

## **Tips on Serving the Multi-Lingual External Customer**

### **The Basics - Speaking**

#### **Speak Slowly with Longer Pauses:**

- Enunciate as you normally would, but add longer pauses, so your customer has time to process or translate what you are saying.
- Learn to be comfortable with longer periods of silence while your customer is processing your words.
- Do not talk louder – just slower. Your customers can **hear** you – they may not be able to **understand** you.
- Be patient – your customers may need time to find the right word.

#### **Rephrase - Don't Just Repeat Yourself:**

- Rephrase in clearer or simpler language – you weren't understood the first time, so try a different tactic.
- Remember that repeating yourself can sound like impatience.

#### **Speak in Specific and Simple English:**

- Don't use jargon or idioms. Can you imagine trying to understand "Hang it in your ear" in another language?
- Avoid words like "should" or "must" – and avoid using contractions like "can't" – because often the "n't" is not heard.
- Instead, focus on clear and simple nouns and verbs.

#### **Learn To Be Comfortable with Lack of Eye Contact When Speaking:**

- It's one thing to know that many cultures do not make direct eye contact; but,
- It's another thing to be comfortable with little or no eye contact.

### **The Basics - Listening**

#### **Learn To Tune Your Ear To Other Dialects and Accents:**

- This is important whether you have customers from one specific region of the world or from different regions of the world.
- Don't be afraid to ask for clarification if you don't understand.

#### **It's ok to ask your customer to speak slower so you can understand:**

- Remember to communicate patience and respect with your voice and facial expression.
- Don't lie and say you understand someone when you truly don't.

### **Beyond the Basics**

#### **More Common Sense Practices to Better Serve Your Multi-Lingual External Customers:**

- **Read** books on cross-cultural communications – and managing businesses in a global economy and international marketplace.

- If you're taking a business trip abroad – and plan on presenting your hosts with presents, do some research to learn business and cultural protocol and etiquette. The Business and Technology section of the local Library can assist you.
- For example: It's considered a gesture of respect in MOST Asian nations to use both hands when presenting your business card. Your research will tell you which countries adhere strictly to this custom and which countries view one hand or two as acceptable.
- Do not make assumptions about what someone is saying or doing – actions and words often get lost in translation.
- For example: The English word "take" could mean "purchase" or "steal" – that's why it's important to be specific and rephrase what you say and what the customer says to you.

### **If You Serve Customers from Specific Cultures:**

- Learn more about the culture(s) represented by your customers.
- Learn words and phrases that describe your merchandise or service in different languages.
- Post signs in different languages that will assist your customers.
- Prepare information sheets that clearly explain return policies, etc., because many people find it easier to understand written English better than spoken English.
- Accurately translate the information sheets into different languages and have a native speaker check the documents for you.

### **Learn the Basics of American Sign Language:**

- Learn how to sign words that describe your service.
- Learn how to sign "welcome" – "thank you" – "goodbye".
- Learn how to sign phrases like "How can I be of service?" "What can I do to help?" or "The restroom is located . . ."
- Prepare "flash cards" with commonly used phrases as a back up.