



EXAMINER'S REPORT

MAY 2010

COMMUNICATION SKILLS Certificate in Marketing Skills

General Comments:

The objective of the *Communication Skills* module is to provide students with the skills to become effective communicators. The examiner was heartened that a significant number of the candidates answered the questions using a mix of concepts/theories and relevant examples. On the whole there was evidence of exam preparation, and the majority of candidates *applied* the concepts, using examples and/or incorporating their work and own experience to reinforce their argument. Similar to previous report comments, the overall grasp and command of English still needs attention in places, particularly in relation to sentence construction, grammar, punctuation and spelling.

Question 1

Case Study – Mobile Phone Complaint

The mini-case study, carrying 50% of the marks, focuses on what recommendations Cian, the regional manager of a mobile phone provider, should communicate to his employees following the mis-handling of a customer complaint by Grainne. Her recently-purchased phone is malfunctioning and staff told her it will not be fixed/replaced because it showed signs “battery corrosion and/or normal exposure to air”. Neither Cian nor Grainne were impressed with this response.

The majority of students correctly based their responses on material contained in Unit 6 which deals specifically with customer complaints. Several students identified complaints as a potential “moment of truth” and listed some of the essential steps to deal with customer complaints. Indeed, if a complaint is handled poorly, the customer will stop doing business with you and tell everyone else they know about their bad experience. Weaker answers failed to refer specifically to material covered in the unit, and/or provide appropriate examples to illustrate grasp of the concepts.

Question 2

This question encouraged students to explore why customers judge the performance of the company based on how the company deals with their queries or complaints rather than its products or services. Candidates were asked to describe the concept known as ‘moment of truth’, and their personal positive and negative experiences in this regard. Students who did well in this question correctly described a ‘moment of truth’ as any encounter that allows customers to form a favourable or unfavourable view of a company. Because all interaction between customers and the company takes place at an individual and personal level, the management of customer service must include attention to the minutest detail of customer contact. Candidates who did not perform very well tended to generalize about the complaints process and use examples that failed to acknowledge that the ‘moment of truth’ is just that, a moment. Research indicates that customers often make a buying decision based on one interaction which may have lasted only 60 seconds.

Question 3

Students were asked to identify the main functions, and the rules, that govern *internal* communication in organisations. They were also asked to identify the tools companies typically use to conduct *external* communication. Successful candidates described the principal **functions** as: Planning, sharing the company vision, instruction, feedback, control, motivation, shared problem solving, social communication, and health and safety issues.

Successful candidates also identified and elaborated the following **rules**: Clarify lines of communication, plan communication, manage distrust, act consistently with your message, ask questions, listen carefully, and beware of the grapevine.

The **tools** companies use to conduct *external* communication include personal channels such as personal selling or personal presentations. They can also employ non-personal communications tools such as advertising, public relations and sponsorship - transmitted through mass communication channels such as TV, radio, print and outdoor display media, such as poster sites. The majority of candidates identified the non-personal channels; however, few mentioned the personal channels.

Question 4

This question required students to write a persuasive letter, using the AIDA model, encouraging customers to test drive the latest model of the car they bought two years ago. AIDA is an acronym for attention, interest, desire and action -- a common list of events experienced when a person is selling a product or service. As per Unit 9 (Better Business Writing), to grab attention the headline of the letter could refer to a financial issue the reader might have, such as 'Fuel Costs Too High – Nissan 207 Cuts Fuel Costs By 20%'. The first and second paragraphs should generate interest using words like 'At Last' to suggest a solution is on the way. Next, desire should be generated at two levels. The first is the reader's desire to find out more, the second is to make the reader want your offer, to the point that they look for the 'action' required. For example, a deadline for a price offer can create desire through fear of loss. The action component can vary. It can be for the recipient to call, or return a form, or call you to buy a product. Often an incentive is needed to encourage a reply.

Question 5

This question requires candidates to outline the steps required to prepare a presentation to colleagues on a new customer service programme their company is introducing. As per Unit 10 (Presentation Skills) the first step is to find out how much your audience knows about the topic and their level of interest. Next, what is your purpose? Is it to stimulate, inform, persuade or teach? What you want your audience to know or do at the end of the presentation. Only when you know who your audience is and the purpose of your presentation, can you create a plan and a structure. The next part of the question asks candidates to describe the role audiovisual aids play in enlivening a presentation. It's important to acknowledge that visual aids should be used as a support mechanism; the speaker should always be the main focus on attention. Visual aids include pre-prepared flipcharts, PowerPoint presentations, props, etc. For example, if you're talking about a product, bring a sample!

Finally, students are asked what role non-verbal communication plays in presentation delivery. Communication experts estimate that only seven per cent of communication is verbal, 55% per cent is non verbal body language, and the remaining 38% the way we speak and the sounds we make. Body language is the use of expressions, gestures, posture, proximity and other non-verbal behaviours which consciously or unconsciously support the verbal message.