Enhancing Public Safety with Customer Service

Based on Inspector Skills, by Stephen Van Note

Introduction

- Why are we doing this Workshop?
  - Inspector Skills book – new from ICC
- What do you hope to take away from class today?

What is the Role of a Code Official?

First Activity:
- Create small working groups
- Create a list of roles and responsibilities
- Create a list of requisite skills
- Create a list of challenges
Responsibilities
Code official responsibilities
✓ Public safety advocate – community risk reduction
✓ Administration of construction and fire safety codes
✓ Knowledge of the codes – the letter of the code and the intent of the code
✓ Fair & consistent application of all codes – “AHJ Abuse”
✓ Effectively working with all stakeholders
✓ Prioritization of tasks based on community risks and available resources (personnel and budget)
✓ Obtaining code compliance by educating and changing behavior

Community Risk Reduction
An “all-risks” approach to:
➢ Mitigation (codes and standards)
➢ Prevention (our three Es)
➢ Response
➢ Recovery

Community Risk Reduction
The 5 Es of Community Risk Reduction:
➢ Engineering
➢ Education
➢ Enforcement
➢ Economic Incentive
➢ Emergency Response
Where does the code official fit in?
Political Environment

- Public desire for “less government”
- Public desire for “less regulation”
- “Cost” versus “Investment”
- Public apathy about safety codes
- Elected officials need to be educated about the value code officials bring

✓ You need to tell your story and promote your value!

Prioritization of duties

- How do you prioritize tasks/work assignments?
- How do you maximize work/staff efficiency?
- Do you have a formal plan? Is it dynamic?

Mission Statement

- Do you have an agency or department Mission Statement?
- Do you have a personal Mission Statement?
- Do you perform periodic self-assessments and situation assessments (lessons learned)?
Enhancing Public Service with Customer Service

Code Official Skills

Requisite skills

- Review code official skills activity
- Let’s list some desirable code official skills.

Definitions

Hard Skills:
Specific, teachable abilities that can be defined, observed, quantified and measured. For a code official, these are the technical skills required to perform the job.
Definitions

- **Soft Skills**
  - Personal qualities, habits, attitudes and social graces that enhance an individual's interactions and job performance.
  - In our list of code official skills, which are soft skills?

Code Official Skills – Purpose

- To raise awareness of the importance of soft skills
- Provide guidance on recognizing and improving soft skills
- Reinforce positive behaviors
- Identify some pitfalls

Job Description

- Employers recognize importance of soft skills
  - Interaction with public
  - Provide service to the public
- Are any soft skills listed in your job description?
  - Customer service
  - Communication
Building a Positive Relationship With Your Boss

- Elected official or employee?
- Understanding their priorities
- Explaining your role and responsibilities
- Regular communication and reporting
- Create trust and mutual respect

Foundation

- Solid technical knowledge
  - Construction methods and materials
  - Hazards to the built environment and occupant safety
  - Technical code provisions and intent – Code Commentary or Handbook
- The codes serve as the basis for the decisions and actions of the code official.

Soft Skills

- Equally important to hard skills
- Elevate inspector from good to excellent
- Accomplish goal of safe buildings
  - Public acceptance of department mission
  - Inspections benefit community
- Success depends on buy-in from the public.
## Enhancing Public Service with Customer Service

### Ambassador
- Who is the first point of contact?
- The code official is often first point of contact
- The code official is an ambassador for their department
  - Gain public trust and support
  - Gain code compliance (*the three Es*)

### Educator
- Skilled code official committed to public education
- Outreach efforts of department (*BSM and FPM opportunities, Ready Campaign, etc.*)
- Informational handouts/application guides
- Website
- Plan review and constructive feedback
- At jobsite with GC and sub-contractors

### Facilitator
Facilitate:
- To make easier, to help bring about.
Facilitator (continued)
- Change public's perception
- Facilitator rather than regulator
- Resource rather than adversary
- Work to find solutions
- Beyond a simple duty of enforcing rigid rules
- And be nice!

Attitude
Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference.
– Winston Churchill

Attitude (continued)
- Positive approach
- Respect, courtesy and diplomacy
- Raise bar of professionalism
- Improve image of the code official
- Makes life easier all around
Enhancing Public Service with Customer Service

Public Trust and Acceptance
- Promotes adoption and use of codes
- Improves public safety and first responder safety

Support from Jurisdiction
- Builds confidence in decision making
- Code official able to work independently
- Signals the code official’s work is
  - Worthwhile
  - Beneficial to the community

Gaining Support From
- Managers
- Director
- Chief
- Commissioner
- City Manager
- Elected officials
Enhancing Public Service with Customer Service

Methods of Support
- Training - Networking!
- Staff Meetings – Networking!
- Mentoring - Networking!
- Encouragement
- Recognition
- Engaging work
- Incentives (Certifications)
- Chapter and Regional/National Meetings

Technical Skills
- Code Administration – Chapter 1
  - Minimum requirements
  - Interpretation
  - Alternatives

Minimum Requirements
- Intent
- Consensus
- Balance
- Practical limits
  - Feasibility
  - Affordability
Enhancing Public Safety with Customer Service

Code Interpretation

- Responsibility and authority
- Performance provisions
- Multiple solutions
- Conflicts
- Meaning and intent

Code Interpretation (Continued)

- Interpretation and applying intent requires developing skills in:
  - Critical thinking
  - Independent decision making
  - Problem solving
  - Conflict resolution

Alternatives

- Flexibility in codes
- Obligation to approve alternatives
- Open mind on new technology and different methods
- Remember, the goal is achieving an acceptable, minimal level of safety – their may be many paths to that end goal!
Decision Making

- Checklist?
  - Much more than a checklist
- Challenging and complex
- Within framework and spirit of code
- Code is basis for decisions
- Keep an open mind

Perspective

- Flexibility
  - Explores alternatives
  - Intent of the code
  - Meets minimum standards
  - Open mind
- Boundaries
  - What is required?
  - Where does the code end?
  - Don’t ask for more than code requires

- Precision
  - Level of precision varies
  - Not an exact science
- Consistency
  - Consistent and fair
Enhancing Public Service with
Customer Service

Perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flexibility</th>
<th>Boundaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is 3.75 inches good enough for a house number...the code requires 4 inches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision</td>
<td>Consistency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flexibility</th>
<th>Boundaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measuring fire separation distance from lot line</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precision</td>
<td>Consistency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Communication
Communication

- Communication Model
- Written and verbal communication
- Non-verbal communication
- Delivering bad news

Communication Model

Sender
Receiver
Message/Feedback
Channel
Sender
Receiver
Feedback

Plan Your Communication

- Understand your objective
- Understand your audience
- Plan what you want to say
- Plan when best to say it
Creating a Clear Message

- Understand what you need & want to say
- Anticipate the other person's reaction
- Choose words that allow the other person to really hear what you’re saying

Written Communication Tips

- State the message clearly & briefly
- Follow with clear direction
- Be respectful
- Written communication can be read by anyone
- FAQ's

Written Communication Tips

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shouting, condescending</th>
<th>Respectful, sticks to facts and reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EGRESS WINDOWS ARE REQUIRED IN ALL BASEMENTS, NOT JUST BASEMENTS WITH HABITABLE SPACE!!!!</td>
<td>... The code changed several years ago to require at least one emergency escape and rescue opening in every basement to improve the level of safety ...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Written Communication Tips

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unprofessional</th>
<th>Professional, courteous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jason - not receiving truss dwg so I can check trusses btw not at job either :-(</td>
<td>This is just a reminder that we haven’t received the truss design drawings yet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u sending over soon????? :-(</td>
<td>Please have the supplier send us a set so we can check … and not hold you up.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Written Communication Tips

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical, judgmental, imposing personal preference, fortune telling.</th>
<th>Accurate, respectful, helpful.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, the code says you can do it that way, but everybody gets this wrong and so will you. …</td>
<td>You are correct. Please see the attached information for the specific requirement and example of a correct installation. Let me know if you have any questions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Communication Model

Sender
Receiver

Message/Feedback

Channel

Copyright 2014 International Code Council
#2752PDF13
Choosing the Right Channel

- The sensitivity & emotional content of the subject
- How easy it is to communicate detail
- The receiver’s preferences
- Time constraints
- The need to ask and answer questions
Receiving the Message

- Look at the person
- Pay attention to his or her body language
- Nod and smile to acknowledge points
- Allow the person to speak
- Don’t interrupt

Reasons for not Listening

- Already made up mind
- Hearing only what you want to hear
- Jumping to conclusions
- Lack of interest
- Being angry, upset, or worried about other things

Body Language-Informal Feedback

- Defensiveness
- Agreement
- Comprehension (or lack of understanding)
- Level of interest
- Level of engagement with the message
- Truthfulness
Enhancing Public Safety with Customer Service

Hands on hips
Aggression, readiness

Touching, rubbing nose
Rejection, doubt, lying
Enhancing Public Service with Customer Service

- Rubbing with eyes closed
  - Negative evaluation

- Hands clasp behind head/back
  - Anger, frustration, apprehension

- Head resting on hand
  - Boredom
Enhancing Public Service with Customer Service

Biting nails
Insecurity, nervousness

Smiling, expressive, open arms
Excited

Arms crossed on chest
Defensiveness
Communication Model

Sender

Message/Feedback

Channel

Feedback

Receiver

Sender

Receiver

The most important thing in communication is to hear what isn’t being said.

Peter Drucker

Difficult Conversations

- Giving bad news
  - Empathy
- Difficult people
  - Exception rather than the rule
Difficult Conversations

- Prepare
  - Gather your thoughts
  - Know what you want to say
  - Choose the right time and setting
  - How you want to open the conversation
- Begin and end on a positive note

Difficult Conversations

- Deliver focused and clear instruction
- Invite comment
- Listen
- Thank the customer for listening

Let’s take a break!
Enhancing Public Service with Customer Service

**Difficult request from your Boss**

- Asked to “look the other way”
- Asked to “come down hard”
- Asked to “just approve the plans”
- Asked to “just issue the C of O or Permit”

**Angry People**

- Counting to 10
- ABC
  - Ask
  - Breathe
  - Choose

**Avoid “I” and “You”**

I want you to do this.

The code requires this.
*And provide a reason or explanation, if possible*
Avoid “I” and “You”

You always do this. OR
You don’t understand.

This department handout will be helpful in understanding the code requirements.

Avoid “I” and “You”

Why didn’t you do it this way? OR That’s for you to figure out.

There are a number of ways that would satisfy the code requirements. Let me suggest some options.

E-mail Communication Tips

- Turn off e-mail notification
- Use descriptive subject line
- Review/respond to e-mail 1 or 2x daily
- Don’t handle e-mail multiple times
- Procrastination
- Paperwork
- Indecision
Communications Recap

- Model
  - Plan your communication
  - Create the message
  - Choose the right channel
  - Feedback
    - Body language
    - Questions

Communications Recap

- Difficult conversations
  - Prepare, prepare, prepare
  - Things to avoid

Code Official Challenges
Enhancing Public Service with Customer Service

Let's review the Challenges

Refer to first activity

Staffing and Budgets

- Enhancing the Profile of Code Officials
  - Staffing
  - Training
  - Support
  - Education
  - Certification

- Funding Sources and Revenue Generation
  - Grants
  - Sponsorships
  - Permit Fees
  - Provide Fee-Based Services
Enhancing Public Service with Customer Service

### Staffing and Budgets

#### Doing More with Less
- Third-party plan review and/or inspections
- Fire suppression company inspections
- Inter-municipal agreements
- Flexible work assignments
- Co-operative purchasing agreements
- Use technology

#### Code Administration Mutual Aid
- Inter-municipal agreements for special servicers, expertise
- Potential to reduce overtime for vacations, holidays

#### Technology and Code Administration
- Improve customer service – reduce turn-around time/inspection lead time
- Reduce paperwork and wasted time
- Improve data collection
- Improve accuracy of inspections
- Increase personnel effectiveness
Consolidations

Headache or Opportunity?

- Building Departments under Fire Service
- Fire Prevention under Department of Buildings
- Fire Prevention/Building Dept. under Public Safety

Customer Service

Who are our Customers?

Technicians

Associates

Property owners

Installers

Homebuilders

Public & First Responders

Designers

Contractors

Home owners

Coworkers
Enhancing Public Service with Customer Service

Customer Service

- First Impressions
- Expectations
- Listening
- Choosing words carefully
- Complaints
- Honesty

First Impressions

- Make a personable greeting – remember, they already know you have “authority”
- Identify yourself
- Have a positive attitude
- Be courteous and respectful
- Be cheerful and friendly

First Impressions

- Be helpful
- Be fair
- Be consistent
- Keep an open mind
- Be punctual
- Smile
Customer Service

- First Impressions
- Expectations
- Listening
- Choosing words carefully
- Obstacles
- Complaints
- Dealing with difficult people

Expectations

- Accurate information
- Answers to inquiries
- Follow-up when promised
- Punctuality
- Courteous behavior

Meeting Customer’s Expectations

- Be courteous and punctual
- Follow through
- Research and preparation
- Be accurate and honest
- Return phone calls and e-mails promptly
- Under-promise and over-deliver
Enhancing Public Service with Customer Service

Expectations

“Customers don’t expect you to be perfect. They do expect you to fix things when they go wrong.”

Donald Porter, VP with British Airways

Customer Service

- First Impressions
- Expectations
- Listening
  - Choosing words carefully
- Complaints
- Dealing with difficult people

Active Listening

- Is simply part of the communication skills discussed earlier
Customer Service

- First Impressions
- Expectations
- Listening
- Choosing words carefully
- Complaints
- Dealing with difficult people

Choose Words Carefully

Avoid—You can't do that. You'll have to...

Better—There are a number of ways to accomplish this and meet the code requirements.

Comment—Keep an open mind, be flexible and look at alternatives or solutions. Make helpful suggestions.
Enhancing Public Service with Customer Service

Choose Words Carefully

Avoid—NO!

Better—The code doesn’t allow that because…but here is a suggestion.

Comment—Turn a negative into a positive

Customer Service

- First Impressions
- Expectations
- Listening
- Choosing words carefully
- Complaints
- Dealing with difficult people

Handling Complaints

- Listen
- Keep a good attitude
- Be open to suggestions
- Try to understand (put yourself in the customer’s shoes)
- Restate what the customer said

Copyright 2014 International Code Council
#2752PDF13
34
## Handling Complaints

- Avoid arguing
- Offer a resolution
- Know when further discussion will not be beneficial
- Document and follow up

## Customer Service

- First Impressions
- Expectations
- Listening
- Choosing words carefully
- Complaints
- Dealing with difficult people

## Why are People Difficult?

- People feel
  - Rushed — not enough time
  - Insecure
  - Angry
  - Have some need or interest
  - Stressed
A Difficult Person can be

- Hostile-Aggressive
- Know-it-all
- Yes person
- Whiner
- Never say a word
- Indecisive staller
- No

Hostile aka “The Tank”

- Bullies their way
- Belittles you
- Tries to convince you that you are doing a bad job
- “I pay your salary”
- “I know your boss”

Dealing with “The Tank”

- If possible, get them to sit down
- Don’t back down
- Let them vent
- Identify the issue….the facts
- Explain the benefits of your point
- Allow aggressor to “save face” – look for a “win-win” solution.
The Know-It-All

- Controls people and events by dominating
- Tries to find flaws in everything

Dealing with the Know-It-All

- Know your facts….be prepared
- Listen carefully and paraphrase the main points
- Use questions to raise issues

Yes Person

- Answers “yes” to everything
- Seeks approval and avoids disapproval
Dealing with the Yes Person
- Work to get to the underlying issue
- Tell how much you value their opinion
- Listen for hidden messages

No Person
- Able to defeat big ideas with a single syllable------NO
- Deadly to morale

Dealing with the No Person
- Work to get to the underlying issues
- Find out the reason for disagreement
- Show the other side
- Show the benefits
Enhancing Public Service with Customer Service

**Whiner**
- Avoids taking responsibility
- Wants sympathy
- Has negative view of the world
- If you ignore them, they increase protests

**Dealing with the Whiner**
- Don’t respond if they are blaming you
- Make sure facts are correct
- Ask them propose solutions

**Never says a word aka “The Clam”**
- Timid, uncomfortable and uncertain
- Wants to avoid conflict
- Feels angry because “the wrong decision was made”
- Some can’t relate authentically
Dealing with the Clam

- Discuss non-threatening topics
- Ask open-ended questions
- Wait for a response... calmly

Coping Techniques

- Don’t take it personally
- Write down details of what annoys you
- Think about why it annoys you
- Which of your buttons does this person push
- Why do you respond to them the way you do?

Coping (continued)

- How would you like to respond
- Monitor yourself
- Give yourself positive feedback
- Q-TIP
- You are not going to change someone else
Ethics

Doing the Right Thing
Whenever you do a thing, act as if all the world were watching.
- Thomas Jefferson

And today, they probably are!

Doing the Right Thing
For the Right Reason

- Job subject to public scrutiny
- Good code officials welcome that scrutiny
- Embrace ethical principles of honesty and lawfulness
- To benefit society, community and profession
- Apply rules fairly and objectively with no vested interest
Conflict of Interest

- Any situation where the inspector is in a position to benefit personally from a decision.
- Causes the public to lose trust in the objectivity and fairness of the inspector.
- Regulations must be applied consistently and equitably.

Ethical Decisions

- Butterfly Test
- Authority Test
- Public Scrutiny Test

What would you do?

You inspect what you consider to be poor quality work by a local contractor. You call the homeowner to report that there were an unusual number of deficiencies, that you’ve had problems with this contractor in the past and you just wanted the homeowner to be aware of some workmanship issues. Is that appropriate?
**What would you do?**

You discover a $500 error in your paycheck, in your favor. **Would you call it to payroll team’s attention immediately or wait for payroll personnel to discover it?**

---

**What would you do?**

You have a little side business unrelated to your position. You need copies made now and then so you use the copier at work. **Is this ethical?**

---

**What would you do?**

During a rental housing inspection you find violations. You give the building owner your personal business card and let them know that you do work on the side, to just call and you would be happy to fix the violations. **Is there an issue?**
What would you do?

- You have just completed the acceptance test for all the fire protection systems in a new restaurant. The owner is excited about his upcoming grand opening and hands you a $150 gift certificate “for all your help” and suggest you bring your spouse for dinner. *Is this an issue?*

Fact or Myth?

- The codes serve as the basis for the actions of the code official.
- Inspection is following a checklist
- The general public enthusiastically values the work of code officials

Fact or Myth?

- Success of a code enforcement department depends on buy-in from the public.
- The code official is an ambassador for their department in gaining the public trust.
Fact or Myth?
- Customer service does not apply to code administration.

Fact or Myth?
- The success of an inspection can be measured by the number of violations identified.

Fact or Myth?
- Code officials are educators.

Fact or Myth?
- The code official needs to make reasonable decisions in following the intent of the code.

Fact or Myth?
Soft skills are specific, teachable abilities that can be defined, observed, quantified and measured.
Expectations?

Did the course meet your expectations?

Questions?

International Code Council®
People Helping People Build a Safer World™

International Code Council is a Registered Provider with The American Institute of Architects Continuing Education Systems. Credit earned on completion of this program will be reported to CES Records for AIA members. Certificates of Completion for non-AIA members are available on request.

This program is registered with the AIA/CES for continuing professional education. As such, it does not include content that may be deemed or construed to be an approval or endorsement by the AIA of any material of construction or any method or manner of handling, using, distributing, or dealing in any material or product. Questions related to specific materials, methods, and services will be addressed at the conclusion of this presentation.
Thank you for participating

To schedule a seminar, contact:

The ICC Training & Education Department
1-888-ICC-SAFE (422-7233) Ext. 33818
or
E-mail: icctraining@icc safe.org