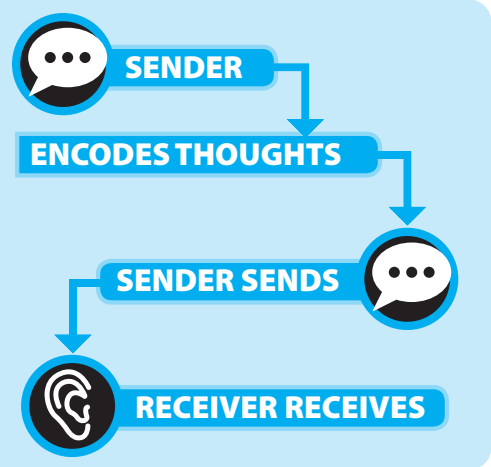
Chapter 7: How to communicate effectively as a security operative

The basic elements of communication

During the course of your duties as a security operative, you will regularly come into contact with members of the public. You will also regularly interact with other members of staff and people from other organisations.

Communication is the sending and receiving of signals. It is all about passing your thoughts or ideas to another person. The 'sender' decides what thoughts they wish to pass on, 'encodes' those thoughts into the most effective form of communication and then 'sends' those thoughts to the 'receiver'.



The different types of communication

Verbal communication is the use of words and tone to convey a message when interacting with another person. The words you use are important, but so is the tone you use to express those words. It's not just what you say, but how you say it that counts. Verbal communication includes:

- speaking
- listening
- reading (aloud)
- pitch and tone of voice

Non-verbal communication is everything else that you do when you communicate with another person on a face-to-face basis. Non-verbal communication includes:

- gestures
- stance
- eye contact
- facial expression
- written communication (pictures, signs, script, text messages etc.)

The importance of effective communication

When working as a security operative, using effective communication skills will not only help you to successfully get the job done, but it will also ensure that people receive a good impression of you.

To effectively communicate in the workplace, you will need to:

- choose an appropriate medium and use appropriate language for the message and recipient it is intended for
- deliver the message clearly
- check the recipient's understanding of the message, for example by asking them to repeat the message back to you

It is important to use effective communication whether dealing with internal or external customers in the workplace.

When used internally, it will promote effective teamwork that will help you and your colleagues to provide an effective service to customers, in turn positively promoting your organisation as a professional establishment.

Communicating effectively will also help to prevent misunderstandings which could lead to mistakes being made and therefore can help to reduce incidents of conflict, aggression or even violence.



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Effective communication in a team

Communication skills play an important role in how you interact with your colleagues, supervisors and managers. You should treat all members of staff with courtesy and respect and you should expect to be treated in the same way.

Good teamwork in the workplace:

- promotes safety
- provides a professional and safe service and establishment
- supports colleagues
- promotes efficiency

Diverse customer needs and expectations

All customers are different people with differing needs and expectations. They may come from different countries, have different faiths or religions, or they may just be from a different age group. Customers may also have different levels of physical or mental ability.

People form their own personal values as they grow up. Where they were born, where they live, how they were brought up, their friends and family, their jobs – all of these factors go towards forming a person's values.

As a security operative, you need to take into account other people's values, and try to choose the most appropriate and effective way of dealing with them. For example, you would speak to a distressed young child in the street very differently to how you would treat a drunk, aggressive customer outside a pub. Both are customers if you have to deal with them as part of your duties, but both would need to be dealt with differently because of their different values, needs and expectations.

Customers with particular needs

It is important to acknowledge and respect individuals with particular needs. You may need to consider adapting how you would normally communicate with individuals e.g. shouting at a visually impaired person will not help them understand you. Particular needs may include physical disabilities, learning difficulties, sensory impairment, English as a second language or being under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol. You may need to speak slower than usual when giving information, assistance or directions or draw a picture to provide guidance.

The principles of customer service

One of your main roles as a security operative is looking after people. How you treat people when you deal with them is very important. Customer care is all about how you deliver your service and how you provide security to your customers on a day-to-day basis.

Examples of how you can deliver good customer care include:

- being professional with every customer
- being approachable
- communicating with them effectively
- acknowledging them
- concerning yourself with customers' needs
- building a rapport
- treating customers as you would wish to be treated yourself
- going out of your way to help customers
- leaving customers pleased with how you have dealt with them

Dealing with problems

Good customer service can often avoid problems occurring. However, some problems may not be caused by you and may be out of your immediate control. In these circumstances you must do everything within your power to appease the customer:

- acknowledge and listen to the customer
- establish the customer's need
- put yourself in the customer's position
- accept responsibility for the problem
- involve the customer in the proposed solution
- see it through, make sure any promised actions are carried out.

Different types of customer

As a security operative, you must understand that every single person you come into contact with is a customer. In your role, you will be providing customer service to both internal and external customers (direct and indirect).

Internal customers

Internally (within your own company), your customers include your work colleagues, supervisors, managers and anyone working for any other company or organisation on the site.

External customers (direct and indirect customers)

External customers are any other customers you may come into contact with, including visitors to the site, workmen, delivery drivers, the emergency services, neighbours and members of the public.



LETTERS

The Phonetic alphabet

A	Alpha	N	November
B	Bravo	O	Oscar
C	Charlie	P	Papa
D	Delta	Q	Quebec
E	Echo	R	Romeo
F	Foxtrot	S	Sierra
G	Golf	T	Tango
H	Hotel	U	Uniform
I	India	V	Victor
J	Juliet	W	Whiskey
K	Kilo	X	X-ray
L	Lima	Y	Yankee
M	Mike	Z	Zulu

The phonetic alphabet

The NATO phonetic alphabet was developed in the 1950s to be intelligible and pronounceable to all NATO allies in the heat of battle. It is now widely used in business and telecommunications in Europe and the rest of the world. The phonetic alphabet requires words to be spelt out by their letters during a conversation. All the letters sound different, so there is no confusion about what people are saying.

You may need to use the phonetic alphabet during the course of your duties as a security operative, as you may well have to use the telephone or radio to communicate with other members of staff, outside organisations or members of the public. It is important that this is always done professionally and politely - always remember to use clear language.

Effective telephone/radio communication between security teams and other people on-site is essential and helps to deal with incidents swiftly and efficiently.

