As they are more interested in achieving these group goals than promoting their personal interests, they develop and promote meaningful interactions that aid in implementing the purpose of the team.

5. Cultivate a Co-operative, Supportive, Friendly and Cordial Atmosphere

An important characteristic of an effective team is the development of a co-operative, friendly and cordial atmosphere where disagreements do exist but they do not lead to serious conflicts. Team members co-operate with each other as they understand and appreciate different points of views and try to pool them together in order to develop group consensus. There may be direct but goal-oriented confrontation as each member presents his/her points of view as well as reservations and differences. However, these different positions, opinions, ideas and approaches enrich the process of interaction and broaden the horizon of the team.

Creating an atmosphere conducive to effective team functioning is the responsibility of each member of the team. A friendly cooperative atmosphere encourages effective and positive deliberations that lead to successful team decisions. It is desirable to make every team effort an enjoyable experience for all the team members. As a member of a team, you can do much to create a conducive and friendly atmosphere. The following suggestions may be helpful:

- Help the team to make all the team interactions, meetings, and discussions lively and pleasant.
- In order to maintain friendly attitudes, demonstrate a sense of fair play by treating others as you would like to be treated yourself.
- Keep members informed of their own progress and appreciate them for contributing effectively to the group goals.
- Conduct yourself with decorum and dignity.
- Show interest in what others say.
- Develop a consensus regarding group standards early in the discussion.
- You should make sure that members feel free to express their views, opinions, comments, and feelings.
- Avoid being too formal.

6. Ensure an Equitable Distribution of Team Participation

An effective team ensures an equitable distribution of participation by all team members in all the team tasks, activities, efforts, and interactions. Each member is important and no one is allowed to dominate or monopolise the team. As optimal participation by all is the team-goal, members encourage each other to participate. The reluctant and shy members are drawn into the activities and tasks by other members.

7. Develop Shared Leadership

Although there may be an appointed, selected, or elected leader in a team, the leadership functions must be shared and performed by the various members of the team. As leadership involves responsibilities with passion and commitment, it is desirable that team members show willingness to share leadership responsibility. Team members must be ready to perform the leadership tasks such as making a new initiative, encouraging other members to take active part in team activities, keeping the team target, making periodic summaries of team activities, checking the team progress, encouraging non-participants to interact and communicate their ideas and feelings, etc.

TEAM DISCUSSIONS FOR EFFECTIVE SALES

Team discussion has emerged as an effective and potentially powerful technique for evaluating advantages and disadvantages of various sales strategies and choosing the most appropriate ones for effective sales promotion. Retailing is highly competitive and it is important for the retail sales persons to use the best sales strategies to promote sales and also to sustain good sales. That is why, Team Discussions for Effective Sales (*TDES*) must be an integral part of any retail organisation, and it should occupy a major position in the marketing procedure of the organisation.

The *TDES* may vary from a brief discussion of a new product to be promoted to an exhaustive interactive discussion of a series of sales strategies to be adopted by the organisation or the retail outlet. However, the purpose of these discussions is to evaluate the depth and range of the marketing and sales strategies and their potential to positively affect the profitability of the company or the organisation.

Apart from effective oral communication skills, retail professionals need to improve the following three areas in order to effectively participate in these team discussions,

- A. Product knowledge,
- B. Leadership skills, and
- C. Team management.

A. Product Knowledge

As you must possess a thorough understanding of the product which you want to promote or sell, *product knowledge* is the first requirement of effective participation in a *TDES*. You need to have a fair amount of knowledge on a wide range of products that you want to promote. You should also know all about the products in the market that compete with the product/s that you want to promote, strengths and weaknesses of your products vis a vis other similar products in the market, consumer requirements, price rationale, profit margins, etc. Although a *TDES* may not be there to assess your product knowledge, you are expected to be aware of relevant product information before you take part in any discussion about it. People with depth and range of knowledge are always sought after in dynamic companies and organisations.

The products that you promote or sell may include new and old products or established brands that are easy to sell. You have to be well informed and the best way to keep yourself well informed is to read relevant product literature, daily newspapers, good magazines and periodicals, watch news bulletins and informative programmes on TV. Moreover, you should use internet to improve your knowledge about latest products. World Wide Web is a vast database of current authentic materials that presents information in multimedia form and reacts instantly to a user's input.

Product knowledge also implies the ability to analyse facts or information in a systematic way to co-relate them with your experiences and exposure. It is this ability to analyse existing knowledge and assimilate new ideas that can give birth to bright and brilliant ideas and schemes. In all the group discussions, people with ideas carry the day. If you put forward new ideas that may work, the group will accept you as their natural leader. During a selection group discussion, you are supposed to analyse the topic and give your interpretation of it. The examiners will evaluate your contribution to the discussion or the ideas put forward by you based on its relevance to the topic, original approach, and wide perspective.

B. Leadership Skills

In every team discussion, there is an element of leadership. We can define leadership in a team discussion on a functional basis. Thus, anything you do that contributes to goal achievement can be considered a leadership function. Although leadership functions are shared during a team discussion, you should be the first one to perform the function whenever a need arises. Thus, your success in a team discussion will depend not only on your product knowledge and oral skills but also on your ability to provide leadership to the team during a discussion. The leadership functions during a team discussion include initiative, analysis, assertiveness, self-confidence, objectivity, patience, and persuasiveness are some of the leadership skills that can prove tremendously useful in proving yourself as a natural leader in any team discussion.

Your unique set of personal skills, which allow you to prove yourself as a natural leader, is crucial to an effective discussion. You need to reflect the qualities of leadership in order to create the right impression on your team members.

Initiative

Initiative is a vital element that forms the basis of leadership during a **TDES**. As an effective leader, you have to take the initiative to perform the needed leadership function at an appropriate time. You can display your ability to take appropriate initiative by performing the following leadership functions:

- initiate the proceedings of the discussion;
- create an atmosphere in which members feel free to participate;
- promote positive group interactions;
- point out areas of agreement and disagreement;
- clarify points when needed;
- keep the discussion on the right track; and
- lead the discussion to a positive and successful conclusion within the time allotted.

Analysis

The ability to analyse a situation, a problem or a condition is the mark of a successful leader. Those who lack an analytical bent of mind and rational thinking cannot be successful in a discussion. You should be able to analyse the topic or problem for discussion in order to develop your point of view. Your capacity to analyse the subject in a convincing manner and present all the facts logically can make you carry the rest of the team with you. Moreover, you should listen carefully to each participant in order to analyse his or her opinions and views. A positive analysis of all the views, suggestions, proposals and solutions exchanged during the discussion can lead to the identification of common elements that may form the basis of group consensus.

Self-confidence

Self-confidence is the hallmark of a leader. People with a strong but realistic level of confidence command respect during a discussion as other members listen to such confident people. So, talk with confidence and self-assurance. Your confidence will not only impress the other members of the team but also help you take the group along with you and instill confidence in each member of the group. You can tackle problems with confidence and find workable solutions with ease. However, avoid being boastful and do not pretend that you know everything and you have a solution for every problem. You should not forget that overconfidence causes failures where as under-confidence leads to lack of productivity.

Objectivity

Objectivity is the quality of being impartial, rational and factual. In order to be successful as a group leader, you need to view a situation or a problem passionately and objectively. In other words, your approach should be systematic, scientific, and realistic. As team discussion is an exchange of views and opinions on a specific topic, there would be conflicting views and heated arguments. You should not become sentimental because if you get emotional and excited, your ideas may become jumbled up and your arguments will become dogmatic and self-appointed. You can overcome opposition by adopting a logical, rational and practical viewpoint, and utilising concrete and foolproof illustrations and examples. As you should be rational rather than being emotional, irrational and, emotional bias should not influence you. Your ideas and arguments should be fully backed by relevant facts and figures. This will give validity and appeal to your arguments.

Patience and Composure

Patience is the key to successful leadership in a team discussion. A successful leader never loses his/her cool and is not easily provoked. Even in the face of extreme provocation, the leader keeps a patient profile. So, keep your cool during the discussion. Do not get provoked. Remember that handling a group of heterogeneous elements requires a lot of patience and composure. It is always difficult to bring a

group of people together to discuss an issue amicably because a few in the group would try to monopolise the group and create problems. In such a condition, if you want to bring the discussion to a successful conclusion, you have to tackle the situation with tact and patience. Your ability to keep cool and maintain your composure despite provocation will help you bring together people with different temperaments and strike a consensus in the discussion.

Persuasiveness

One of the vital pre-requisites for success in any team discussion or deliberation is your ability to persuade other members of the group to accept and believe in what you say. Persuasion is an art that requires an ample amount of convincing power. This art can be acquired by consistent practice. In a discussion, you can make a favourable and forceful impact on the group by being persuasive and convincing. In order to be persuasive, you have to advance strong, convincing and logical arguments properly supported by factual data and forceful illustrations. In addition, you should use a firm tone and a sober voice that others may find difficult to ignore. Your listeners should immediately realise that you mean business. Your ability to convince others and make them accept your views and suggestions will establish your credentials for leadership.

C. Team Management

Apart from product knowledge, oral communication and leadership skills, you need team management skills in order to be successful in a team discussion. A leader in a group discussion should be able to manage the group despite differences of opinion and steer the discussion to a logical conclusion within the fixed time limit. You have a choice to become either a team player who can get along with people or an individualist who is always fight to save his/her ego. You should be able to work in a team-oriented environment. You need a number of team management skills in order to function effectively on a team. The four important skills needed to manage a group effectively include adaptability, positive attitude, cooperation, and coordination.

Adaptability

Adaptability refers to the ability to adjust with other members of the group and get along with them. It is an important leadership quality that you need in order to be an effective team player. A person who lacks the ability to get along with others will not succeed as a group leader because an effective leader has to rise above his personal likes and dislikes in order to accommodate the larger interests of the group. In most of the team discussions you will find several categories of participants who might differ from each other in temperament, I.Q, social attitudes, personal preferences, points of view, etc. In order to emerge as a natural leader of a group, you have to adjust yourself suitably with others in the group. In fact, by being adaptable and flexible you will be able to carry the entire group with you.

Positive Attitude

A team player should have a positive attitude because no one would like to work with a person who always complains and is negative towards everything and everyone. In a team discussion, each participant should get an opportunity to offer his/her valuable viewpoint to the enrichment of the discussion. Therefore, you should encourage other members to contribute effectively to the group process. Sometimes you may have to face aggressive, rigid, authoritarian, obstinate, and quarrelsome people but a cheerful approach and a positive attitude will help you deal with them tactfully. If you show respect for their ideas and handle them with tact and understanding, they will automatically look up to you for help and support. Thus, if you have a positive attitude, you can bind the team and get along well with your teammates, including the difficult ones.

Cooperation

The very idea of group discussion is based on the concept of cooperation where all members are expected to work as a team. A team derives its success from the inherent factor of cooperation. Each member supports the other member because the success of each member lies in the success of the team. On the other hand, a hostile approach by any member will go against the spirit of cooperation and will result in either delaying or sabotaging the entire process of team discussion. It is, therefore, very important that every group member subordinates his/her ego as well as his/her individual interest to the larger group interest of working together in order to achieve the group goal within the time allotted.

Coordination

Team discussion is a group activity where the success of the group depends on the involvement of each member of the group. It is important that you reflect team spirit by developing coordination during the discussion. As a group can not function as an effective team and accomplish a task without a coordinator, you should come forward to accept the leadership by coordinating its activities. You can emerge as the natural leader and coordinator of a group with your positive approach, tactful handling of difficult situations, resourcefulness, and objective behaviour.

TEAM INTERACTION STRATEGIES

A team interaction can be defined as any communicative situation where a group of team members meet to discuss an issue, a problem, or a situation that needs a team decision. In other words, any forum that provides opportunities for discussion or a structured exchange of views and ideas can be described as a team interaction. An effective team interaction is possible only if every member of the team contributes and demonstrates his or her level of understanding on the given issue, problem, or situation for discussion. You need several strategies in order to effectively take part in team interactions. Some of the team interaction strategies are described below.

Exchanging Opinions

A team interaction is a cooperative exercise where opinions and views of each member of the group are important for developing consensus and reaching to a conclusion. So, you have to ask for opinions, give opinions, support opinions, balance points of view, or express agreements and disagreements.

Asking for Opinions

You may ask one person to give his or her opinion on any point or your request might be directed at a group of people in general. Study the following examples:

<i>Directed at one person</i>	<i>Directed at a group of people</i>
What is your opinion about this?	What is the general view on this?
What do you feel about it?	What is the general feeling about this?
What do you think about that?	Any reaction to that?
Have you any strong view on this?	Has anyone any strong view on this?
Have you any strong feeling about that?	Has anyone any strong feeling about that?
Do you want to make any comments?	Has anybody any comments to make?
Have you anything to say?	Has anybody anything to say?

Giving Opinions

During a team discussion you have to give your opinions about the subject being discussed. You have to also react to the views given by other members. You may express an opinion in a strong way, in a neutral way, or in a tentative way. It is very important to make other members aware of the nature of your opinion. If they know that you have strong views on something, they may not like to argue with you to change your views whereas they might like to convince you if your views are neutral or tentative.

<i>Strong opinions</i>	<i>Neutral opinions</i>	<i>Tentative opinions</i>
• I have no doubt that ...	• I think that...	• It appears to me that...
• I'm pretty sure that...	• I feel that...	• It seems to me that ...
• I'm quite convinced that...	• I believe that...	• I'm inclined to think that...
• It's perfectly clear to me that...	• From a social point of view...	• I tend to favour the view that...
• I'm convinced that...	• The way I find it is that...	• As it appears to me, ...
• I'm sure that...	• As I see it...	• I can reconcile to the view that...

(Contd.)

(Contd.)

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- | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| • There's no doubt that... | • As I find it... | • I might accept the view that... |
| • I strongly believe that... | • According to me... | |
| • As far as I am concerned,
I'm totally convinced that... | • The way I see it is that... | |
| | • Personally, I think... | |
-

Supporting Your Opinions

In order to make your views acceptable to the other group members, you need to support them with facts, examples, illustrations, or arguments. Sometimes you may feel that giving one reason or consequence for your point of view is sufficient to convince the listeners. Look at the following examples:

- *I'm convinced that our company must open new branches because our business has expanded.*
- *I think we should go ahead with the project as it will help us establish the name of our company in India.*
- *I'm pretty sure that reducing the prices will improve our sales.*

However, in many cases during a discussion, you need to give more than one reason to support your opinions. In order to develop your opinions by giving a series of causes or consequences, you may have to use connectives or transitional words. Study the examples given below:

- *I think implementing the idea of increasing the prices is out of question. First of all, it would be impossible to increase prices without losing customers as the economic slow down has affected all sections of society, and what's more, increasing prices would go against the our company norms.*
- *I think we should go ahead with the plan to reduce the prices of our car. That will help us clear the old stock and apart from that it will give a tough competition to other cars in this segment and will improve our sales.*
- *We must reduce our energy consumption. First, there's the high price of oil and electricity. Secondly, there's the long term danger of using up oil stocks.*

Balancing Points of View

In order to be reasonable and rational, you may have to balance points of view by trying to look both sides of a given opinion. You need to balance advantages and disadvantages. Read the following examples:

- *The fall in interest rates is good for industry as it makes borrowing cheaper. However, it might adversely affect balance of payments situation in India by affecting the exchange rates and making essential imports like oil more expensive.*
- *Of course, reducing the prices of our car will help us clear the old stock and improve our sales but it will adversely affect the company profits and can damage company's image in the long run.*

- Although the organised retail industry in India is facing lot of opposition from traders, the government has to formulate a separate policy for the industry.

Agreeing and Disagreeing

Agreeing and disagreeing are the two aspects of interaction in a team discussion. When you agree or disagree to someone or accept or reject the suggestions and proposals given by other members, you should clearly express your agreement/disagreement. When you agree with someone your expression of agreement should indicate to the listener the strength of your agreement, which might be strong or neutral. Look at the following examples:

<i>Strong agreement</i>	<i>Neutral agreement</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I strongly agree • I quite agree • I completely agree • I'm in complete agreement • Of course, yes • Yes, certainly • Yes, definitely • Exactly • Precisely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I agree • Yes • Of course • Right • That's true • You are right • O.K. • That's fine • I think you are right

Similarly, your expression of disagreement should indicate to the listener the strength of your disagreement. Read the following examples:

<i>Strong disagreement</i>	<i>Neutral disagreement</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I strongly disagree • I disagree completely • This is totally unacceptable • That is out of question • Definitely not • Of course not! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I disagree • I don't agree • No • That's not true • That's not right • I think you are mistaken

Exchanging Suggestions and Proposals

During a group discussion, you need to get the suggestions of other members of the group in order to conduct the discussion, and to explore possible solutions to actual problem situations. There is a difference between an opinion and a suggestion. An opinion is what seems to one to be probably true while a suggestion is a proposal

to do something. Request suggestions, make suggestions, express agreement and disagreement, accept and reject proposals.

Requesting Suggestions

Your request for suggestions might be directed at one person or it may be an open request for the group. Look at the following table:

<i>Directed at one person</i>	<i>Directed at a group of people</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you suggest? • What is your suggestion? • What would you suggest? • What should we do? • What do you recommend? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Any suggestions? • Any recommendations? • Do any of you have any suggestions? • I'd like to some of your recommendations? • Do any of you have to make any suggestion/recommendation?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think we should...? 	

Making Suggestions

During a case study discussion, you may have to make suggestions or present various alternatives to solve the problem situation. Like your opinions, your suggestions might be strong, neutral and tentative. Study the following examples:

<i>Strong suggestions</i>	<i>Neutral suggestions</i>	<i>Tentative suggestions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There's no way but to... • There's no alternative but to... • The only way is to... • The only alternative is to... • The only solution is to... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I suggest that... • I would suggest that... • We should... • My suggestion is that... • My recommendation is that... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One alternative could be... • One way would be to... • One solution could be... • How about ---ing ... • What about ---ing ...

You may also use several phrases to put forward several alternatives. Study the following examples:

- There are at least three different ways to deal with this situation. The first solution is to... Another possibility could be... The third alternative can be...
- There appears to be at least two solutions to this problem. One solution could be to... Another alternative is to...

Accepting and Rejecting Proposals

While discussing a problem or a case, you may need to accept or reject proposals

put forward by other members of the group. As your acceptance will show your support to the concerned member, the expression you choose should indicate to the listener the strength of your support. You may use strong phrases to indicate a strong acceptance while the use of weak phrases or informal expressions might show neutral or weak support. Read the following examples:

<i>Strong support</i>	<i>Weak support</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm sure that is the best option. • It is the best solution. • It is an excellent idea. • I strongly favour this. • I'm strongly in favour of that. • That's a great idea. • I'm completely in favour of that. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good idea. • It appears to be a good idea. • It may be tried. • Sounds O.K. • Sounds fine. • O.K. • Fine.

Similarly, the expression showing your rejection of a proposal put forward by other members must indicate to the listener the strength of your rejection. You may use strong, standard or diplomatic rejections according to the need of the situation. Read the following examples.

<i>Strong rejections</i>	<i>Standard rejections</i>	<i>Diplomatic rejections</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is not possible/feasible. • It's not possible to accept that. • I can't accept it. • I'm strongly against that. • I'm completely against this. • I really find it unacceptable. • I'm absolutely against this proposal. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I'm sorry, but that is not possible/feasible. • I'm sorry I can't accept that. • I'm afraid I am against that. • I'm sorry, but that is not acceptable. • I'm afraid that is not practical. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I appreciate your point of view but ... • That's a good idea but I still feel that... • You have a point but... • I can see your point but... • That sounds interesting but... • That's a good point but I still think that...

When you support or reject proposals or solutions given by other members, you have to give reasons for doing so. Look at the following examples:

- I'm sure that is the best option. My first reason is that ... My second ...
 - It is the best solution. Firstly because... Secondly....
- It is an excellent idea. First, due to ... and secondly....
- I'm strongly in favour of this solution. One reason is ... Another is...
 - I'm sorry, but this is not practical. Firstly because... Secondly....
- I'm absolutely against this proposal. First, due to ... and secondly....

PARTICIPATING IN MEETINGS

As a meeting is a form of systematic and purposeful oral process characterised by the formal and structured exchange of views on a particular topic, issue, problem or situation, it should be well planned and well conducted. The five strategies for effective participation in meetings include:

1. Contributing Systematically,
2. Moving the meeting along,
3. Promoting Optimal Participation,
4. Handling Conflict, and
5. Ensuring Effective Closure

1. Contributing Systematically

The success of a meeting depends on systematic contribution by each member of the team. In order to make systematic contribution to the team deliberations, all the team members should understand the process of reflective thinking during a meeting. They should be able to identify the stages of the discussion (i.e., *individual stage* where each member has to systematically present his or her views without any disturbance, or *group interaction stage* where members have to exchange views and opinions in order to reach to a group consensus) and contribute accordingly. When you make a contribution, you should ensure that your contribution

- relates to what has previously been said by other members,
- focuses on the theme of the discussion,
- deals with the specific point under consideration,
- is directed towards the overall objective of the meeting, and
- is as per the requirement of the particular stage of discussion.

Moreover, your contribution must reflect your depth of understanding and knowledge of the agenda items being discussed as well as your ability to analyse it. You must see the discussion points from your perspective so that your background and personal experiences give it a new interpretation which may prove valuable to the group for taking a decision.

2. Moving the Meeting Along

A meeting may drift away without a proper direction. As an effective member of the team, you should ensure that the meeting moves along the right direction so that it is able to complete the task within the fixed time limit. You should make sure that every member of the team gets some time to present his/her views and no one monopolises the meeting. No one should be allowed to do all the talking because the purpose of a meeting is to exchange views, and not to hear just one person. If

someone tries to take too much time, you may politely say, “Thanks, you have very valid ideas but let us hear how Mr. X, or our next speaker would respond to the idea.”

It is very important to avoid any digression that may sidetrack the meeting and waste time of the members. You may volunteer to avoid digressions and bring order out of chaos by requesting the members to see reason and come to the point. Read the following examples:

- I do understand your point but I think we should stick to the main subject in hand.
- I see what you mean but it would be better if we limit our discussion to the given agenda items.
- That is all well said but I do not find a link between what you want to say and the subject in hand. Could you please return to the main point?
- That is not the main point under discussion. Let us come to the main subject.

You may use other techniques to keep the meeting on the right track. You can emphasize the point that everyone has to keep the objectives of the meeting in mind and adhere to the time schedule. You may summarize or clarify the points already put forward by the group members and thereby focus their attention on the main objective of the meeting and keep the discussion from slowing down.

3. Promoting Optimal Participation

As the success of a meeting largely depends on the involvement of each member of the team, you should promote optimal participation. Every member has a resource potential that can be used to make the meeting successful. You should encourage non-participants to speak. With patience, restraint, and proper motivation, you can inspire even the shy and reluctant members to give their views on the given subject. It will not only reflect your leadership qualities but also lead the meeting to a successful conclusion. You may find the following suggestions quite helpful:

- Make each member feel that his or her contribution is wanted to make the meeting successful.
- Encourage each member to make his or her maximum contribution.
- Recognise a member of the group who has not spoken and request the person to express his/her views.
- When a member makes a contribution, you may request the non-participant member to comment on it.
- Direct some relevant questions related to the topic to the reticent persons.
- Try to control talkative members.
- Make talkative members take responsibility for getting non-participants to speak.
- Avoid pushing the meeting too fast, and take care of slow speakers.

4. Handling Conflict

One important aspect of participating in any meeting is dealing with conflict. As a team usually tends to be heterogeneous, conflict is natural in any group activity and may be sometimes desirable for the success of a group process. Expect differences of opinions in a meeting but do not let these conflicting opinions go against the basic purpose of a meeting. Do not be a silent spectator when two or more people are in conflict. Although conflict resolution is a complex art, you need to remember just a few simple tips in order to handle conflict during a meeting. The following suggestions will help you deal with conflict during a meeting:

- Maintain friendly attitudes and try to create an atmosphere in which people respect conflicting opinions as they feel free to express their opinions and expect others to talk freely. This will generate enough goodwill that will take care of conflicts within the group.
- Strictly follow the discussion procedure that you might have decided early in the meeting.
- Avoid conflicts between persons and not conflict between ideas.
- Clarify conflicting statements given by group members so that they do not lead to personal differences.
- Provide positive guidance to the group by making occasional summaries.
- When two people are in conflict, you should encourage each to express himself/herself completely and then you can sum up their views. This will give ego satisfaction to each one of them.
- Help to establish the attitude of critical objectivity.

5. Ensuring Effective Closure

Effective closure of a meeting is as important as an effective start of a meeting. Sometimes when the leader is weak, the meeting is likely to continue until everybody is tired and wants to leave. Some meetings suck the members and still continue. Every member present in meeting is responsible for an effective closure as a stakeholder of the meeting. Every member has to see that the meeting ends with constructive conclusions within the given time limit. In order to get the meeting completed within the desired time, you have to remind the team of its goal and request them to reach to effective conclusions, which may or may not be based on group consensus. You should do the following yourself or get them done by other group members in order to achieve the objectives of the meeting:

- Summarise the progress made by the team.
- Put forward the common points of agreement.
- Indicate the differences that need to be resolved.
- Review decisions/suggestions/views already decided.

Once you have successfully initiated the closure of a meeting, you may propose the consensus view, if any. It is not essential that every meeting ends with a consensus but every meeting must end with some constructive or positive conclusion. You must emphasise the points of agreement in order to indicate a common viewpoint regarding the agenda items.

CHAPTER REVIEW

Team communication is a dynamic interactive process that involves the effective transmission of facts, ideas, thoughts, feelings and values among team members. The success of the team largely depends on this team interaction, which leads to better understanding of each other's ideas, views, and suggestions.

There are four elements to effective team communication. These elements can be summed up in an acronym TEAM. T stands for **Talk**, E stands for **Empathy**, A stands for **Assertiveness**, and M stands for **Motivation**.

To ensure that your team achieves its objectives efficiently and effectively, you need to follow seven basic steps to effective team communication.

- *Communicate openly and freely with your team members.*
- *Develop agreement on processes and procedures.*
- *Communicate team goal/s clearly to team members.*
- *Motivate team members to have goal-oriented interaction and communication.*
- *Cultivate a co-operative, supportive, friendly and cordial atmosphere.*
- *Ensure an equitable distribution of team participation.*
- *Develop shared leadership.*

Apart from effective oral communication skills, retail professionals need to improve the following three areas in order to effectively participate in these team discussions,

- *product knowledge,*
- *leadership skills, and*
- *team management.*

A team interaction is any communicative situation where a group of team members meet to discuss an issue, a problem, or a situation that needs a

team decision. An effective team interaction is possible only if every member of the team contributes and demonstrates his or her level of understanding on the given issue, problem, or situation for discussion. You need several strategies in order to effectively take part in team interactions.

As a meeting is a form of systematic and purposeful oral process characterized by the formal and structured exchange of views on a particular topic, issue, problem or situation, it should be well planned and well conducted. The five strategies for effective participation in meetings include:

- Contributing Systematically,
- Moving the meeting along,
- Promoting Optimal Participation,
- Handling Conflict, and
- Ensuring Effective Closure

ACTIVITIES

Explore it Further

In order to understand the topics discussed in this chapter, you need to read further and check websites to answer the following questions:

1. What is the importance of team communication for retail salespersons?
2. What is the process of team communication?
3. How does team-based retail management depend on effective communication?
4. What are the different ways and methods of improving communication among team members?
5. What are the different elements of effective team communication?
6. What makes a meeting effective and what are the different strategies to effectively participate in meetings?
7. How can one improve team discussions skills for effective sales?
8. What are the steps to effective team communication?
9. What are team interaction strategies?

Experience It

In order to get a feel of team communication, you need to develop a project to find out the solutions to certain problems being faced by your company or organisation through effective team discussions. You need to conduct meetings and apply the principles discussed in this chapter. You may find the assignment very interesting.

APPLICATION EXERCISE

1. Study the following table and match the actions in team discussion (left column) with appropriate leadership/team management skills that they reflect (right column):

<i>Actions in a team discussion</i>	<i>Leadership/team management skills</i>
1. keep a patient profile despite provocation	A. Initiative
2. encourage other members to contribute effectively to the group process	B. Analysis
3. convince others effectively	C. Assertiveness
4. promote optimal participation	D. Self-confidence
5. clarify points and point out areas of agreement and disagreement when needed	E. Objectivity
6. coordinate the group activities	F. Patience
7. bring order to a chaotic group	G. Persuasiveness
8. view a situation dispassionately	H. Motivation
9. get along with other members of the group	I. Adaptability
10. subordinates his/her individual interest to the larger group interest and supports other members of the group	J. Positive attitude
11. talk with self-assurance	K. Cooperation
12. analyse the given topic	L. Coordination

2. Read the following instructions about team discussions and classify them as *do's* and *don'ts* in team discussions:

1. Get involved in cross talks, low-key conversations, cross-consultations, and asides.

2. Create an atmosphere in which all members feel free to participate.
3. Try to be the centre of attention all the times.
4. Comment on everyone and everything.
5. Keep members informed of their own progress.
6. Monopolise the discussion.
7. Encourage personality conflicts.
8. Avoid any digression that may sidetrack the group.
9. Encourage non-participants to speak.
10. Make each member feel that his or her contribution is wanted.
11. Control talkative members.
12. Pushing the discussion too fast.
13. Maintain friendly attitudes.
14. Provide positive guidance to the group by making occasional summaries.
15. Help to establish the attitude of critical objectivity.

3. Study the following table. Combine the advantage/s and disadvantage(s) to provide a balanced opinion.

<i>Opinion</i>	<i>Advantages</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>
I. Sale tax should be increased.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create more revenue for the government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leads to inflation.
II. Foreign equity should be allowed in the Indian Print Media.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower the prices of Indian newspapers and magazines. • Improve the quality of print media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve foreigners in our democratic process.
III. Strikes should be banned in essential services like health and power.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the efficiency of these services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create employee dissatisfaction.
IV. All the government offices should be computerised.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotes efficiency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increases unemployment.
V. Interest rates in India should be reduced.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes borrowing cheaper. • Promotes industry. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes imports expensive. • Adversely affects balance of payments.

4. Study the following table that contains some problems (left column) and their proposed solutions (right column). Give suggestions in the light of these solutions. Read the solved example.

Solved Example

<i>Problems</i>	<i>Proposed solutions</i>
One of the chemical products that the company is selling have been found to be harmful.	I. Stop selling the product. II. Withdraw the stock from the market.

First of all, we must stop selling the chemical product. Then we should withdraw the stock from the market in order to save the name and reputation of our company.

<i>Problems</i>	<i>Proposed solutions</i>
1. Your company is having problems with its sales, which has been reducing for unknown reasons.	I. Appoint a new sales manager. II. Rationalise and modernise sales methods.
2. The company wants to recruit efficient executive trainees.	I. Use a recruitment agency. II. Advertise in the press.
3. Sales of a new electronic stabilizer have been very poor, and stocks are high.	I. Stop production. II. Cut prices.
4. Due to increased competition, the new television model launched by the company has failed to make an impact on the market.	I. Intensify publicity. II. Cut prices. III. Introduce attractive customer prizes.
5. There have been problems in delivery and distribution of goods.	I. Improve distribution networking. II. Set up automated regional warehouses.

5. Study the following table and accept or reject the proposals (left column) by giving reasons and choosing appropriate expressions as indicated in brackets (right column).

<i>Proposals</i>	<i>Reasons for accepting/rejecting</i>
1. We suggest that we should introduce five days of working instead of six days by working an extra hour everyday.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improve efficiency ● Promote a better work culture (<i>standard acceptance</i>)
2. What do you think of giving every officer in the company a laptop with internet facility?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Burden on company exchequer ● No obvious benefit (<i>Diplomatic rejection</i>)
3. I suggest that we introduce flexitime in the administrative departments of our company.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Need lot of official adjustments and readjustments ● Create dissatisfaction in other departments

(Contd.)

(Contd.)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>4. What about hiring a recruitment agency to recruit our sales staff?</p> <p>5. Why don't we consult a specialized security agency to take care of our security problems?</p> <p>6. I suggest we shift our headquarters from Kolkata to Mumbai.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adverse affect on the motivation of staff in other departments (<i>standard rejection</i>) • Expensive • Time consuming (<i>Diplomatic rejection</i>) • More effective • Save time and money (<i>strong support</i>) • Expensive exercise • Time consuming (<i>Diplomatic rejection</i>) |
|--|--|

KEY TO APPLICATION EXERCISE

1. Keep a patient profile despite provocation **F**
2. Encourage other members to contribute effectively to the group process **J**
3. Convince others effectively **G**
4. Promote optimal participation **H**
5. Clarify points and point out areas of agreement and disagreement when needed **A**
6. Coordinate the group activities **L**
7. Bring order to a chaotic group **C**
8. View a situation dispassionately **E**
9. Subordinates his/her individual interest to the larger group interest and supports other members of the group **K**
10. Get along with other members of the group **I**
11. Talk with self-assurance **D**
12. Analyse the given topic **B**

2.	
<i>Do's</i>	<i>Don'ts</i>
1. Create an atmosphere in which all members feel free to participate.	1. Get involved in cross talks, low-key conversations, cross-consultations, and asides.
2. Keep members informed of their own progress.	2. Try to be the centre of attention all the times.
3. Avoid any digression that may sidetrack the group.	3. Comment on everyone and everything.
4. Encourage non-participants to speak.	4. Encourage personality conflicts.
5. Make each member feel that his or her contribution is wanted.	5. Monopolise the discussion.
6. Control talkative members.	6. Pushing the discussion too fast.
7. Maintain friendly attitudes.	
8. Provide positive guidance to the group by making occasional summaries.	
9. Help to establish the attitude of critical objectivity.	
3.	
I. I don't agree with the idea of increasing sales tax. I accept that it can create more revenue for the government but I strongly feel that it pushes up inflation.	
II. I don't agree. Although allowing foreign equity in the Print Media may lower the prices of Indian newspapers and magazines and improve the quality of print media, it is against our national interests because it will involve foreigners in our democratic process.	
III. Personally I am in favour of complete ban on strikes in essential services like health and power. I can accept that it creates employee dissatisfaction but I feel that it improves the efficiency of these services.	
IV. I don't agree that all the government offices should be computerised. Computerising government offices may promote efficiency but it increases unemployment.	
V. I don't agree that interest rates in India should be reduced. Although the fall in interest rates makes borrowing cheaper and promotes industry, it adversely affects balance of payments situation by making imports expensive.	

1. As I see it, we have no alternative but to appoint a new sales manager. In addition, I think that we should rationalise and modernise sales methods.
2. I think there are two possible ways of dealing with this problem. We could either use a recruitment agency, or advertise in the press.
3. I strongly recommend that we stop production. In addition, I suggest that we should cut prices to clear the stocks.
4. As I see it, there are three possible solutions. One solution is to intensify publicity to create market demand. Another possibility is to cut prices to face the competition. Finally, we could introduce attractive customer prizes to promote sales.
5. I think that we should improve our distribution networking. In addition, we should set up automated regional warehouses in order to improve distribution of stock.
- 5.
1. That's a good idea. It will definitely improve efficiency and promote a better work culture.
2. I can see your point but I still feel that it will be burden on company exchequer with no obvious benefit.
3. I'm afraid that is not practical. Firstly because it will need lot of official adjustments and readjustments. Secondly, it will create dissatisfaction in other departments and adversely affect the motivation of staff in these departments.
4. That sounds interesting but I think it will be both expensive and time consuming.
5. I'm sure that is the best option. My first reason is that it will be more effective than our security arrangements. My second reason is that it will save both time and money.
6. That's a good idea but I still feel that it will be an expensive exercise that will take up too much time.

CHAPTER EIGHT

8

Nonverbal Communication in Sales

Let us Understand

On March 1, Ritesh Khandekar joined Reliance Digital as a sales trainee. Reliance Digital is the second format of stores from Reliance Retail to be launched within six months of its foray into organised retail in India. Mr Sunil Kabra, the senior sales manager and immediate supervisor of Ritesh has told Ritesh that the unique store concept is built around Reliance Retail's core philosophy—customer centricity and a hassle free store experience. He has further added that Reliance Digital is a one stop shop for all technology solutions in the field of consumer electronics, home appliances, information technology and telecommunications. Sunil told Ritesh that he should develop himself to be customer centric to give customers a hassle free pleasant store experience. He gave Ritesh the literature of one of the electronic products that they were selling. Sunil asked him to go through this as he expected Ritesh to discuss the product with customers after two days. Ritesh read everything about the product and was very sure to do a good job.

On March 4, Sunil introduced Ritesh to Dr. Biswas who was one of their regular customers. He asked Ritesh to describe the features of the product to Dr. Biswas. Ritesh started confidently and knew that Dr. Biswas would be pleased with his description of the new product. His communication was clear and detailed and he had told everything that was good about the new product. However, Ritesh was perplexed by the reaction of Dr. Biswas, who said that he was not interested and he wanted to buy something else—and that Ritesh was wasting his time. Ritesh was surprised, and did not know what went wrong. He looked at Sunil and asked him what went wrong. Sunil told him in a sober tone, “Anyone will react like that. You need to improve your body language, which seems very negative”. No body ever told Ritesh anything about his body language and he did not know what to do.

What should Ritesh do?

Well, Ritesh should try to improve his body language. He should try to understand other people's body language by watching them.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you

- ✓ Identify the differences between *verbal and nonverbal communication*
- ✓ Understand the significance of nonverbal communication in retail sales
- ✓ Develop sensitivity to nonverbal communication
- ✓ Improve your *body talk* for effective sales performance
- ✓ Develop paralinguistic aspects of your communication.

VERBAL AND NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Communication is a multi-dimensional dynamic interactive process of sharing common sets of signs, symbols and language from one person to another person so that an understanding response results. It involves the effective transmission of facts, ideas, thoughts, feelings and values. It is not passive and does not just happen; we have to actively and consciously engage in communication in order to develop information and understanding required for effective group functioning. It is dynamic because it involves a variety of forces and activities interacting over time. The word process suggests that communication exists as a flow through a sequence or series of steps. The term process also indicates a condition of flux and change. The relationships of people engaged in communication continuously grow and develop.

Communication includes both verbal and nonverbal communication. *Verbal communication* is the process of communication through sending and receiving messages through words while *nonverbal communication* is the process of communication through sending and receiving wordless messages. The key components of verbal communication are sounds, words, speaking, and language, whereas the key components of nonverbal communication are gestures, facial expressions, eye contact, body postures, tone, voice modulation, pacing, pausing, etc.

Thus, verbal communication includes spoken as well as written communication. It is mainly concerned with the use of words. On the other hand, nonverbal communication has nothing to do with words. It is basically beyond words. Nonverbal communication expresses individual emotions, social attitudes and feelings, and it can convey more meaning than spoken words. When we are not able to find an exact word for something we want to say, we may subconsciously use some kind of facial or physical gestures to convey our meaning.

In fact, there are several characteristic features of nonverbal communication that makes it different from verbal communication. As shown in Table 8.1, nonverbal communication differs from verbal communication in the nature of communication clues, communicative function, communication impact, and message reliance.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION IN RETAIL SALES

What is the first thing many of us think of when we hear the word retail selling? I am sure most of us imagine retail salespersons talking up their company's products with potential customers. That is what retail selling is all about; talking about the products with potential customers and convincing them to buy the products. This talking can be either through face-to-face oral communication or through telephonic conversation or through some other communication channel. Now, as nonverbal communication is definitely the most important factor in oral communication, it plays a significant role in retail communication. Several studies have clearly shown that the meaning that a customer interprets during face-to-face retail selling largely depends on the body language and paralinguistic features of the salesperson.

Retail salespersons should always remember that it is not only what they say to their customers that is important, but it is also how they say it that can make the difference to their customers. Nonverbal messages are, therefore, an essential component of communication in the selling process. In fact, nonverbal clues have several functions during a selling process. In particular, nonverbal clues can strengthen a verbal message by repeating, emphasising, clarifying, explaining, or reinforcing it during a selling process. On the other hand, nonverbal clues can also weaken a verbal message by contradicting it.

Retail salespersons, therefore, need a *nonverbal sales orientation* (NVSO). A nonverbal sales orientation occurs when the sales persons are aware not only of their nonverbal behaviour but they are also aware of the nonverbal behaviour of their customers. Nonverbal sales orientation will:

Table 8.1 *Differences between Verbal and Nonverbal Communication*

<i>Verbal Communication</i>	<i>Nonverbal Communication</i>
<i>Nature of Communicative Clues</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal clues are less universal. • Verbal clues are explicitly expressed. • Verbal clues can be easily noticed. • Verbal clues are mostly consciously produced. • Verbal clues are less spontaneous than nonverbal clues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonverbal clues are more universal. • Nonverbal clues are implicitly expressed as they are usually silent. • Nonverbal clues are sometimes difficult to notice. • Nonverbal clues are mostly subconsciously produced. • Nonverbal clues are more spontaneous than verbal clues.
<i>Communicative Function</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal messages convey more explicit meanings. • There is less use of verbal messages to express individual emotions, attitudes and feelings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nonverbal messages convey more implicit meanings. • There is more widespread use of nonverbal messages to express individual emotions, attitudes and feelings.
<i>Communication Impact</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of verbal messages on the receiver usually varies between 30–40 per cent. • Effectiveness of oral communication depends less on verbal messages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The impact of nonverbal messages on the receiver usually varies between 60–70 per cent. • Effectiveness of oral communication depends more on nonverbal messages.
<i>Message Reliance</i>	
<i>Message reliance depends on the content of communication.</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receivers usually rely more on verbal clues when verbal and nonverbal are congruent. • Receivers usually rely less on verbal clues when verbal and nonverbal clues conflict. • Receivers usually rely more on verbal clues when the information processed is factual, cognitive, and persuasive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receivers usually rely less on nonverbal clues when verbal and nonverbal are congruent. • Receivers usually rely more on nonverbal clues when verbal and nonverbal clues conflict. • Receivers usually rely more on nonverbal clues when the information processed is emotional and attitudinal.

- help them understand their customers better by allowing them to interpret the nonverbal clues of the customers more effectively;
- make them better receivers of customers' messages;
- help them become better senders of nonverbal signals that reinforce the selling points;
- make them select more appropriate nonverbal clues that convey positive meanings and attitudes; and
- increase the degree of the perceived psychological closeness between salesperson and customer.

DEVELOPING SENSITIVITY TO NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Nonverbal communication is very important for sales persons. In fact, one of the factors that might create differentiation between average and excellent salespersons is the ability to effectively use nonverbal communication to understand the customers and use effective nonverbal clues to reinforce the selling process. Ignoring the nonverbal clues of a customer can be a big mistake for the salesperson because the customers' gestures, body movements, patterns of eye contact, facial expressions, and tone reveals their hidden feelings, emotions, sentiments, and attitudes.

Effective salespersons never ignore nonverbal communication during selling. They use the nonverbal clues of the customers to understand the customers by analysing their response to the selling offers. Moreover, they use the nonverbal feedback to strengthen the selling process. Effective salespersons know that the recognition and analysis of nonverbal communication in sales transactions is a tool that can help them decide the right selling pitch.

As an effective retail person, you must be aware of the fact that a wrong gesture or facial expression can lead to miscommunication and confusion. Your one inappropriate body clue has the potential to negatively affect your relationships. You may displease a customer, annoy a colleague, irritate your supervisor, or even lose a business deal. As culture, social class, age, occupation, ethnic background and communication contexts influence nonverbal forms of communication, you must be very careful while using or receiving nonverbal messages.

It is, therefore, very important for the salespersons to develop sensitivity to nonverbal communication. They need to understand the significance of nonverbal communication during selling and improve their own nonverbal communication to improve their selling effectiveness, which largely depends on their ability to understand their customers. They should not only take care of the nonverbal clues that they receive from their speakers during any communicative situation, they should also take care of the nonverbal clues that they pass on to their listeners.

BODY LANGUAGE FOR EFFECTIVE SALES PERFORMANCE

Body language includes body movements and postures, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact. Different body language forms may suggest different meanings (Table 8.2).

Table 8.2 *Body Language*

<i>Body Language Forms</i>	<i>Description</i>
Posture and body movements	The way a person stands, walks, moves, or uses body movements
Gestures	A visible bodily action that may express implicit meaning.
Facial expression	The use of eyes, eyebrows, forehead, and mouth for expression
Eye contact	The way a person observes or looks at the audience while speaking or listening

Each body language form includes several nonverbal clues, and each body language clue conveys some meaning. The interpretation of these clues might also vary from culture to culture because nonverbal messages have cultural connotations. Please go through Table 8.3 to find out some of the common interpretations of these body language clues.

Table 8.3 *Examples of Nonverbal Clues**

<i>Body Language Form</i>	<i>Body Language Clue</i>	<i>What does it Suggest?</i>
<i>Eye contact</i>	Sustained eye contact	Trust, admiration, confidence
	Brief eye contact	Stress, nervousness
	Avoiding eye contact	Fear, shyness, lack of sincerity, mark of respect in some cultures
<i>Facial expression</i>	Eye squinting	Antagonism
	Raising eyebrows	Surprise, question, curiosity
	Lowering eyebrows	Acceptance, submission
	Furrowed forehead	Anger, frustration, displeasure
	Wide open eyes	Surprise, astonishment
	Open mouth	Shock
<i>Gestures</i>	Swallowing	Nervousness
	Frowning	Anger, displeasure
<i>Posture and body movements</i>	Leaning towards a speaker/listener	interest
	Pulling away/leaning back	Fear, disgust, anger, distrust

(*As nonverbal clues and the meaning they convey differ from culture to culture, the suggestions given here may not be exactly the same in all cultures.)

Improving Posture and Body Movements

Your posture talks about your personality. They may tell that you are a bold, confident and dynamic person or a timid, submissive and servile fellow. Similarly, your body movements give important signals about your personality.

Use your posture and body movements to reflect self-confidence, maturity, alertness, and physical stamina. Read the following suggestions:

- Examine your posture and correct it if it is not appropriate.
- Use appropriate body postures.
- Keep your posture natural. Stand, sit and bow in a natural way.
- Avoid making funny or confusing postures or body movements.
- If you use body movements, ensure that they are consistent with your verbal message.
- Learn the cultural patterns of posture and body movements to avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings.

Using Effective Gestures

A *gesture* is a visible bodily action that may express implicit meaning. It refers to the use of fingers, hands, and arms for expression. It is an important dimension of body language. Gestures may reveal the mindset of the communicator and convey thoughts through voluntary or involuntary physical movements. For example, if you are very upset and nervous, your hands may tremble. Although most of the gestures that we make are voluntary, we may sometimes give negative signals by making some inappropriate involuntary gestures.

Using positive physical gestures require conscious effort and practice but it will definitely be worth it. Positive and appropriate gestures can make us better oral communicators. The following suggestions may help you:

- Keep your gestures quite natural.
- Avoid using gestures to express negative feelings. You should express them verbally. For example, if you have to say ‘no’, do not use your fingers or head to express it. Such negative gestures could be very annoying for some people.
- Avoid confusing gestures or body movements (biting nails or scratching your head).
- Use positive gestures.
- Don’t reflect nervous mannerisms.
- Don’t use your fingers too often.
- Use your hands and arms very carefully and effectively.
- If you use gestures, be sure that they are consistent with your verbal message and there is no contradiction.
- Learn the cultural patterns of physical gestures to avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings.

Using Positive Facial Expressions

Facial expression refers to the use of eyes, eyebrows, forehead, and mouth for expression. It is another dimension of body language. Facial expression normally shows how we feel. For example, if someone has offended you, your face will tell it. Unless you have received special acting training to control your facial expressions, your face will easily reveal your emotion. Your face will tell that you are bored, angry, pleased, sad, or excited.

Like positive gestures, positive and appropriate facial expressions add to meaning and helps to improve the effectiveness of a verbal message. The following suggestions may help you:

- Keep your facial expressions quite natural.
- Use positive facial expressions. Smile at others. A good smile gives very positive signals and helps to make the atmosphere friendly. Moreover, it indicates

goodwill and shows that you are a positive and pleasant person. However, do not smile constantly and your smile should not be totally unrelated to your content or contradict your message.

- Keep your facial expression consistent with your verbal message, i.e., your facial expression and content should match. Learn and practise to do this.
- Do not try to hide your feelings. Be your natural self.
- Learn the cultural patterns of facial expression so that you are able to avoid misunderstandings.

Maintaining Eye Contact

Eyes tell what words hide. Eyes never lie. Can you look straight in the eyes of a person and lie? If you can, you have probably mastered the art of telling lies. Most of us cannot do this. That is why we normally distrust people who do not maintain eye contact while telling something to use whereas we believe those who look directly at us. Since the eyes are probably the most accurate predictor of your feelings and attitudes, you should know how to use good or positive eye contact to improve the effectiveness of your verbal message during an oral interaction.

Although the frequency and duration of eye contact varies from culture to culture, you can learn to maintain positive eye contact with your listeners. Remember the following suggestions:

- Maintain eye contact while you are listening to someone. This will indicate that you are giving attention to what the person is speaking.
- Use eye contact to show your sincerity and confidence. Do not speak while looking at your feet. That will mean that either you are too shy or you are telling a lie.
- Learn the cultural patterns of eye contact in order to understand the differences so that you are able to avoid misunderstandings.
- If there are more than one listeners as in the case of a meeting, group discussion, oral presentation, etc., you should look at all the listeners giving each of them equal importance.
- If someone is avoiding eye contact, do not try to look continuously at the person and embarrass him or her.
- Do not look at a person the way a doubtful police officer looks at a convict or a doctor looks at a patient. Be natural.

PARALINGUISTICS AND SALES

It must be clear to you by now that you can improve your nonverbal communication by applying simple principles to understand different forms of body language and use effective body language clues. Paralinguistics is another form of nonverbal

communication as, like body language, it includes those aspects of oral communication that do not involve words. However, paralinguistic features of communication are extremely important for sales persons as they have the potential to change the meaning of a message completely. In order to improve paralinguistic aspects of your oral communication, you need to work on the following:

1. Improving the quality of your voice
2. Developing effective voice modulation
3. Controlling the pace of speaking
4. Developing effective pausing

Improving the Quality of Your Voice

Your voice reflects your personality. An impressive voice does reflect an impressive personality. It is, therefore, important that you try to improve the quality of your voice. Your voice depends on several factors, which include your *vocal habits* formed since childhood, the structure and physical condition of your *voice mechanism*, the patterns of your *oral interactions* along with its *influences on your speech habits*, and your overall *personality*. Developing your voice might include making effective changes in your speech habits.

As developing the quality of your voice is desirable to become a confident salesperson, you need to follow a systematic plan. In order to develop the quality of your voice, you should first analyze your voice. Then, you will have to do regular practice to improve specific features of your voice.

Analyse Your Voice

Analysing your voice is the first step in improving your voice quality. You must listen to your voice carefully to understand the following aspects of your voice:

- **Pitch** (highness or lowness of the sounds produced by you)
- **Volume** (loudness of the sounds that you make)
- **Quality** (specific identifying feature of sounds that you produce)
- **Rate of speaking** (the duration of individual sounds, the length of the phrases, and the duration of the pauses between phrases)

You may have a tape recording of your voice made while talking to someone, reading something aloud, taking part in a discussion, or while giving an oral presentation. Listen carefully and critically to your voice and ask the following questions?

- Is the pitch of your voice varied and flexible? (It is neither too high nor too low.)
- Do you vary your voice to fit your content?
- Does your voice change with your mood?

- Does your voice reflect your personality?
- Do you adjust the volume of your voice to suit your material?
- Is the rate of your speaking fitting to the occasion? (You are neither too slow nor too fast.)
- Does your voice fit the topic and the occasion?
- Do you vary the rate of speaking according to the need of the content?
- What is the overall impression of your voice?

If you try to answer these questions honestly, you will get a fairly good idea of the quality of your voice.

Do Regular Voice Practice

Once you have determined the quality of your voice, you need to do regular practice to improve specific features of your voice. You must follow a systematic routine for doing practice, and set aside regular practice periods. Be relaxed during practice sessions. Practice in such a way that you concentrate on improving one feature of your voice at a time. The transition from practice to performance should be slow and gradual.

Although the quality of your voice depends mainly on factors that are beyond your control, you can improve it if you make sincere efforts. It is always a good idea to improve your ability to speak English words clearly. So, practice pronouncing the English speech sounds individually and in context. Make fine distinctions between long and short vowels, vowels and diphthongs, and different consonant sounds. Practice speaking long stretches of conversation and concentrate on the production of sounds.

In order to improve the pitch of your voice, practice to be varied and flexible. Avoid being monotonous. Control your pitch if it is too high or too low. You may try to speak words, phrases and sentences in different ways by changing the pitch of your voice. A balanced pitch will make your voice pleasant, lively, and clear.

Developing Effective Voice Modulation

You should also improve your ability to modulate your voice by practicing how to adjust the volume of your voice to fit your topic and content. Notice how a good public speaker varies his/her voice to fit his/her material. Listen carefully to the newsreaders to note how they vary the voice according to the content of the news. Practice reading different kinds of material and adjust the volume of your voice. Ask a friend to listen to you and give feedback. Regular practice will make you able to adjust your voice according to the needs of the content.

To modulate your voice, consider the following:

- Be expressive and avoid speaking in a monotone.

- Make sure you speak loud enough for the listener to hear you.
- Raise and lower your voice to make your point.
- Slow down for important points.
- Keep the tone of your voice natural and conversational.
- Lower the volume for an aside.
- Raise the volume gradually as you build toward a point.
- Change your volume when you're changing an idea or an approach.

Controlling the Pace of Speaking

You should also practice to control your rate of speaking. It is a general observation that salespersons speak faster than they should. You must understand that fluency and speed of speaking are not the same thing. Whether you should speak fast or slow depends on several factors that include the type of audience, the nature of content, the occasion, and so on. What is important to remember is that the listener should have no difficulty in understanding your message. Therefore, you should be neither too fast nor too slow. Your rate of speaking should be fitting to the content, the occasion and the audience.

To control the pace of your speaking, consider the following:

- Be in control of the pacing and let not pacing control you.
- Modify your pace as per the requirement of the content as well as that of the audience.
- Slow the pace to emphasize certain ideas.
- Quicken the pace to show excitement or humor.

Developing Effective Pausing

Your pauses reflect your understanding of your listeners because you pause so that you want your listeners to get time to understand a point better. That means the main of function of Pausing is to underscore major points or to give listeners time to absorb a complex idea. You may also pause when you are about to make a transition from one idea to another idea.

To make effective pauses while speaking, consider the following:

- Use pausing as a strategy to increase clarity of your communication.
- Pause whenever you are communicating a difficult or a complex information or idea.
- Pause when you want to shift your focus or your point of emphasis.
- Pause when you change an idea or turn from one idea to another.
- Pause when you have said something that needs some reflective thinking on the part of the listener.

CHAPTER REVIEW

Communication includes both verbal and nonverbal communication. Verbal communication is the process of communication through sending and receiving messages through words, while nonverbal communication is the process of communication through sending and receiving wordless messages. Nonverbal communication is very significant in sales. Effective salespersons never ignore nonverbal communication during selling because they know that the recognition and analysis of nonverbal communication in sales transactions is a tool that can increase selling effectiveness.

Nonverbal messages are, therefore, an essential component of communication in the selling process. In fact, non verbal clues can strengthen a verbal message by repeating, emphasizing, clarifying, explaining, or reinforcing it during a selling process. On the other hand, nonverbal clues can also weaken a verbal message by contradicting it.

Nonverbal communication includes body language as well as paralinguistics. Body language includes body movements and postures, gestures, facial expressions, and eye contact. Each of these body language forms includes several nonverbal clues, and each body language cue conveys some meaning. Retail salespersons can improve their nonverbal communication by applying simple principles to understand different forms of body language and use effective body language clues. However, the interpretation of these clues might also vary from culture to culture because nonverbal messages have cultural connotations. Retail salespersons must be sensitive to these differences as they have to deal with people from different cultures.

Paralinguistics is another form of nonverbal communication. Paralinguistic features of communication are extremely important for sales persons as they have the potential to change the meaning of a message completely. In order to improve paralinguistic aspects of your oral communication, you need to work on improving the quality of your voice, developing effective voice modulation, controlling the pace of speaking, and developing effective pausing.

ACTIVITIES

Explore it Further

In order to understand the topics discussed in this chapter, you need to read further and check websites to answer the following questions:

- How is nonverbal communication different from verbal communication?
- What is the importance of nonverbal communication for retail salespersons?
- What are the different forms of nonverbal communication?
- What are the different elements of effective nonverbal communication?
- How can one understand the body language of the listeners?
- What are the different ways and methods of improving body language?
- What are paralinguistic aspects of oral communication?
- What are the different ways and methods of improving paralinguistics?

Experience It

In order to get a feel of nonverbal communication in retail sales, you need to develop a project to study the body language of your customers. You need to select a few regular customers that you interact with on a regular basis. You have to note down their body language as well as their paralinguistic aspects of communication and make a comparative analysis. You can co-relate it with their buying patterns or decisions or other factors that you find relevant. It would be an interesting as well as a challenging exercise for you.

APPLICATION EXERCISE

1. Study the following statements about body language, and tick TRUE or FALSE against each of them.

- (a) Body language includes both intentional and unintentional messages.
- (b) Messages are easy to understand when the verbal and nonverbal messages contradict each other.
- (c) When verbal and nonverbal messages contradict each other, listeners believe the nonverbal clues.
- (d) Most of us look another person straight in the eye when we tell a lie.
- (e) Prolonged eye contact does not show respect in all the cultures.
- (f) Everyone can control facial expressions.
- (g) We are sometimes not aware that we are sending nonverbal messages.
- (h) Facial expression can never show how we feel.

- (i) Your body movements give important signals about your personality.
- (j) Nonverbal clues have different meanings in various cultures.

II. Study the following suggestions to improve your body language, and choose those which may be not effective strategies for improving your body talk.

- (a) Keep your posture as natural as possible.
- (b) If you use body movements, ensure that they are not consistent with your verbal message.
- (c) Use gestures to express both positive as well as negative feelings.
- (d) Learn the cultural patterns of body movements and gestures to avoid cross-cultural misunderstandings.
- (e) Use your hands and arms very carefully and effectively.
- (f) If you use gestures, be sure that they are consistent with your verbal message and there is no contradiction.
- (g) You may reflect nervous mannerisms.
- (h) Use positive facial expressions.
 - (i) Use eye contact to show your sincerity and confidence.
 - (j) If there are more than one listener as in the case of a meeting, group discussion, oral presentation, etc., you should look at only one of the listeners.

III. Study the following suggestions to improve the paralinguistic aspects of your communication, and choose those which may be effective.

- (1) Listen carefully and critically to your voice to determine the quality of your voice.
- (2) Once you have determined the quality of your voice, you need to do regular practice to improve specific features of your voice.
- (3) Practice in such a way that you concentrate on improving all the features of your voice at a time.
- (4) In order to improve the pitch of your voice, practice to be varied and flexible.
- (5) Control your pitch if it is too high or too low.
- (6) Always speak in a monotone.
- (7) Keep the tone of your voice natural and conversational.
- (8) Never change your volume when you are changing an idea or an approach.

- (9) Modify your pace as per the requirement of the content as well as that of the audience.
- (10) Pause whenever you are communicating a difficult or a complex information or idea.

KEY TO APPLICATION EXERCISE

I.

- (a) True (b) False (c) True (d) False (e) True
(f) False (g) True (h) False (i) True (j) True

II. (b), (c), (g), and (j) may be not effective strategies for improving your body talk.

III. (1), (2), (4), (5), (7), (9), and (10) are effective strategies for improving paralinguistic aspects of your communication.

CHAPTER NINE

9

Application of
Product Knowledge
in Retail Sales

Let us Understand

Mr. Mathur had walked into the multi product showroom of a car manufacturer to buy a new car. He had discussed the financial arrangement with his bankers and he was all set to purchase a new car from the show room on that particular date. For this purpose he had also carried his cheque book with him as he wanted to surprise his wife today that happened to be her birthday. He had seen all but selected a particular model. When he asked the car salesperson present there to explain to him the difference between a tall boy model and the regular model of the car that the salesperson had been offering him, the salesperson had given him very vague and unconfident explanation. Sensing this, the customer Mr. Mathur decided to visit the showroom of the company manufacturing tall boy model to check for himself the difference between the two. He did not go back to the first showroom that he had visited and decided to rather buy the car from this company whose technically trained salesperson could give a satisfactory answer to his problem.

What is obvious is that the first salesperson lost a good and almost fixed sale.

What according to you lead to this failure?

The salesperson at the first showroom should have been able to answer the query of the customer there and then if he had been trained into the latest competitive products available in the market. That would have prevented the customer Mr. Mathur walking out of the showroom. He would have made his decision based on the product knowledge provided by the salesperson at the first showroom.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This chapter will help you understand

- ✓ What is a product in retail marketing?
- ✓ Essential facts about the product.
- ✓ How much product knowledge will suffice in retail sales to communicate effectively with prospects
- ✓ Difference between the product and product line.
- ✓ Price in relation to the product for retail sales.
- ✓ Product performance and its talking points for communication in retail sales.

INTRODUCTION

A retail salesperson has to communicate effectively with his prospects who visit the retail stores, shopping malls, and other points of purchase. He has to educate these customers on the merchandise available in the store and inform them about those facts about the merchandise which will enable them to reach a decision on the purchase of the products. Product knowledge therefore is a very essential tool for a retail salesperson to be equipped with. This product knowledge will enable the retail salesperson become a better and skilled retail salesperson. He can with the help of his product knowledge show the prospects visiting the showroom as to how and what they will gain by buying the products from the store. Product knowledge will also equip the retail salesperson with the facts on conversational and curiosity value to help the customer spend more time in the store till he is able to reach the purchase decision.

The modern stores and shopping malls are a kind of self display and self advertising points of purchase and it is often argued as to how much should a retail salesperson know about his products. In this chapter we make an attempt to understand the need for product knowledge, the extent of product knowledge that a retail

salesperson requires to communicate to the prospects. We will also analyse as to how effectively he can communicate the product knowledge for promotion of sales through his store. The chapter will deal with what should a retail salesperson know and master about the products in his store.

IMPORTANCE OF PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE

Product knowledge is an integral part of salesperson's skill and proficiency. He can do away with many other shortcomings of the store décor and display etc., if he has been able to master the product information. The product information may be provided to him by the representatives of the firms whose products are on sale at his store. In fact firms dealing into automobiles, white goods, machineries, and other high value and hi-tech products, sponsor the retail sales men from the retail stores for training, and upgradation of their skills from time to time.

The firms undertake such an expensive task to make sure that when it comes to selling their products the retail salesperson presents the facts correctly to the prospects i.e. neither understated nor overrated. This means that the retail salesperson must be able to do an acceptable job in order to make satisfactory sale to the prospects and enable them satisfy their needs without causing any post purchase dissonance or discomfort. Such a professional task will attract more satisfied customers to the store in future too.

The four points mentioned below highlight the importance of product information for a retail salesperson.

Product Knowledge Generates Confidence

A product in marketing parlance can be defined "as a bundle of physical, psychological, tangible, and intangible, present and future attributes that put together bring satisfaction or benefits to the buyer beyond the price paid by him."¹ In order to give them the feeling of having derived a return satisfaction beyond the price paid the marketers around the world develop their advertising communication to the consumers based on these tangible and psychological attributes of a product.² A retail salesperson is expected to have a complete knowledge of all these attributes present in the product and communicate them to the prospect in order to help the prospect reach a buying decision while he is present in the retail store. It appears to be a very tall task. Yet the products are being sold across the retail counters all over the world with the efforts of the knowledgeable salesmen across the world.

We can imagine talking to a salesperson who does not know about the product he is offering on sale. He will simply not exude the confidence necessary to win over the customer's trust. Such a salesperson will not have any knowledge about the

¹Ramneek Kapoor, *Fundamentals Of Sales Management*, Macmillan India limited, pp 34-35.

²Justin Paul, Ramneek Kapoor, *International Marketing: Text and Cases*, 2008, Tata McGraw-Hill, pp 192.

product line, capacity, performance parameters, limitations and benefits. He will not be able to demonstrate the product as per the laid down policy of the manufacturer. A well trained salesperson on the other hand will be full of confidence. He will not be shy of displaying the product and demonstrating its operations. He will also be able to point out not only the plus points but many a times its shortcomings too to win over the confidence of the prospects. The prospects will always trust a man who speaks the truth and that too with a relevant confidence. It will generate the self-assurance in the mind of the prospect to make a purchase from this store.

Product Knowledge Generates Enthusiasm

A reasonable level of enthusiasm is required in every retail sales person. It enables him to generate the requisite interest into the mind of the prospects also about the quality, value, dependability, style, advantage and profit from the product being offered for sale. Such an enthusiasm will come in the mind and behaviour of salesperson only if he has gained sufficient knowledge about the product. He will be then able to distinguish about the benefits, features and advantages of the products for his prospects' assistance. For example, a car salesperson who takes the prospect for a test drive into a new model of the automobile will be able to make a better impression about the product if he can open the hood of the car and make a comparative assessment of the new features with the old models. He can also compare it with similar models from other car manufacturers too.

Product Knowledge Results into Professional Selling

A retail salesperson does not get access to the tools of finding about his prospects like a missionary salesperson does, as it is never sure what kind of customers can walk into his store. The retail salesperson has to make an extempore and on the spot prospecting of the foot falls. He has to convert the possibility of sales into the definite profitable proposition for both the visitor as well as the store. Through his or her professional handling a salesperson has to show the buyers how best they can select the proper products to satisfy their needs. Each customer walking into the store will have a different need to fulfill even though he may opt many a times for the same products. Their affordability levels, their urgency of needs and their parameters of satisfaction may differ from each other. The same refrigerator may be bought for the storage of food by customer A or the display of newly acquired social status by customer B, or even an addition cooling machine for his household by customer C. A well trained professional salesperson will have adequate product information to match the product to suit the need of these three different customers. He will be thus in a position to sell a refrigerator each to three different customers who have three different needs. This is called professional selling. The matching of product to the need to generate the required action for purchase is definitely a professional salesperson's job. He can adopt this professional selling only when he is fully equipped with the thorough product knowledge.

A Brief Report on Retail Sectors', Training Efforts in India:

The retail sector's hunt for manpower is leading players to hitherto uncharted territory. Now, school students (Class X and XII pass outs) are being roped in to help the sector satisfy its insatiable appetite for skilled workforce. So, companies such as Reliance Retail, Pantaloon and Godrej Agrovet are going to schools to scout for talent. Reliance Retail, which plans to recruit around 5 lakh employees for its venture over the next five years, expects to hire around 60–70% of its front-end staff from government schools. These Class XII pass outs then undergo a six month training programme before getting on to the shop floor. Similarly, Pantaloon Retail hires as many as 300 school pass outs from both government and private schools, out of the 600 it recruits every month. The retail major also gives them an option of pursuing a BBA in Retail through distance-learning programmes at Madurai Kamaraj University and pays half the fee on completion of one year of the course. It currently has on its rolls around 3,500 school pass outs, picked up from various schools in the country.

(Source: http://retailindiatv.blogspot.com/2007_02_25_archive.html)

Product Knowledge Generates Higher Income

Each retail sales person will notice that his earning has a direct linkage to the volumes of sales he generates for the store. These earning may fluctuate as the sales fluctuate in the store. In case the store salesperson is able to convert more foot falls into actual sales his income will go up. Similarly, if the customers merely walk into and out of the store without buying anything, the retail salesperson's income is bound to get affected negatively. The better product knowledge will enable him to convert more enquiries and foot falls into actual and profitable sales. Better product education will also help the retail salesperson meet and answer the objections of the reluctant customers. He can actually help them to take a decision by highlighting the efficiency of the product thus overcoming the last minute disinclination and lack of enthusiasm about the purchase of the product from the store. In a way in meeting their need, he generates better income for himself too.

WIDTH OF PRODUCT KNOWLEDGE

The product knowledge that a retail salesperson can absorb can be very wide as can be evaluated from the list of the points indicated below. However it is not necessary that he masters all the points. It will depend on the support and the training facility he gets from the principle suppliers to the store. In case of the exclusive stores, it must be obligatory on the retail salesperson appointed there to master as much product as possible in order to communicate the positive story about the product to the prospects. The extent of product knowledge a retail salesperson needs can though differ from product to product and its application and classification. We will have a discussion on all these points and their application by the retail salesperson in communicating with the customers and converting their visit into effective and profitable sales.

<p>General information about the product:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Origin and history Research and development Major improvements Identification: brand name, trademark, trade character Competitive position Availability and supply position Talking points Related products and substitutes <p>Product in operation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> –uses and application –User benefits –Performance potential and limitations –Operation and service –Cost of operation and maintenance 	<p>Physical product:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sizes and weights Colors, models and designs Place in product line Specifications Packaging Peripheral knowledge about method of manufacture Quality control Price, discounts, terms, taxes Schemes available on product Profit <p>Services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Credit policy Shipping and delivery Installation and stores' policy
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Product History

Every product displayed at the retail store will have some fascinating anecdotes related to its history that can be made use of by the retail salesperson to correlate with the story he tells to the retail customer. The salesperson will do well to learn as to who had invented the first such product, what changes historically took place in the shape, size, physical properties of the product. It is very interesting to note the history of coffee written on the walls of Barista coffee shops that tell of the origin of the Italian coffee in the world and the journey therefrom to the modern day Barista stores. As the customers sip their different flavors of Italian cappuccino at the Barista coffee shops they also get acquainted with the historical journey of barista coffee from the days of when it was considered a sin to drink a cup of coffee to the modern world where a cup of coffee leads to many leisure time discussions. The story of coffee starts with a legend of coffee beans discovered by a goat herder in a year before 1000 A.D, to the year 1600 when Pope Clement VIII had baptized coffee as an acceptable Christian beverage. It tells the customers that the first coffee house had been opened in Italy in 1645. It becomes a matter of great interest for coffee lovers to know that coffee had been banned too by king Charles II in the year 1700. It also speaks of the research into the product when it tells that the customer about the removal of caffeine from the coffee beans and the patenting of espresso machine. The history brings the Barista lounge visitors to the year 2000 when first barista bar had been opened. Such interesting reading on the product can definitely create the desired urge to drink coffee at the lounges.

Similarly, the salesperson of other products too will do well to remember and reconnect the historic important dates with the journey. History of motor cars could

be one such interesting story to listen to; the automobile salesperson should remember to make it sound fascinating to the prospects. It could also be heartening for a prospect to know that he is dealing with a well informed individual. Along with the history of the product the salesperson can also delineate on the improvement that had taken place in the product performance over the years. For example the introduction of 100 cc bikes, the invention of 800 cc cars, the hatch back sports utility vehicles etc., in Indian automobile market can all make interesting story.

Knowledge Related to Production of the Product

The retail salesperson does not need to have a complete knowledge of the production systems. He does not have to be an automobile engineer to sell cars. Similarly, a salesperson selling refrigerators need not know how refrigerators are produced. Though he must have peripherals knowledge about the raw materials and other parts that go into production and their use by the company whose brand he offers to the prospect for sale. He can then compare the differences in diverse substitutes for the benefit of his prospects. He can then educate himself on the availability of such raw materials and their impact on the supply position of the finished product. For example, if a salesperson selling lubricant is aware of the supply position of the crude oil and its price fluctuations' nationally as well as in the international markets he can definitely attend to a customer's worries of unpredictable price and supply situation and assuage any wrong feelings towards the stores.

Knowledge Related to the Manufacturing Process and Standards

It is often said that a salesperson does not have to play the part of a production manager hence he need not know about the total production process. But in the modern world what with the concern about child labour, animal protection activists and environment friendly green armies' customers too would like to know the production process systems of various products.

The retail salesperson will be able to convince the prospects about the non infringement of any such social issues if he actually knows the production sequence, beginning with the raw material to the shipping of the finished goods. Learning about the online process and treatment till the final shipping will give him the confidence to answer all kind of socially relevant queries of his prospects. Many a customers from India and abroad have raised such issues as employment of child labour, the impact of chemicals used into the production process on the environment and general health and well being while purchasing toys, leather shoes, apparels, fireworks, and even match boxes. The customers may not like to know the total production process but they will be satisfied if the salesperson across the counter can answer their apprehension. Salesperson's display of knowledge about the manufacturing standards e.g. I.S.O, B.I.S. Euro emission standards, pollution controls etc., are other issues that can assure a customer on the safety and quality aspect of the products. Even though the standard packing and literature of the product might

carry such details but a customer is reassured if an educated salesperson at the retail counter communicates this to him in a knowledgeable way. The retail salesperson can communicate with exhibited authority with his prospects only if he has been imparted the necessary knowledge on the manufacturing process and manufacturing standards. Many companies sponsor retail salesmen from their retail channel partners for their plant visits to give them a short training and exposure in manufacturing processes.

Knowledge Related to Product Research

A retail salesperson does not have to conduct a research into the product himself but if he can be educated and trained into the research that has gone into the manufacturing and marketing the product. It will enable him to communicate the same to the prospects while converting a mere enquiry into actual buying decision. The salesperson can be informed about the manufacturing research as to when and where it had been conducted and what findings and results lead to consequently introduction of the product. It will be in the interest of sales to educate him on the studies and tests conducted during such research either by the manufacturer himself or by any outside professional agency. Such detailed knowledge by the man at the point of sale can definitely impress the prospects. It can also be used as an effective feedback system by the companies for further research and development. Hyundai Motors must have had similar thoughts in mind while they devised a policy to get the retail sales personnel from their distributors showrooms trained at the factories. Similarly other automobile companies e.g. Maruti Suzuki, Bajaj Auto, and Hero Honda conduct similar training programs for their retail sales personnel from distributor partner points. Feedback on market research data if provided to retail salesperson can very well be used as an effective selling tool.

Similarly, the quality of the product can be upgraded by the feedback provided by the retail salesperson. The communication thus becomes a two way flow of information about the market as well as product research. The customer too will feel happy knowing that the salesperson and his principals do care for his comments and that his valuable suggestions are attended to by the retailer and the manufacturer. This will help establish a long term relationship between the customer and the retail store.

Knowledge Related to the Product Line

It is a rare case in the modern times that a retail salesperson is expected to sell only a single product. In fact even when he is employed by the exclusive stores of a single manufacturer, he will have to represent several different models and range of products to the prospects. A retail showroom managed by any distributor of car company will have displayed a large assorted bevy of cars to meet the demand of different segments of the customers.



Cars on Display

The retail salesperson will have to get training and updating into all the features of the different models of the products that his showroom sells in order to present the facts to the prospects. That means first of all he must be trained into the vital essentials of the physical product and then he has to learn how to describe his product to the prospect very clearly and completely without any ambiguous terms. He will also have to get training into the addition of latest features and ingredient into the product to keep his prospects updated and informed on the technical developments in to the product.

He will also have to get training into other details e.g., dimensions, capacity, designs and their adaptability to different segments and conditions. The choices available in different segments like the colours, models, grades, sizes, delivery conditions and the composition of the line. By telling the customers about the composition of the line he will be able to distinguish one product from the other for the benefit of the prospects. For example when Maruti Suzuki had floated the joint venture in early 1980s 800 cc car was the first model to be introduced. It was only later on at stage II that the other models such as 1000 cc, Zen, Maruti Esteem, and Baleno to cater to the customers from the large size and mid-size segment had been added to the Maruti stable. The story of the product development will also speak of the additions to the product family and what has been the performance of each product on way to the updating of technology.

Knowledge Related to the Product Performance

A product to the buyer is a mean to find an answer to his problem. The retail salesperson while helping the prospect in the proper selection also in a way helps the prospect to satisfy his need. And if he is able to delight him by the selection, he will establish a life time connection with the customer. The retail salesperson must be able to find out the basic need of the prospect and sell him a communication that matches this expectation of the prospect. In other words, instead of selling only the product, the retail salesperson will go a step further and sell to the prospect what the product will do to satisfy his need. The retail salesperson should have answer to the following general questions about the product that the prospects may ask him:

What is the product designed to do?

What are the operating systems?

What are the substitutes of this product?

What will this product substitute for?

Who are the regular customers?

What are the other related and auxiliary products his store sells?

Do the neighbourhood stores sell similar products?

What are the guarantees, warranties, and replacement policies about each product his store sells?

The salesperson will have to communicate the exact and precise terms of the product after sales support policies of the manufacturers and the retail store in order to handle reasonably tenable request and claims from the customers in future. He must be very clear with the customer right at the time of purchase of the products in case his store does not offer any kind of guarantee or warranty and it has to be handled by the manufacturers only.

It is equally important that the salesperson communicates to the customer about the product after sales service. The retail salesperson will be asked questions related to the free service or the amount chargeable after the sales have taken place. He must also communicate to the customer the details whether the store service staff will visit the customer's place of installation or the product will be brought to the retail showroom for service. He also has to communicate the policy on spares, repairs and the charges thereof along with the time limit for such service. Many smart retail salesmen will transform such details into the reasons for converting the general enquiries into actual sales by their effective communication skills.

Knowledge about Product Price, Discounts and Schemes

The prospects visiting retail stores will definitely be keen to know the price they are supposed to pay for the product. Even though the product may have the maximum retail selling price or discounted saleable price displayed all over, it is but human nature to bargain further and try to extract the maximum advantage. The retail salesperson will have to be very clear about the pricing philosophy of his store. He should understand whether the price mentioned is final or he has the authority to negotiate further. He should also be very clear if his seniors expect him to refer any such queries to them, so that store does not stand to lose any money on the transaction nor the customer. The retail salesperson should also be aware of the free schemes, add-on schemes and any other contests his store is running. He will have to communicate the same to the customers visiting the retail store. His knowledge of the maximum retail price of all the products will prevent the overcharging etc. from the customers. Many products will also have inbuilt clauses about the mainte-

nance contract for extended periods. Knowledge about such contracts and their validity, the advantage involved for the customers, should also be known to the retail salesperson. He can definitely use such knowledge about the products and price to convert his prospects into customers.

Knowledge Related to the Selling Points of Product

But all this product knowledge can be useful only if it is gainfully employed by the retail salesperson in his communication with the prospects. The salesperson by his experience and knowledge now can devise common selling points which he can use to convey positive image about the product brands his store sells. For example, a salesperson selling refrigerators may use the better after sales service offered by the store. He can emphasize on the advantage of the availability of factory trained service staff for attending to any kind of future service need of the customer. He can tell the prospects some references of the already satisfied customers who had bought the similar products from his store. He can communicate about the research and development taking place at the factories of his stores' principal supplies to yet develop still better products for the customers. The retail store's image will be further enhanced by the comprehensive product knowledge the salesperson will possess. He should be fully trained to handle not only the communication about the products but also if need be a further training to his prospects in the use and maintenance of the products he offers to them for sale.

CHAPTER REVIEW

Retail selling is becoming very competitive in India. It has today moved from the neighbourhood friendly store to megamalls and multi departmental stores and shopping complexes. This has resulted into an unprecedented demand for widely informed and better trained sales personnel for these stores. The companies are finding it difficult to find and retain trained retail salespersons. Many retail management educational institutes have been set up all over the country to provide necessary training to the retail sale staff. The product knowledge however, will always remain the domain of the manufacturers. The manufacturers though keep on inviting the retail sales personnel to their shop floors for some peripheral training. It is in their interest that they should devise special training program in product knowledge in collaboration with some of the institutes. We have seen in this chapter that, product knowledge for a retail sales person is absolutely necessary for effectively communicating with the prospects and converting their visit to the store into the actual sales. The product knowledge would mean all those facts that have a convertible and

retention value to change the mindset of the prospect from that of a mere query to actual purchase, should be told to the retail salesperson to handle the job of selling more efficiently and profitably. The retail salesperson will be able to match the product to the need of the customer by use of the successful communication of the product knowledge. He will be able to generate effective satisfaction and delight amongst all his customers to make it profitable situation for both the retail store and the manufacturers.

ACTIVITIES

Explore it Further

In order to understand the topics discussed in this chapter, you need to read further and check websites to answer the following questions:

1. What is the importance of product knowledge for a salesperson employed by a multi product megamall?
2. Why should a retail salesperson brief the customer on the after sales service policy of a product company?
3. What are the important facts of product knowledge that should be communicated to a retail salesperson?
4. "Why a retail salesperson should need to know about the price, discount and schemes offered on the product", comment.
5. How can the History of the product make an interesting sales story? Explain with examples.
6. Why should a retail sales person have knowledge about the product performance? Explain with examples.

Experience It

In order to understand the application of product knowledge for effective communication with a retail customer you should visit a retail store selling appliances and white goods. Discuss with the senior retail sales persons of such a store if the product knowledge actually helps them in selling better.

APPLICATION EXERCISE

Assess your understanding of the key points discussed in this chapter by answering the following ten questions:

Q.1. Which the following is TRUE about product knowledge?

- (a) It generates a confidence in the retail salesperson.
- (b) It generates enthusiasm in the retail salesperson.
- (c) It generates higher income.
- (d) It leads to professional selling.
- (e) None of these.
- (f) All of these.

Q.2. Product history refers to

- (a) Invention of the first product.
- (b) Changes that historically took place in the shape of the product.
- (c) Changes that historically took place in the size of the product.
- (d) Changes that historically took place in the physical properties of the product.
- (e) None of these.
- (f) All of these.

Q.3. Product knowledge refers to

- (a) General information about the product.
- (b) Use of product in operation.
- (c) Physical product.
- (d) Services offered along with the product.
- (e) All of these.
- (f) None of these.

Q.4. Product knowledge of a retail salesperson includes

- (a) Knowledge related to Product history.
- (b) Knowledge related to production of the product.
- (c) Knowledge related to the manufacturing process and standards.

- (d) Knowledge related to the product line.
 - (e) All of these.
 - (f) None of these.
- Q.5. Retail salesperson's knowledge related to product research refers to
- (a) feedback Research conducted by the salesperson himself
 - (b) manufacturing research conducted by the manufacturer
 - (c) studies and tests conducted during market research by the manufacturer himself
 - (d) study and tests conducted by an outside agency
 - (e) None of these.
 - (f) All of these.
- Q.6. Retail salespersons' knowledge on product performance refers to
- (a) the design of the product
 - (b) the operating systems about the product
 - (c) substitutes of this product
 - (d) product after sales support policies of the manufacturers
 - (e) the product after sales service
 - (f) All of the above
- Q.7. In order to understand pricing philosophy of the store, the retail salesperson should know
- (a) the maximum retail price of the product
 - (b) schemes attached to the products
 - (c) discounts allowed on the product
 - (d) inbuilt price of the maintenance contact of product
 - (e) All of these.
 - (f) None of these.
- Q.8. Possessing adequate product knowledge effectively has several advantages. Which of the following is important in these advantages?
- (a) It helps in identifying customer need.
 - (b) It helps in matching the product to customer need.

- (c) It strengthens store's customer relations.
- (d) It helps to devise common selling points about products.
- (e) it helps in meeting many objections raised by the customers.
- (f) All of the above.

Q.9. A retail salesperson should utilize his product knowledge while communicating with the prospects. The reasons being

- (a) It can inform the customer about the product line available in the store.
- (b) It can inform the customer about the development in product performance.
- (c) It can inform the customer about different product designs available.
- (d) It can inform the customer about the product price, schemes, and discounts.
- (e) It can inform the customer about the after sales support and service available to him.
- (f) All of these.

Q.10. A retail sales man needs product knowledge to

- (a) enable his customers to reach a decision on the purchase of the products.
- (b) become a better and skilled retail salesperson.
- (c) show the prospects as to how and what they will gain by buying the products from the store.
- (d) present the facts about the product correctly to the prospects i.e. neither understated nor overrated.
- (e) equip himself with the facts on conversational and curiosity value.
- (f) All of the points mentioned above.

KEY TO APPLICATION EXERCISE

Q.1. (f)

Q.2. (f)

- Q.3. (e)
- Q.4. (e)
- Q.5. (f)
- Q.6. (f)
- Q.7. (e)
- Q.8. (f)
- Q.9. (f)
- Q.10. (f)

Appendix

Spoken English for Retail Professionals

Let us Understand

Most of the communication that salespeople do is in English. A basic understanding of spoken English is essential for retail professionals. This appendix is a short manual on spoken English. It illustrates important concepts in English Pronunciation, explains problem areas, and explains standard spoken English practices. It discusses basics in English phonetics, word accent, intonation, and a few other features of Spoken English.

Read this Appendix thoroughly in order to improve your spoken English Skills.

ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

Today English is the language of sales and marketing. In most of the Indian cities and towns, retail professionals use English as medium to communicate to the

customers, clients, and colleagues. Thus, you need to be fluent in spoken English in order to be a successful retail salesperson. Moreover, you have to be very careful in your speech habits and avoid simple mistakes in speaking. You should learn appropriate pronunciation techniques that gives you the confidence to avoid common lapses and errors in speaking.

The common belief is that you should use correct English pronunciation in order to speak correct English. Interestingly, there is no such thing as a ‘correct’ pronunciation’ because there is no one right way of speaking. The pronunciation of English varies from one country to another and there are marked pronunciation features associated with English spoken in important English speaking countries—the United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada, and Australia. Even within the United Kingdom, there are variations between English spoken by the inhabitants of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Island. One particular accent, called Received Pronunciation (RP) has come to be accepted as the standard in U.K. Thus, it is better to consider pronunciation in terms of ‘acceptable pronunciation’ and ‘unacceptable pronunciation’ rather than correct or incorrect pronunciation.

A truly acceptable pronunciation is one which allows the listener to understand the content of a message without being distracted by its form. Acceptable pronunciation is, thus, clearly intelligible to all ordinary people whereas ‘unacceptable pronunciation’ refers to a way of talking which is difficult for most people to understand.

Now, it would be difficult for you to learn correct English pronunciation without learning basics of phonetics. Phonetics is that branch of linguistic science that deals with pronunciation. However, we are using the word ‘phonetics’ here to refer to the study of English speech sounds.

Basics in English Phonetics

In order to speak correct English, you should have some idea of English phonetics. You can easily learn acceptable English pronunciation with the help of phonetics.

As you know there are twenty-six letters in English. Do you know how many speech sounds are there in English? Just guess. Not twenty-six, of course. Well, there are forty four speech sounds in English.. That means that there is no *one to one correspondence* between letters and sounds in English as it is in many Indian languages. Now, you can understand why it is difficult to learn English pronunciation. The duality of English spelling and pronunciation may confuse you and make English pronunciation difficult to master. Study the following table that contains examples of words where same letters (underlined) represent different sounds:

<i>Letters</i>	<i>Examples</i>			
/S/	sell	busy	pleasure	pension
/T/	tell	mention	culture	
/CH/	<u>ch</u> ef	<u>ch</u> emical	<u>ri</u> ch	
/E/	pet	decent	decay	

Now, study the following table that contains examples of words where different letters (underlined) represent the same sound:

<i>Sound</i>	<i>Examples</i>						
/S/	see	<u>c</u> ensor	miss				
/SH/	shoe	<u>ch</u> ef	ment <u>ion</u>	prec <u>ious</u>	tens <u>ion</u>	pass <u>ion</u>	anx <u>ious</u>
/Z/	zoo	se <u>ason</u>					
/K/	<u>k</u> ill	<u>ch</u> emistry	<u>call</u>	<u>sick</u>			
/EE/	me <u>et</u>	<u>key</u>	<u>deal</u>	se <u>ize</u>	phys <u>ique</u>	re <u>cast</u>	
/OO/	zoo	mov <u>ie</u>	sou <u>p</u>	tru <u>e</u>	tru <u>th</u>	ju <u>ice</u>	
/AH/	mar <u>ket</u>	fas <u>t</u>	cl <u>erk</u>	<u>aunt</u>	<u>heart</u>		

Phonetic Transcription

Phonetic transcription can be defined as a kind of alphabetical writing in which each letter represents one sound. It is, thus, the writing of a language by means of a separate symbol for every sound. A pronunciation symbol or a phonetic symbol represents each English sound. As the letters of English alphabet can be a poor guide to pronunciation, you should learn the *phonetic symbols of English* because these symbols are a reliable guide to English pronunciation. If you know these symbols, you can use a dictionary to find out the pronunciation of a word. Every good dictionary contains a list of these pronunciation symbols in the beginning. You may find the pronunciation of a word in phonetic symbols.

ENGLISH CONSONANTS

A consonant sound may be defined as a speech sound which is produced with stoppage of air. Speak the word 'paper' and you will notice that while producing the sound /p/, lips are trying to stop the air. Thus, the voice or breath in consonants is partially hindered by tongue, teeth, lips or other organs of articulation. There are twenty four consonant sounds in English. These consonant sounds are classified according to the nature of constriction as plosives, affricates, nasal consonants, lateral consonants, and fricatives.

Now study the following table that contains phonetic symbols for consonants.

Consonant Symbols

<i>Phonemic symbols</i>		<i>EXAMPLES</i>
1	p	p aper p ipe p lastic u pper a cept c ouple c up c ap
2	b	b ulb b ase b ehave a bsorb c arbon c able m ob c ab
3	t	t able s tart t op p ot t ake, c attle c ot c at
4	d	d esign d ata d evelop c ru d e t end b lend d oll b ad
5	k	k ick c ast c hemist a ccurate a ct b lock f actor
6	g	g ive g raphite a go a gainst d iagram o rganic i norganic
7	tʃ	Ch ance r ich b each d ischarge f eature l aunch p reach
8	dʒ	J udge a djust b ridge m agic ch arge g enerator c age
9	f	f ast f eature f ilter f lash d raft e ffect g raph
10	v	v ery v ariant v elocity v ertical v olatile g ive n egative
11	θ	t heory t hermal t hrust f aith b oth e arth m ethod
12	ð	b rother g ather f eather f urther m other n either b athe
13	s	s imple s ea m ass a sk a ssembly d evice e lastic g as
14	z	z ero d esign p hysical p ositive r esult b usy l aser
15	ʃ	sh ift p ressure ash n ation cr ush e mission m achine
16	ʒ	v ision p leasure t reasurer l eisure m easure e xtrusion
17	m	m achine e mission a utomatic c olumn c ompact c ompare
18	n	n ew n umber a node c arbon c rane d rain e lectron
19	ŋ	E vening b earing d istinguish b uilding
20	h	h andle h ardware h eavy h eight
21	l	L evel c all c ollect r ealise
22	r	R ole r ed c orrect m arriage
23	w	W ater w eaver w onder
24	j	Y es y ou y ear y our

VOWEL SOUNDS

Unlike a consonant sound, a vowel sound is unobstructed in articulation by the tongue, teeth or lips. During the articulation of a vowel sound, the active articulator

is raised towards the passive articulator in such a way that there is a sufficient gap between the two for the air to escape through the mouth without friction. For example, speak the word ‘art’. You will notice that while producing the first sound /AH/ the air escapes freely and continuously without any friction.

There are twenty vowel sounds. The vowel sounds are classified as pure vowels and diphthongs. There are twelve pure vowels and eight diphthongs. The pure vowels are further classified as long vowels and short vowels. Study the following tables that contains phonetic symbols for vowel sounds.

Long Vowel Symbols

<i>Phonemic symbol</i>		<i>Examples</i>				
25	i:	easy	feel	free	seize	ceiling
26	u:	shoe	fool	true	coup	truth
27	ɜ:	firm	birth	hurt	curl	burn
28	ɑ:	art	farm	part	fast	aunt
29	ɔ:	port	sport			

Short Vowel Symbols

<i>Phonemic symbol</i>	<i>Examples</i>
30 e	pet said led men
31 ɒ	hot shot pot
32 ʌ	hut shut cut blood
33 æ	hat cat bat
34 ə	ago about announce
35 ʊ	wood food book
36 ɪ	hit sit fill

Diphthong Symbols

<i>Phonemic symbol</i>	<i>Examples</i>
37 ɪə	fear here year
38 eə	fair hair air
39 ʊə	poor truer

(Contd.)

(Contd.)

40	oi	oil boil spoil
41	ei	say late train
42	ai	Try sight bike
43	oo	Go so old gold
44	aw	Now how

PRONUNCIATION GUIDELINES

Pronunciation Guidelines Related to Consonants

If you follow spellings too closely, you may make some mistakes while pronouncing consonant sounds. Remember the following simple guidelines:

The spelling **CH** may confuse you because it has three different sounds tʃ, k and ʃ. Study the following examples:

CH Pronounced as tʃ

Chain, chair, chairman, chalk, challenge, chamber, cherish, champion, preach, exchange, recharge, preacher, mach, attachment, bench, beach

CH Pronounced as k

Character, chasm, chimera, choreographer, chloral, choir, cholera, cholesterol, choral, chord, chorus, chromatic, chromatin, chrome, chromite, chromium, chromosome, chronic, chronicle, chronology, chronological, archives, archipelago, archangel, machinations, schizophrenic, archbishop, schism, mechanical

CH Pronounced as ʃ

Chauffeur, chef, chagrin, chevron, chic, chiffon, chauvinism, chauvinist, chivalry, chivalrous, cache, chassis, chicanery, champagne, chaise, machine, sachet, brochure

The spelling **G** may also confuse you because it has three different sounds ɡ, dʒ and ʒ. Study the following examples:

G Pronounced as ɡ

Gadget, gainful, galaxy, gallant, gallery, galvanize, gargle, garment, glossary, glue, gossip, govern, graceful, gradual, graphic, graphite, grease, grievance, against, regard, magnet, stagnant, regress.

G Pronounced as dʒ

Gauge, cage, gelatin, gelatinous, gem, gemstone, gender, gene, general, generate, generation, generous, genius, gentle, gentry, gesture, giraffe, gorgeous, gym, gymnast, gypsum, gypsy, gyroscope, manage, change, stranger, baggage, cleavage

G Pronounced as ʒ,

Garage, mirage, beige, regime, rouge, bourgeois, bourgeoisie

The spelling S has generally the sound s, but it may also have the sounds ʃ, z and ʒ. Study the following examples:

S Pronounced as ʃ

Sugar, sugary, sure, surely, surety, Pension, tension, expansion, mansion, dissension, ensure, insure, insurance, insured.

S Pronounced as z

Busy, these, rays, lease, noise, chase, cause, disease, because, arise, oppose, expose, pause, prose, praise, rose, tease, vase, transient, transit, transition, transitive, trousers.

S Pronounced as ʒ

Pleasure, measure, treasure, treasury, treasurer, vision, leisure, leisurely, lesion.

The spelling SS may have the sounds s, ʃ and z. Study the following examples:

SS Pronounced as s

Aggressive, miss, kiss, asses, masses, classes, assent, assert, assertive, assertion, assign, assist, assimilate, assistance, associate, association, assumption, dissect, dissension, dissertation, dissident, dissimilar, vessel.

SS Pronounced as ʃ

Aggression, passion, assure, assurance, mission, session, assuredly.

SS Pronounced as z

Dissolve

The spelling T has generally the sound t but it may also have the sounds tʃ and ʃ. Study the following examples:

T Pronounced as tʃ

Nature, culture, future, fracture, puncture, mature, nurture, capture, lecture, picture, gesture, signature.

T Pronounced as ʃ

Differential, differentiate, mention, edition, initiation, nation, national, relation, location, sanction.

Sometimes consonants are not pronounced at all. They become silent. Study the following examples: (The underlined letter/s is/are silent.)

Handsome, handkerchief, grandfather, grandmother, grandson, forehead, cupboard, coupp, psalm, psychology, adjust, adjustment, adjecative, adjoin, adjoining, adjourn, often, gneiss, gnome, gnostic, bourgeois, subtle, sachet, sign, signboard, farm, palm, calm, artist, starter, charter, market, knot, know, knowledge, bouquet.

Minimal Pairs

A minimal pair is a group of words which differ from each other only in one sound. However, this difference brings about a change in meaning. For example, the words *fill* and *till* differ only in the first consonant sound but they mean different things. They are minimal pairs. Read the following minimal pairs aloud:

Sip	ship	Said	shed	Face	phase	Rage	raise
So	show	Same	shame	Race	raise	Refuge	refuse
Sack	shack	Sank	shank	Seal	zeal	Region	reason
Sake	shake	Seat	sheet	Sip	zip	Major	measure
Sale	shale	Self	shelf	Sage	says	Ledger	leisure
Sell	shell	Sock	shock	Page	pays		

Pronunciation Guidelines Related to Vowels

As there is no one to one correspondence between vowel letters and sounds in English, you may make mistakes while pronouncing vowel sounds if you are not careful.

1. Study the following table carefully:

<i>Some possible Letter/s representing the vowel</i>	<i>Vowel sounds</i>	<i>Examples</i>
ee/ea/i/e/ie/ey	i:	Free, meal, unique, legal, field, key
oo/u/ou/ui/ew/ue	u:	zoo, truth, coup, juice, shrewd, true
ir/ur/er/ear	ɜ:	shirt, curl, stern, learn
a/ar/al/er/ear/au	ɑ:	cast, farm, calm, clerk, heart, aunt

(Contd.)

(Contd.)

a/ar/al/or/oa/our/oar/ au/o/augh/ough/wor	ɔː	water, warm, talk, port, coast, course, board, cause, chlorine, taught, sought, sword
e/ai/ea	e	bed, head, said,
o/e	ɒ	socket, entrepreneur,
u/ou/oo	ʌ	fun, couple, enough, blood
a	æ	man, apt, stand
a/e/er/or/eur/ure/o/ou	ə	adult, entrance, anthem, farmer, factor, entrepreneur, nature, automatic, luminous
u/oo/oul	ʊ	Pull, look, should
i/e/y/a/ui	ɪ	sit, behave, baby, accurate, circuit
ear/eer/iu/year	ɪər	fear, peer, helium, year,
a/ay/ai/au	eɪ	made, say, train, gauge,
oor/uer	ʊər	poor, truer
ow/ou	əʊ	now, how, founder
oi/oy	ɔɪ	spoil, coil, joy, loyal
y/igh/ig/i/eigh	aɪ	try, sight, sign, five, height,
o/ow/oa	əʊ	so, low, coal
air/are/ae	eə	chair, care, aerial

2. Read the following **minimal pairs** aloud:

Sit	seat	Cut	cart	Farm	firm	Red	raid	Tell	tail
Fill	feel	Hut	hurt	Heart	hurt	Men	main	Fate	fight
Hill	heal	Shut	shirt	Last	lust	Sent	saint	Set	sight
Hit	heat	Full	fool	Calm	come	Fed	fade	Let	light
Lid	lead	Pull	pool	Card	curd	Let	late	Fell	file
Mill	meal	Spot	sport	Hard	hurd	Met	mate	Plate	light
Knit	neat	Pot	port	Fast	first	Sell	sale	Date	diet
Pick	peak	Cop	corp	Last	lost	Trend	trained	Fail	file
Slip	sleep	Shot	short	Part	pot	Pen	pain	Lay	lie
Ship	sheep	Sot	sort	Cast	cost	Edge	age	Tape	type
Live	leave	Cot	court	Bard	bird	Fell	fail	Tale	tile

Check your Understanding 1

- List three words each with different spellings for the consonant sound having
 - the same consonant sound as in **shoe**.
(Examples: **ship**, **social**, **nation**)

- (ii) the same consonant sound as in **zoo**.
 - (iii) the same consonant sound as in **chair**.
 - (iv) the same consonant sound as in **joy**.
 - (v) the same consonant sound as in **see**.
 - (vi) the same consonant sound as in **care**.
2. List at least three words to show that the consonant letters **C**, **G**, **S**, and **T** can have different sounds in different words.
3. Read the following 105 words aloud and identify words that contain a long vowel sound. Now classify these words into five classes according to the five long vowels.

Abbreviate, absent, airfield, absurd, accident, accessory, accelerator, accompany, mortar, faulty, acetylene, achieve, acknowledge, actually, adamant, diesel, kerosene, technique, advance, aeroplane, aerospace, affiliate, water, frequency, absolute, alcohol, allergy, allergic, altogether, amateur, ambulance, analogous, decrease, frequent, announcer, anonymous, diverge, inertia, apparatus, lubricant, appearance, apprentice, architecture, assault, attractive, attribute, august, authentic, authority, automatic, automobile, barrack, bathe, biography, bouquet, chlorine, chronicle, coefficient, deficiency, delegate, differential, embarrass, encompass, female, finale, luminous, fluoride, forgive, forget, furniture, gymnastic, gynaecology, harmony, penal, hindrance, intermission, organic, intervene, motor, nuclear, natural, plutonium, overseas, overlook, outspread, outward, parlour, paramount, particular, alright, quadrant, repose, research, restoration, surface, survive, survey, translate, translate, volatile, wooden, movie, magazine, police, garden

4. Read the following sentences aloud and identify words containing long vowel sounds. Now, insert these words in the appropriate column in the table.
- (i) Good morning, sir.
 - (ii) Good evening, teacher.
 - (iii) Good to see you again.
 - (iv) I am glad to meet you.
 - (v) Speak to me.
 - (vi) Excuse me.
 - (vii) Could you tell me your name, please?
 - (viii) Can you tell me where the canteen is, please?
 - (ix) I need a glass of water.
 - (x) Thank you sir.

Phonemic symbol

i:

u:

ɜ:

ɑ:

ɔ:

5. The most common English vowel sound is the short vowel **ɔ**. Most of the vowel sounds are reduced to this sound in continuous English. Read the following fifty words and identify words that begin with this short vowel.

Examples: **a**bout, **a**dult, **a**nnounce ability, abolish, above, absent, abrupt, abscond, academic, academy, access, accident, accessory, accompany, account, accuse, acid, acknowledge, achieve, acquaint, acquire, acre, action, addition, address, adjacent, adjunct, admire, advance, adversary, advise, advocate, aeronautics, aeroplane, affair, affect, afford, after, accept, accelerate, average, away, awkward, axis, assert, antique, analyse, analysis, anarchy, another, arrange, aspect

PRACTICE 1

Read the following 100 words aloud and identify words that contain a long vowel sound. Now classify these words into five classes according to the five long vowels. Check your answer from a dictionary.

Absentee, accident, accumulate, adamant, admission, affection, advance, adoption, ambulance, amusement, anarchy, attractive, apartment, analysis, arbitrate, believe, breadwinner, burglar, business, brought, capital, carpet, cartel, catalyst, conscientious, creative, cellulose, ceremonial, charge, chlorine, chronicle, clearance, correspondence, crescent, catalogued, coordinated, conceive, dependable, determined, debauch, demonstration, departmental, dilemma, disciple, disguise, displeasure, decreased, designate, document, engineered, earthquake, enterprising, enthusiastic, experienced, enlarged, examine, equitable, fatal, favourable, ferment, finalised, gardening, group, harnessed, hardly, heart, heated, harmonised, inhabitant, interpolate, introvert, inclination, launch, luxurious, localised, martial, manage, maintain, mechanised, processed, parallel, paralyse, programmed, redesigned, resignation, resource, recruitment, support, systematise, tested, trained, transaction, resourceful, self disciplined, sensitive, sincere, successful, tactful, trustworthy.

TECHNIQUES OF EFFECTIVE WORD ACCENT

English is a **stress language**. To speak English well you have to use correct stress patterns. *Stress* is an important feature of English. This feature of English needs some explanation. Stress is the degree of force with which we pronounce a sound. This degree of force is mainly pressure from the chest affecting the air-stream. However, the hearer or listener may perceive this degree of force as loudness. The stress system of English makes it different from Hindi and other Indian language. In most of the Indian languages, we place the same amount of stress on each part of a word. However, it is not so in English, where one part of a word may be more prominently pronounced than the other parts.

Word Stress

Words are made up of one or more than one separately pronounced parts, which are called syllables. For example, the word ‘teach’ consists of one such part (syllable) whereas the word ‘teacher’ consists of two such parts (syllables). Thus we define a syllable as a group of sounds with one vowel sound and one or more than one consonant sounds. Most of the words that you use may consist of one, two or three syllables. Study the following table carefully:

<i>One syllable</i>	<i>Two syllables</i>	<i>Three syllables</i>
read	reader	readership
lead	leader	leadership
sharp	sharpen	sharpener
stand	standard	standardise
part	partake	particle
mark	remark	remarkable
care	careful	carefully
shame	shameless	shamelessly
out	outrage	outrageous
own	owner	ownership

You may also use words having more than three syllables. Examine the following table:

<i>Words having four syllables</i>	engineering, mechanical, electronics, electrical, decoration, international, introduction, ordinary, artificial, beneficial, architecture, multinational, entrepreneur, chronology, chronometer, entertainment, advertisement, advertiser, economist, economy, disappointment, absolutely, accessory, necessary, accidental, incidental, accompany, accordingly, bureaucracy,
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<i>Words having five syllables</i>	convocation, deficiency, departmental, benevolent, ceremony, certificate, discontinue, experiment Opportunity, aboriginal, abnormality, communication, accelerator, deliberation, academician, civilization, examination
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In words of two or more syllables (actor, actress, singer, doctor, wonderful, interesting, punctuality, opportunity), one of the syllables stands out from the rest. It is ‘relatively loud, long in duration, said clearly and distinctly, and made noticeable by the pitch of the voice’. The stressed syllable is said to be accented. Thus, a *stressed syllable* has the following three features:

- it is said more loudly than the other syllable or syllables;
- it is said on a different pitch; and
- it is held for a longer time than the other syllable or syllables.

Let us try to understand this with the help of a few examples. In the word ‘student’, the first syllable ‘stu’ is more prominent than the second syllable ‘dent’, and thus the first syllable is accented. On the other hand, in the word ‘include’, the second syllable ‘clude’ is more prominent than the first syllable ‘in’, and thus the second syllable is accented. Take another example, in the word ‘physics’, the first syllable ‘phy’ is more prominent than the second syllable ‘sics’.

The following table contains few more examples of word stress.

Stress on the first syllable	Absent, alkali, demonstrate, graduate, marriage, matrimony ordinance, progress, technocrat, weather
Stress on the second syllable	advantage, competitive, converge, credential, eccentric, impossible, necessity, position, reception, tremendous
Stress on the third syllable	Accidental, inspiration, introductory, mathematics, panorama, residential
Stress on the fourth syllable	Affiliation, congratulation, responsibility

Primary Stress and Secondary Stress

In longer English words, there may be more than one prominent syllable. In such words, one syllable may have the main strong stress called *primary stress* where as the other syllable may have weak stress called *secondary stress*. For example, in the word ‘introduction’, the third syllable ‘*duc*’ is said with force and is held for a longer time where as the first syllable ‘*in*’ is held a little less long with a little less force. Thus, the first syllable has the secondary stress while the third syllable has the primary stress. Marking accent.

Study the following table containing stress system in some long English words:

<i>Word</i>	<i>Primary Stress</i>	<i>Secondary Stress</i>
avalanche	1st syllable ' <i>av</i> '	3rd syllable ' <i>lanche</i> '
beautify	1st syllable ' <i>beau</i> '	3rd syllable ' <i>fy</i> '
photograph	1st syllable ' <i>pho</i> '	3rd syllable ' <i>graph</i> '
stethoscope	1st syllable ' <i>ste</i> '	3rd syllable ' <i>scope</i> '
antecedent	3rd syllable ' <i>ce</i> '	1st syllable ' <i>an</i> '
chronological	3rd syllable ' <i>lo</i> '	1st syllable ' <i>chron</i> '
information	3rd syllable ' <i>ma</i> '	1st syllable ' <i>in</i> '
instability	3rd syllable ' <i>bi</i> '	1st syllable ' <i>in</i> '
departmental	3rd syllable ' <i>ment</i> '	1st syllable ' <i>de</i> '
possibility	3rd syllable ' <i>bi</i> '	1st syllable ' <i>po</i> '

Most of the dictionaries use the mark / ' / to show the primary stress in a word. Notice the way stress is marked in the following words:

'summer, 'television, 'secular, 'reference de'ficiency, infor'mative, occu'pation,

Using Correct Stress Patterns

In order to use correct stress patterns, you should follow the simple rules given below:

1. Words with weak prefixes are accented on the root.

Examples

a'broad,	in'clude	in'crease	a'bove	a'ffect
be'come	be'low	dis'able	dis'arm	dis'card
dis'own	dis'place	in'cur	pre'cast	pre'clude
pre'date	re'call	re'cast	re'cite	un'roll
un'safe	un'said	un'seat	un'sound	un'subtle

2. In most two-syllabic words containing a long vowel, the stress is generally on the syllable with long vowel sound.

Examples

'artist	a'cruce	'father	'farmer	'party
'partner	'starter	'faster	'carbon	'market
'teacher	a'chieve	can'teen	ma'chine	'colonel
'fortune,	'journey	'leader	'speaker	'army
'argue	'ardent	'armour	'curtain	'easy
e'ffuse	e'lude	em'bark	'fasten	'faulty
'female	'fertile	fif'teen	'harness	'harvest

'heathen	'hermit	i'mmune	im'part	im'port
im'prove	in'form	i'nert	in'sert	in'trude
'lawyer	'leaflet	'learned	le'gume	'margin
'master	'mercy	mon'soon	'nasty	'nurture
ob'serve	'orchid	'ordain	'organ	'parlour
re'mark	re'lease	re'search	re'trieve	'serpent
'service	'season	'thermal	'treason	'turban
'turbine	'water	'worthy	'carpet	'worship

3. Words ending in -ee are generally accented on the last syllable.

Examples

a'gree	de'cree	de'gree	refe'ree	trus'tee
--------	---------	---------	----------	----------

4. Words ending in -tion have the stress on the syllable before it.

Examples

'action	a'ttention	a'ttraction	calcu'lation	'caption
appli'cation	'caution	co'llection	combi'nation	co'nnection
con'dition	con'ception	communi'cation	con'duction	confir'mation
co'rrection	congre'gation	con'vention	con'struction	conso'lation
'diction	congratu'lation	di'rection	du'ration	intro'duction
di'stinction	di'straction	do'nation	in'jection	in'tention
'function	'fiction	exami'nation	'friction	frus'tration
lo'cation	limi'tation	'mention	imi'tation	re'lation
re'jection	re'tention	'nation	'sanction	se'lection
'section	pro'duction	'station	esti'mation	infor'mation

5. Words ending in -sion, -ssion, -cion and -shion have the stress on the syllable before it.

Examples

'mansion	e'xpansion	'pension	'tension	di'ffusion
'passion	Co'mmission	com'passion	'mission	con'cession
'fission	'session	po'ssession	pro'cession	pro'fession
e'ffusion	con'fusion	con'vulsion	suc'cession	sub'mission
persu'asion	supp'resion	elec'trician	su'spicion	mu'sician
phy'sician	oc'casion	pre'cision	de'cision	'fashion

6. Words ending in -ic, -ical, -ically, -ious, -ial, -ially, -ian, -ious, -logy, -nomy, -graphy have generally the stress on the syllable preceding the suffix.

Examples

aca'demic	spe'cific	aro'matic	ar'tistic	me'chanic
poly'technic	e'lectric	mag'netic	eco'nomie	'magic

elec'tronic	'magical	me'chanical	e'lectrical	eco'nomically
em'pirical	me'chanically	'partial	'partially	confi'dential
es'sential	es'sentially	pufe'rential	confi'dentially	li'brarian
'vicious	'cautious	'precious	de'licious	ma'licious
su'spicious	cere'monious	psy'chology	e'economy	physi'ology
e'cology	chro'nology	bi'ography	pho'tography	ty'pography

7. Words ending in -icy, -ify and -ity have the stress generally on the third syllable from the end.

Examples:

'policy	'scarcity	'codify	i'dentify	'pacify
a'bility	a'trocidity	actu'alidity	ac'tivity	a'ffinity
fa'cility	abi'lity	elec'tricity	'purity	punctu'alidity
elec'tricity	vi'cinity	mo'rality	to'tality	po'larity
le'gality	ca'pacity	lo'cality	to'tality	'charity

8. The suffixes -eer, -self, -ever, -ique, and -mental are accented on the first syllable.

ca'reer	her'self	my'self	him'self	your'self
how'ever	for'ever	what'ever	when'ever	phy'sique
u'nique	'mental	depart'mental	compart'mental	senti'mental

9. The suffixes -ed, -ment, -es, -ing, -age, -ance, -en, -er, -ess, -ful, -hood, -ice, -ish, -ive, -less, -ly, -ness, -or, -ship, -ter, -ure, -y, and -zen do not affect the stress pattern of a word.

Examples:

a'ffect	a'ffected		
a'muse	a'mused		
re'source	re'sources		
e'ffort	e'ffortless		
'court	'courtship		
'friend	'friendship		
'tribute	'tributory		
'lazy	'lazily	'laziness	
'start	'starter	'starting	
e'ffect	e'ffective	e'ffectual	
a'ppoint	a'ppointed	a'ppointment	
a'ppear	a'ppeared	a'ppearing	a'pppearance

10. The suffixes -al, -ible, -ial, and -ially generally affect the stress pattern.

Examples:

'accident	acci'dental
'origin	o'riginal
'sentiment	senti'mental
'access	ac'cessible
'president	presi'dential

11. The stress pattern in the two-syllabic English words which function both as nouns/adjectives and as verbs generally depends upon the grammatical category of the word. The stress is on the first syllable if the word is used as a noun or adjective and on the second if it is a verb.

Examples:

<i>Noun/Adjective</i>	<i>Verb</i>
'convert	con'vert
'process	pro'cess
'transport	trans'plant
'conduct	con'duct
'contrast	con'trast
'contact	con'tact
'object	ob'ject
'perfect	per'fect
'present	pre'sent
'produce	pro'duce
'project	pro'ject
'record	re'cord
'refund	re'fund
'report	re'port
'research	re'search
'subject	sub'ject

Check you Understanding 2

- How many syllables do the following words have?
controversy, demonstrate, entrance, foreign, forehead, jewellery, journey, knowledge, magistrate, mechanism, autonomous, combustion, conduction, curriculum, distinguish, empirical, impossible, impression, informative, involuntary, judicial, machine, manipulate, material, maternal, mechanic, memorial, mistake, municipal, necessity

2. Speak the following words aloud and underline those words, which have stress on the first syllable:
neighbour, accent, catalogue, entrance, secondary, welcome, telephone, encounter appropriate, ceremonial, philosophy, farmer, father, remark, transform, summarise, carbon, differential, reluctant, refuse
3. Speak the following words aloud and mark correct stress:
disappoint, employee, interrupt, precipitation, awkward, handsome, cinema, justice, kerosene, kitchen, knowledge, currency, designate, library, literacy, legislative, emphasize, generalise, adventure, autonomous, connect, concession, irrational, negotiable, manipulate, reproduction, recalculation, laureate, hundred, circumstance, consequence, compulsory, authorise, challenge, empirical, nicotine, merchant, minimise, modern, forgery, chronicle, encourage, excuse, involuntary, cigarette, decompose, perform, persuade, straightforward, supremacy, suspension, material, suspicious, progressive, afternoon, reprehend, seventeen, understand

PRACTICE 2

Stress on the First Syllable

Speak the following words aloud stressing the first syllable. Speak the first syllable **loudly, distinctly, clearly** and **hold** for a longer time than the other syllables in the word.

absence, accident, acid, active, actual, actually, adult, advertise, aeroplane, agent, agency, alcohol, allocate, ambulance, ancient, anecdote, animal, arbitrary, architect, aristocrat, aspirant, borax, borrow, bottom, brilliant, calcium, calendar, camera, capital, capsule, captain, capture, carriage, ceremony, chancellor, character, chemical, controversy, difference, difficult, discipline, evidence, extrovert, factory, family, fashion, favourite, foreign, forehead, formula, frequent, harmony, honorary, hostile, husband, illustrate, indicate, influence, interest, interview, interest, jealous, jewellery, juvenile, lawyer, leaflet, lethargy, living, local, lubricant, luggage, luxury, magistrate, magnet, magnify, manage, manifest, manner, manuscript, margin, market, mechanism, medicine, memory, mercury, message, microphone, microscope, mineral, miniature, minimum, mobile, modem, molecule, moment, mountain, multiple, mystery, national, national, narrow, nationalise, natural, necessary, negligence, negligible, neutral, neutron, nitrogen, nominal, nourish, nuclear, nucleus, nutrient, nature, obligate, ocean, ombudsman, opposite, optic, optimism, optimize, optimum, ordinary, organism, orient, ornament, origin, orthodox, oscillate, oxygen, ozone, packet, pageant, palace, panic, paper, parallel, paralyse, paramount, paramour, paraphrase, paragraph, parcel, pardon, parliament, parlour, partial, particle, partner, passage,

passion, passive, pattern patronise, penalty, penetrate, pension, perfect, permanent, person, personal, petrol, pharmacy, phosphorous, photocopier, photograph, physical, physics, picture, picnic, pilgrim, plagiarise, platform, pleasure, pocket, poison, policy, polish, popular, populate, portion, positive, possible, practice, precedence, precious, perfect, preference, pregnant, president, pressure, previous, primary, principal, principle, product, project, profile, profit, programme, promise, proper, proverb, punctual, puncture, qualify, quality, quantity, quarter, quotable, radical, radiator, rainbow, rampant, ransom, rapture, rational, reason, recognise, reconcile, rectangle, refuge, region, regular, relevant, reverse, rigorous, salient, sanction, scholar, second, seminar, sentiment, serious, session, shoulder, similar, singular, sovereign, spectacle, splendour, stadium, standard, summary, summit, supervise, sympathy, telegraph, temperature, tension, terminal, territory, travel, treasure, ultimate, ultrasound, vegetable, verify, vehicle, vibrant, victory, vicious, visible, vision, vital, volatile, voluntary, volume, vulnerable, vulgar, warrant, water, weapon, wisdom, woman, wonder, yesterday

Stress on the Second Syllable

Speak the following words aloud stressing the second syllable. Speak the second syllable **loudly**, **distinctly**, **clearly** and **hold** for a longer time than the other syllables in the word.

believe, absorb, account, achieve, acquire, activity, address, adjust, admire, admit, adopt, advertisement, advice, advise, affiliate, agree, allow, alternative, amount, apologise, arithmetic, assemble, behaviour, cartoon, cashier, catalysis, certificate, chromatic, collect, combine, combustion, commission, committee, compartment, complexion, conception, condense, condition, conduction, confess, confirm, congratulate, conservative, contain, continuous, convene, corroborate, curriculum, deceive, decline, deliberate, departure, design, detergent, diffusion, direction, discover, distinguish, distributive, diversify, domestic, economy, electric, electrode, electron, embrace, embarrass, exhaust, exhaustion, explore, express, extraordinary, extreme, familiar, fraternity, frustrate, impression, improve, inform, involve, internal, investigate, judicial, machine, magnetic, magnificent, maintain, maternal, mechanic, memorial, mentality, mistake, municipal, neglect, negotiate, notorious, November, obligatory, oblige, observe, obstruct, occasion, offense, offend, opinion, opponent, oppose, optician, organic, original, originate, outrageous, pacific, paralysis, parameter, particular, particularly, peculiar, perfection, persuasive, pervert, phenomenon, phonetic, photography, photographer, physique, police, polite, political, politicise, pollute, potential, practitioner, precaution, prefer, prepare, preserve, prestige, procedure, proceed, production, productive, professor, profound, promote, propose, proposal, provide, psychosis, psychology, quotation, react, reaction, reactive, reactivate,

reality, reciprocate, reflect, reflection, reform, refresh, reliable, reliance, relieve, religion, religious, resource, resort, responsible, return, reveal, revert, review, revoke, revolt, sophisticate, sophisticated, sincere, spectacular, surpass, suspense, suspicion, technique, technocracy, telegraphy, thermometer, transact, transaction, transcend, transcribe, transfer, transition, translate, transmit, unanimous, unchanging, unconscious, unfaithful, unnecessary, unsound, ultimatum, vernacular

Stress on the Third Syllable

Speak the following words aloud stressing the third syllable. Speak the third syllable **loudly**, **distinctly**, **clearly** and **hold** for a longer time than the other syllables in the word.

aeronautics, affidavit, alcoholic, circulation, introduction, complication, corporation, counteract, departmental, derivation, designation, differentiate, distribution, electricity, electrician, independent, information, introduce, introduction, intervene, interrupt, interpose, international, intermission, intonation, irresponsible, mathematical, mineralogy, mountaineer, nationality, obligation, oceanography, operation, opportunity, opposition, oriental, overhead, overseas, personality, personnel, pioneer, population, productivity, radiation, recollect, recommend, represent, representative, situation, souvenir, telegraphic, territorial, ultrasonic, ultraviolet, vegetarian, volunteer

Stress on the Fourth Syllable

Speak the following words aloud stressing the fourth syllable. Speak the fourth syllable **loudly**, **distinctly**, **clearly** and **hold** for a longer time than the other syllables in the word.

apologetic, characteristic, communication, configuration, degeneration, encyclopedia, entrepreneur, exhibition, negotiation, qualification

Weak Forms

Certain very common words such as articles, personal and relative pronouns, the auxiliary verb forms, prepositions and conjunctions have usually two pronunciations, i.e., strong pronunciation and weak pronunciation. The weak pronunciation is generally used in connected speech whereas the strong pronunciation is used when the word is stressed or spoken in isolation, and also when the word comes at the end of a sentence. Study the following examples:

I am looking for my book.	(Weak pronunciation)	f + ə
What are you looking for?	(Strong pronunciation)	f + ɔː

I am going to the party.	(Weak pronunciation)	t + ə
What are you up to ?	(Strong pronunciation)	t + u:
He did not look at me.	(Weak pronunciation)	ə + t
What are you looking at ?	(Strong pronunciation)	æ + t

The use of weak forms is integral to stress patterns in English because the unstressed words are reduced to give prominence to accented syllables. This weakening of unstressed syllables in a sentence is a characteristic feature of spoken English. Consider the following examples (the **bold** words are in weak form):

- 'Look **at** 'these 'flowers.
- I **am** **from** 'Bangalore.
- They **are** 'coming **to** the 'party.
- She **was** 'writing a 'letter.
- They **were** 'present in the 'meeting.
- I **am** 'waiting **for** my 'friend.
- He **has** 'gone **to** the 'club.
- She **can** 'join you.
- Can** you 'wait **for** me?
- That** is the spirit.

Study the following table that contains a list of words which generally appear in weak form in connected speech.

Prepositions	at, for, from, of, to
Articles	a, an, the
Conjunctions	and, as, than, that, but
Auxiliary verbs	is, am, are, was, were, does, can, has, have, had, shall, will, would, must

Check Your Understanding 3

Speak the following sentences aloud and identify the words that appear in weak form. Underline them.

1. What can I do for you?
2. Can I help you?
3. I am coming from the library.
4. I want to send this parcel to New York.
5. What are you waiting for?
6. I am waiting for you.
7. Are you waiting for the train?

8. Was he present in the meeting?
9. When was the last announcement made?
10. They must be working very hard.
11. One atom differs from another in its atomic number and electronic configuration.
12. You can never see air moving but can only detect its motion.
13. You should try as hard as you can.
14. That is not really expensive.
15. You are welcome.
16. Thanks for coming to the party.
17. They are waiting for you for half an hour.
18. Do not look at these papers.
19. Can you join me for a moment?
20. I would love to join you but I am busy.

RHYTHM IN CONNECTED SPEECH

Rhythm is a pattern of successive accented and unaccented syllables in an utterance or a sentence. In connected speech in English, one sound is linked closely to the next in such a way that it is difficult to tell exactly where one word ends and the next begins. This linking of words and phrases affect your pronunciation in more than one way and helps to maintain *rhythm* in speech.

‘*Rhythm*’ is an important characteristic feature of English speech. In an utterance or a sentence in connected speech, some syllables stand out from the rest and are stressed while some syllables remain unstressed. In fact, stressed and unstressed syllables make a pattern in connected speech and this pattern is known as rhythm. Speak the following sentences aloud to understand this feature of English speech:

1. Can I ‘help you?
2. ‘What can I ‘do for you?
3. I am ‘pleased to ‘meet you.
4. I am ‘glad to ‘meet you.

In the first sentence above, there is one stressed syllable and three unstressed syllables while in each of the remaining sentence there are two stressed and four unstressed syllables. Thus, you may note that in every sentence or utterance there are some syllables which stand out from the rest and are stressed. Stressed syllables occur at regular intervals of time, and it is this regularity of occurrence of the stressed syllables that gives English its characteristic rhythm. The rhythm in English pronunciation is maintained by pronouncing the stressed syllables carefully while the unstressed syllables are crowded together between the stressed syllables.

Speak the following sentences aloud maintaining the stress patterns as marked, and note how unstressed syllables are crowded together between the stressed syllables:

1. 'What is your 'father?
2. My 'father is a 'singer.
3. I 'want a 'glass of 'water.
4. The 'pleasure is 'mine.
5. My 'sister 'wants to be a 'doctor.
6. It is 'nice to 'see you a'gain.
7. I 'wonder if you could 'find an 'English 'teacher for me.
8. Would you 'mind 'giving me your 'notebook for a 'day?
9. There is 'someone 'waiting for you in the 'living 'room.
10. She would 'like to be'come a 'social 'worker.

DEVELOPING CORRECT TONE

In order to be fluent in English, you need to develop correct *tone* or *intonation*. A *tone* refers to the *modulation of the voice expressing a particular feeling or mood*. It is an important feature of spoken English and plays an important role in verbal interaction. The tone of the voice shows the attitude of the speaker and reveals the intention of the speaker. It gives implicit information by indicating the type of sentence spoken by the speaker.

In order to use and identify correct tone in spoken English, you should identify the *tonic syllable*, understand different *types of tones*, and divide an utterance into *tone groups*.

Tonic Syllable

Tonic syllable is the syllable on which the pitch change begins. Some people call it 'nucleus'. Look at the following sentences:

'What's your father'?

In this sentence, there is a high static tone on the syllable 'What's', i.e., the accented syllable is on a level pitch. However, the tone starts falling down on the last stressed syllable 'fa', i.e., the voice slides down from the original pitch becoming softer and softer until it stops. Thus, 'fa' is the tonic syllable or the nucleus. A pitch change begins on the syllable, which we want to make the most important. Although there are exceptions, the last stressed syllable of a tone group is generally the tonic syllable.

Now consider the following examples:

1. She is a 'painter.

2. What is your 'problem?
3. I 'want a 'glass of water'.
4. 'What do you `want?
5. 'What a 'beautiful scene'.

Types of Tones

There are several tones. However, we will try to discuss three of them, i.e., falling tone, rising tone and falling-rising tone here.

Falling Tone

The pitch of our voice falls on the tonic syllable in a *falling tone*. You use falling tone in ordinary statements (assertive sentences, including both affirmative and negative, without any implication), wh-questions (questions beginning with a wh-word, such as what, when, where, etc.), polite expressions, greetings, imperative sentences (commands, prohibitions, etc.), and exclamatory sentences. Study the following table for examples. The symbol ' is used here to indicate a falling tone:

<i>Type of sentence</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Ordinary statements	I'm 'pleased to 'talk to you./I can 'drive a `car./ She's 'going to `London./ I'm at'tending the `meeting.
Wh-questions	'What's the 'problem?/ 'Why are you 'late? /'What do you 'want?
Polite expressions	'Thanks for 'helping./ 'So 'nice of you.
Greetings	'Good 'morning./'Good 'evening./'Good 'night.
Imperative sentences	'Pick up the 'phone./ 'Close the 'door./ 'Finish the 'job.
Exclamatory sentences	'What a 'fine morning! / 'How 'wonderful!

Rising Tone

The pitch of our voice rises on the tonic syllable in a *rising tone*. You use rising tone in polite questions, conditional expressions, polite requests, direct questions (require yes/No answer), and incomplete utterances. Study the following table for examples. The symbol ˆ is used here to indicate a rise of tone:

<i>Type of sentence</i>	<i>Examples</i>
Polite questions	'How is your -study?/ What's the -time?/'Can I -help you?
Conditional expressions	If you 'work -hard, you 'may 'get the pro'motion. If you 'do 'what I -say, you will 'get 'what you `want.
Polite requests	'Please 'give me your -pen?/ 'Please 'sit -down. / 'Could you please 'tell me your -name?
Direct questions	'Do you 'like 'English -music?/ 'Have you fi'nished the -job?/ Did you at'tend the -meeting?
Incomplete utterances	By the -way, /I'm not at'tending the 'meeting. -Fortunately, / the 'car didn't 'hit the 'old `man.

Falling-Rising Tone

There is a change in the pitch from high to low in a falling-rising tone. You use this tone when you are in doubt or want to convey some implicit or special meaning. Study the following examples. The symbol ∨ is used here to indicate a rise and fall of tone:

1. His ‘husband is ∨smart. (Implied meaning: His husband is smart but not intelligent)
2. I don’t ‘want to ‘go to the ∨party. (I don’t want to go but I’ll go because you want me to go.)
3. The ‘place is ∨nice. (The place is nice but the people are not.)

Tone Group

You should be able to divide an utterance or a sentence into tone groups. A sentence or an utterance in English may consist of a single tone group or several tone groups. For example, the sentence “Could you please tell me something about your career goals?” has one tone group while the shorter sentence “well, I’m ready.” consists of two tone groups. Although there are no fixed rules for the division of a sentence into tone groups, you should remember that a full stop or a new clause indicates the end of a tone group where a comma may or may not indicate the end of a tone group.

Examine the following examples carefully to understand tone group division. (The use of a slant line / indicates the end of a tone group.)

1. I am sure you would like to meet the group members. (one tone-group)
2. I have worked for six years as an assistant manager in Mumbai for Infosys. (one tone-group)
3. If I attend the meeting, / I shall put your point of view before the board. (two tone groups)
4. Luckily, / there was no one in the room / when the explosion started. (Three tone groups)
5. Whatever may be the circumstances, /I always complete my projects on time. (two tone groups)

Check your Understanding 4

1. **Identify the rhythm pattern of the following expressions. Read the solved example.**

Solved example

Sentence: Please call the doctor.

Rhythm pattern: **SSUSU** (S stands for stressed syllable while U stands for unstressed syllable)

- (i) What can I do for you?

- (ii) Can I help you?
- (iii) I beg your pardon.
- (iv) Please cancel the trip.
- (v) I don't know what to do.
- (vi) I'd like to join your company at the earliest.
- (vii) Could you please do me a favour?
- (viii) When can you join?
- (ix) My greatest strength is my ability to work under pressure.
- (x) I want to work as a system manager in a leading company.

2. Divide the following utterances into tone groups by using an oblique bar / to indicate the end of a tone group.

- (a) Good morning ladies and gentlemen, I am here to talk about the dangers of AIDS.
- (b) For the last six years, I have been working as a sales engineer at Tata Steel.
- (c) I always strive to be the best in whatever I do.
- (d) I have strong communication and inter-personal skills.
- (e) As a dynamic extrovert student, I took active interest and participated in extra-curricular activities in the college.
- (f) With the qualifications and skills that you are seeking, I am sure I would be able to get desired results for your company.
- (g) My academic record reflects my sincerity and strong determination.
- (h) Working with such a growing organisation has been one of my career objectives since the very beginning.
- (i) I have successfully completed several projects as a leader, but at the same time, I have worked in cross-functional teams as a member and have done well.
- (j) I believe your company is one of them and I would like to be a part of such a company.
- (k) Although I would prefer a full-time position, I can also consider a part-time position.
- (l) Although I want to be part of your company, I am afraid I would not be able to accept a lower position.

PRACTICE 3

1. Speak the following words aloud and mark correct stress. Check your answer from a dictionary.

accomplishment, adamant, administered, allocation, application, approval, arrangement, attainment, classification, collaborated, comparison, complete, computerise, construction, contracted, controlled, cooperation, delegate, developed, discovery, encouragement, escalated, establish, estimate, evaluated, expansion, experienced, exploration, facilitate, formulation, functioning, government, guidance, identification, implement, innovative, improvement, index, initiate, inspection, institute, interesting, interpret, introduction, investigate, justified, locate, moderated, motivate, negotiate, organised, originated, overcome, permanent, perceive, performance, pioneer, planning, presentation, provocative, preside, promotion, purchaser, recommend, recorded, rectify, reasonable, repair, replacement, restore, reverse, select, sparked, specify, stimulate, strengthen, summarise, supervise, transcribe, transform, upgraded, validate, vitalised, active, competent, diplomatic, discreet, efficient, energetic, fair, firm, logical, mature, methodical, motivated, objective, pleasant, positive, practical, reliable

2. Speak the following sentences aloud and identify the words that appear in weak form. Underline them.
 - (a) It is nice meeting you.
 - (b) I am pleased to meet you.
 - (c) It is a pleasure to talk to you.
 - (d) Thanks for coming.
 - (e) I would like to talk to you later.
 - (f) See you again.
 - (g) See you later.
 - (h) Can I do something for you?
 - (i) I will attend the party.
 - (j) I have been working in a departmental store for the last three years.
 - (k) You can contact me at my home address.
 - (l) I am interested in this job.
 - (m) Today I would like to inform you about a national problem in India—Child marriages.
 - (n) It is a great pleasure to be here today.
 - (o) I am here today to talk about the dangers of AIDS.
3. Read the following conversation between two friends and identify words that appear in weak form. Underline them.

CONVERSATION

Ravi: Hello, Anil. How are you?

Anil: Fine. Thanks. And you?

Ravi: Pretty well. Thanks.

Anil: How about your parents?
Ravi: They are O.K. How is your study?
Anil: It is going on. And yours?
Ravi: Just fine. I have completed almost half the course.
Anil: I haven't seen you for sometime. Where have you been?
Ravi: Well, I have been very busy these days. I hardly got any time to move out.
Anil: It's good to see you again.
Ravi: Really. I am also glad to have met you again.
Anil: Thanks. By the way, what are you doing today evening?
Ravi: Nothing in particular.
Anil: I'll come to come to meet your parents.
Ravi: At what time will you come?
Anil: About 7 P.M. in the evening.
Ravi: I'll wait for you.
Anil: Well, see you in the evening.
Ravi: See you.

Key

Check your Understanding 1

- Conscious, passion, tension
 - zip, busy, dissolve
 - cheap, lecture, catch
 - jug, bridge, gym
 - sick, kiss, society
 - pick, kill, camp
- C** camp, delicious, cell
G Good, gem, regime
S soup, please, measure
T tea, mature, patience
- The following words do not contain any long vowel:
absent, accident, accessory, accelerator, accompany, acknowledge, actually, adamant, aeroplane, aerospace, affiliate, alcohol, allergy, amateur, ambulance, analogous, announcer, anonymous, apparatus, appearance, apprentice, attractive, barrack, bathe, biography, chronicle, coefficient, deficiency, delegate, differential, embarrass, encompass, fluoride, forgive, forget, gymnastic,

gynaecology, hindrance, intermission, natural, overlook, outspread, outward, paramount, particular, quadrant, repose, restoration, surface, survive, survey, translate, translate, volatile, wooden.

The following table shows the words that contain long vowels:

<i>Phonemic symbol</i>	<i>Examples</i>
i:	Abbreviate, airfield, acetylene, achieve, diesel, kerosene, technique, frequency, decrease, frequent, female, penal, overseas, magazine, police,
u:	absolute, lubricant, attribute, bouquet, luminous, nuclear, plutonium, movie,
ɛ:	absurd, allergic, diverge, inertia, furniture, research
ɑ:	advance, architecture, finale, harmony, parlour, garden
ɔ:	mortar, faulty, water, altogether, assault, august, authentic, authority, automatic, automobile, chlorine, organic, alright,

4.

<i>Phonemic symbol</i>	
i:	evening, teacher, see, meet, speak, me, please, canteen, need
u:	Excuse
ɛ:	sir
ɑ:	Glass, water
ɔ:	morning

5. The following words begin with the short vowel sound ɒ.

Ability, abolish, above, abrupt, abscond, academy, accessory, accompany, account, accuse, acknowledge, achieve, acquaint, acquire, addition, address, adjacent, admire, advance, advise, advocate, affair, affect, afford, accept, accelerate, away, assert, analysis, another, arrange

Check your Understanding 2

- word having two syllables* entrance, foreign, forehead, journey, knowledge, machine, mistake

word having three syllables demonstrate, jewellery, magistrate, mechanism, combustion, conduction, distinguish, impossible, impression, judicial, material, maternal, mechanic, memorial,

word having four syllables controversy, autonomous, curriculum, empirical, informative, manipulate, municipal, necessity

word having five syllables Involuntary

2. The following words have stress on the first syllable:
neighbour, accent, catalogue, entrance, secondary, welcome, telephone, farmer, father, summarise, carbon
 3. The following words have stress on the first syllable:
awkward, handsome, authorise, challenge, forgery, chronicle, laureate, hundred, circumstance, consequence, cinema, justice, kerosene, kitchen, knowledge, currency, designate, library, literacy, legislative, nicotine, merchant, minimise, modern, emphasise, generalise
- The following words have stress on the second syllable:
adventure, autonomous, connect, concession, compulsory, empirical, encourage, excuse, involuntary, irrational, negotiable, manipulate, material, perform, persuade, straightforward, supremacy, suspension, suspicious, progressive
- The following words have stress on the third syllable:
afternoon, cigarette, decompose, disappoint, employee, interrupt, reprehend, seventeen, understand, reproduction
- The following words have stress on the fourth syllable:
recalculation, precipitation

Check your Understanding 3

1. What **can** I do **for** you?
2. **Can** I help you?
3. I **am** coming **from** the library.
4. I want **to** send this parcel **to** New York.
5. What **are** you waiting for?
6. I **am** waiting **for** you.
7. **Are** you waiting **for** the train?
8. **Was** he present in the meeting?
9. When **was** the last announcement made?
10. **They must** be working very hard.
11. One atom differs **from** another in its atomic number **and** electronic configuration.
12. You **can** never see air moving **but can** only detect its motion.
13. You **should** try as hard as you **can**.
14. **That** is **not** really expensive.
15. You **are** welcome.
16. Thanks **for** coming **to** the party.
17. They **are** waiting **for** you **for** half **an** hour.
18. Do **not** look **at** these papers.

19. **Can** you join me **for** a moment?
 20. I **would** love to join you **but** I **am** busy.

Check your Understanding 4

- | 1. Sentence | Rhythm pattern |
|---|--------------------|
| (i) What can I do for you? | SUUSUU |
| (ii) Can I help you? | UUSU |
| (iii) I beg your pardon. | USUSU |
| (iv) Please cancel the trip. | SSUUS |
| (v) I don't know what to do. | UUSSUS |
| (vi) I'd like to join your company. | USUSUSUU |
| (vii) Could you please do me a favour? | UUSUUUSU |
| (viii) When can you join? | SUUS |
| (ix) My greatest strength is my ability to work under pressure. | USUSUUUSUUSSUSU |
| (x) I want to work as a system manager in a leading company. | USUSUUSUSUUUUSUSUU |
2. (a) Good morning ladies and gentlemen, /I am here to talk about the dangers of AIDS. (Two tone groups)
 (b) For the last six years, I have been working as a sales engineer at Tata Steel. (One tone group)
 (c) I always strive to be the best in whatever I do. (One tone group)
 (d) I have strong communication and inter-personal skills. (One tone group)
 (e) As a dynamic extrovert student, /I took active interest and participation in extra-curricular activities in the college. (Two tone groups)
 (f) With the qualifications and skills you are seeking, /I am sure I would be able to get desired results for your company. (Two tone groups)
 (g) My academic record reflects my sincerity and strong determination. (One tone group)
 (h) Working with such a growing organization has been one of my career objectives since the very beginning. (One tone group)
 (i) I have successfully completed several projects as a leader /but at the same time I have worked in cross-functional teams as a member and have done well. (Two tone groups)
 (j) I believe your company is one of them /and I would like to be a part of such a company. (Two tone groups)
 (k) Although I would prefer a full-time position, /I can also consider a part-time position. (Two tone groups)
 (l) Although I want to be part of your company, /I am afraid I would not be able to accept a lower position. (Two tone groups)

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