Great expectations

Worksheet

1 Warmer

Read the example situation below and select the best solution in your opinion.

Your car has broken down and you need assistance from a road recovery service. Would you prefer the mechanic to:

a. explain what the problem is in a friendly way and then fix your car?
b. start working on your car immediately and not tell you anything about what he is doing?

2 Business expressions

Find business expressions in the article that match the definitions below.

1. starting the job that needs to be done _____ (five words, para 2)
2. something that places a company above other companies in the same line of business _____ (two words, para 4)
3. someone's life experience and the way it has been shaped by their religion, race, language, where they live, etc. _____ (two words, para 4)
4. dealing with, looking after and talking to clients _____ (two words, para 6)
5. when it is very clear who is the boss and where everyone fits in within a company – at the top or the bottom of the ladder _____ (two words, para 7)
6. the amount of money that you would like to pay _____ (two words, para 8)
7. a way of saying that you want or mean to do something _____ (three words, para 10)
8. when situations change _____ (three words, para 10)
9. kept to very clearly without any possibility of doing something differently _____ (three words, para 10)
10. difficult to measure or judge _____ (three words, para 15)
11. something positive you get back when you put something (effort, time or money) in _____ (three words, para 15)
12. try to imagine how someone else feels and thinks _____ (five words, para 15)

© Macmillan Publishers Ltd and Spotlight Verlag GmbH 2010

•PHOTOCOPIABLE• CAN BE DOWNLOADED FROM WEBSITE

Great expectations

by Robert Gibson

Customer service and customer care are the cornerstones of every company. But it's important to bear in mind that expectations of these services differ from country to country and from culture to culture, as Robert Gibson explains.

1 We had missed the flight connection and were queuing at the airline counter in Frankfurt to get new tickets. The US businessman in front of me was complaining that no one had apologized. He threatened not to fly with the airline again. From where I was standing, I could see that the German ticket agent was typing in data and concentrating on the computer screen. Within a few seconds, she had handed him the new ticket. He walked away with a new flight but was still complaining about the "terrible service".

2 For me, this was a classic example of person orientation versus task orientation. In cultures that are usually task-oriented, the priority is getting the job done; in person-oriented cultures, it is essential to develop a relationship first before getting down to the task. The German ticket agent in this example no doubt felt that the most important thing was to get all the passengers in the queue their new tickets as quickly as possible and not "waste time" with "unnecessary" small talk. The American, not having received an apology or an explanation, interpreted this as "unfriendliness" and "poor service".

3 Cultures that are normally more person- than task-oriented will spend a considerable time building up a relationship before they talk about business. Europeans doing business in Arab countries are often frustrated at the time it takes to get down to business. They wonder why they are being entertained and asked about their private lives. Yet, in many cultures, it is essential to know the person you're negotiating with before you can do the deal. Once the trust is there, things can move surprisingly quickly.

4 Awareness of cultural differences gives you a competitive advantage when you deal with your international customers. When presenting your products and services, it's worth considering the cultural background of your clients. In some cultures, like Germany, they will expect a sales presentation to focus on detailed information about the product or service. In others, like the US or Britain, customers may very well want to see the "big picture" before getting down to details.

5 In future-oriented cultures, like the US, the most convincing arguments in the sales pitch will be the ones that concentrate on future benefits. Customers from past-oriented cultures, such as India and China, will expect to hear about the history and past achievements of your company.

6 Negotiating is an important part of handling customers, and styles differ widely across the world. It's worth finding out the answers to some basic questions before you start negotiating. Where will the negotiations take place? In the office? In a restaurant? On a golf course? In the sauna? At home, in the pub, or maybe even in a karaoke bar?

7 Who should be present in negotiations? In cultures with steep hierarchies, like France or China, it may be essential that not only the technical experts but also senior managers are present – this is seen as a sign of respect for the importance of the customer.

8 When abroad, observe how people behave in shops. Tourists in Istanbul often view bargaining in the bazaars as a strange sport. Yet for Turkish business people, bargaining is a serious part of getting to know business partners. It is important to find out what the bargaining style of your client is. How far is your asking price from your desired price?



9 For that matter, when do you talk about price? Is it early in negotiations, as can happen in India, or is it only after you have had a chance to assess the precise requirements of the customers, as is common in Germany? Both approaches have a certain logic. The thinking behind the "early" approach is that there is no point out of reach. The "later" approach is based on the idea that you need to know what the customer wants in order to be able to say what it will cost.

10 Another key question is: what does the contract mean? Is it more of an expression of intent to work together, which can change when circumstances alter, as is sometimes found in China? Or is it a detailed agreement that has to be strictly adhered to, as is common in Germany?

11 How do you deal with complaints? Koichi Satoh, the general manager of Hotel Okura in Japan said: "The only thing we deliver, or are trying to deliver, to our guests, is satisfaction. We have nothing else. In our business, no excuse at all is accepted when something goes wrong."

© Macmillan Publishers Ltd and Spotlight Verlag GmbH 2010

•PHOTOCOPIABLE• CAN BE DOWNLOADED FROM WEBSITE

Great expectations

by Robert Gibson

12 Advances in technology and the drive to cut costs have made the consolidation of customer services in call centres highly attractive for international companies. Clients are accessible through a single point of contact, and operating costs can be cut dramatically when call centres are in low-cost countries.

13 If these customer-service centres are to be successful, a number of cultural factors have to be considered. As Huib Wursten, Tom Fadrhonc and Pernilla Roersoe of itim International explain: "The key is to manage customer-service centres so that they satisfy customers better than the competition does, and that can be done by using cultural differences as a competitive advantage."

14 While in some cultures "the customer is king", in others, they are not given special treatment. Customers from risk-averse cultures are reassured by detailed information about the process, while in other cultures, the big picture is important. The perception of excellent customer service varies from culture to culture. In Japan, callers have few problems waiting for several rings before a phone is answered. In contrast, American customers expect a quick response, but are then prepared to be put on hold. Call-centre operators need to be aware of the fact that customers are highly sensitive to different accents and dialects. There are also different attitudes to the expression of emotions in conflict situations. In some cultures – Russia, for example – people are likely to become emotional and to argue strongly in stressful situations. This can be seen by others – the British, for example – as aggression.

15 To succeed globally, you need an understanding of how customers in other cultures think and behave. Although it may be hard to gauge, there is a clear return on investment in spending time cultivating relationships and getting to know key clients. Just put yourself in their shoes. Simple, isn't it?

ROBERT GIBSON is a senior consultant for intercultural business competence at Siemens AG in Munich (www.siemens.com) and the author of Intercultural Business Communication.

© Business Spotlight, 6/2010, www.business-spotlight.de

© Macmillan Publishers Ltd and Spotlight Verlag GmbH 2010

•PHOTOCOPIABLE• CAN BE DOWNLOADED FROM WEBSITE

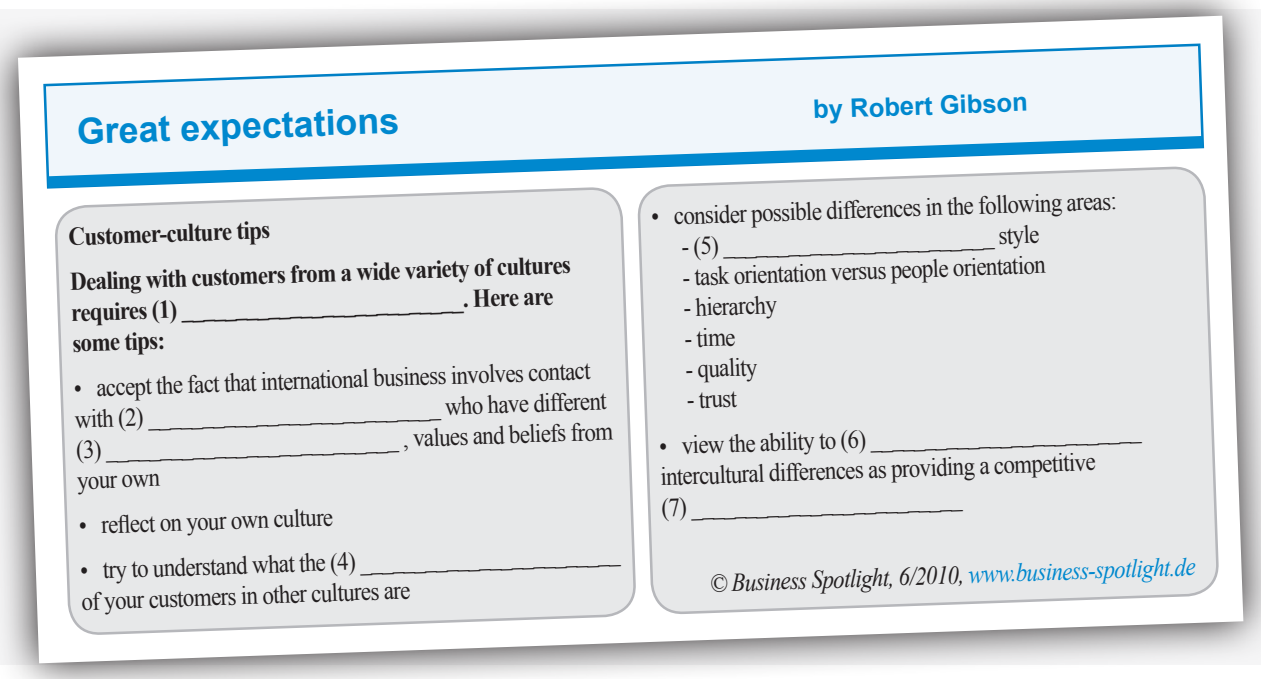
Great expectations

Worksheet

3 Customer-culture tips

Complete the customer culture tips with the words in the box.

communication	understand	advantage	expectations	people	flexibility	attitudes



Great expectations — by Robert Gibson

Customer-culture tips

Dealing with customers from a wide variety of cultures requires (1) _____. Here are some tips:

- accept the fact that international business involves contact with (2) _____ who have different (3) _____, values and beliefs from your own
- reflect on your own culture
- try to understand what the (4) _____ of your customers in other cultures are
- consider possible differences in the following areas:
  - (5) _____ style
  - task orientation versus people orientation
  - hierarchy
  - time
  - quality
  - trust
- view the ability to (6) _____ intercultural differences as providing a competitive (7) _____

© Business Spotlight, 6/2010, www.business-spotlight.de

4 Talk about it

Discuss the following questions:

- Consider the example of the airline in paragraph 1. How would you have expected the airline ticket agent to react to her customers?
- Read what the Japanese hotel manager says in paragraph 11. Do you agree with him?
- In your opinion, is your business culture more task-oriented or more person-oriented? (see para 2)
- Do you think your national culture is more future-oriented or more past oriented? (see para 5)
- Where do you prefer to hold negotiations? Would you feel comfortable holding a negotiation in the places mentioned in paragraph 6?
- You are having a meeting with a potential new customer. He is coming to your offices. Who (from your company) will be at the meeting? Compare your answer with the information in paragraph 7.
- You are negotiating an important deal. At which point in the negotiations do you talk about money? Consider three scenarios:
  1. you want to buy machinery for your company
  2. you are at a job interview
  3. you are trying to rent out some of your office space
- How would you explain your company or national culture to visitors from other countries? What tips could you give them to make their visit more successful?
- Is there an equivalent expression in your language to 'the customer is king'? What does that tell you about your culture?
- In paragraph 14, the author talks about accents and dialects. How might this information effect the decision to outsource your customer service?

© Macmillan Publishers Ltd and Spotlight Verlag GmbH 2010

•PHOTOCOPIABLE• CAN BE DOWNLOADED FROM WEBSITE

Great expectations

Vocabulary record: Intercultural communication

verb	noun	adjective (+ opposite)	adverb (+ opposite)
apologize			
	bargain		
		sensitive	
			emotionally

© Macmillan Publishers Ltd and Spotlight Verlag GmbH 2010

•PHOTOCOPIABLE• CAN BE DOWNLOADED FROM WEBSITE