A group of business professionals in a meeting. A woman in a grey blazer is pointing at a tablet held by another person. There are coffee cups on the table. The background is a bright office space with windows.

Better Communication = Better Customer Service

By Tracey L. Foster, JD, RPA, RTA, CTA

What is the First Rule of
Customer Service?

Be Nice!



Honey, this ain't Burger King. You can't always have it your way!



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Good customer service is extremely important in all professions.

As it applies to Property Tax Professionals, our “customers” are the taxpayers, their agents, and the jurisdictions that we serve.

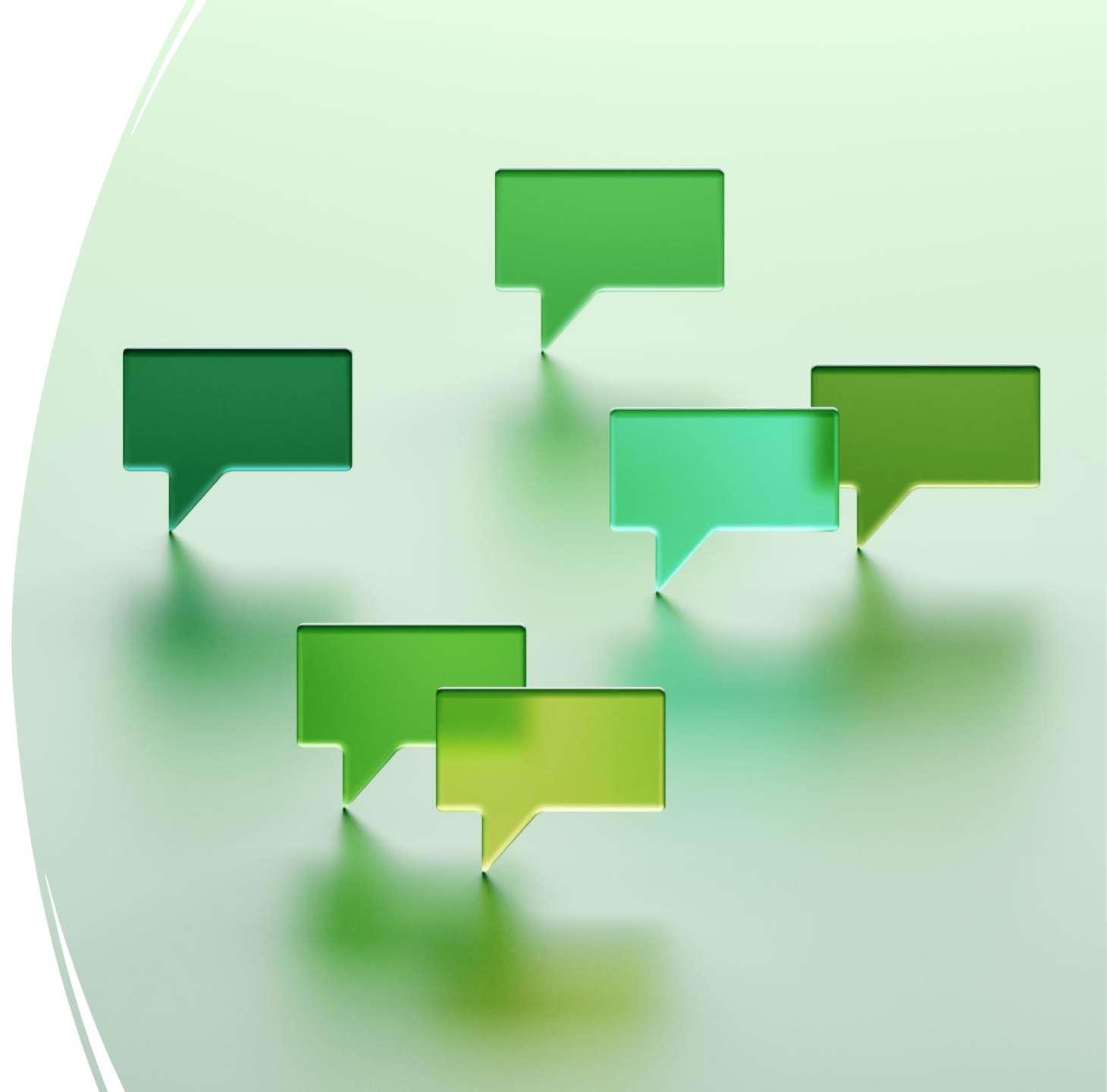
It is important that they get our best each time we interact!

-
- Communication is the bread and butter of customer service – as every interaction between your office and taxpayers is a communication exchange.



What is customer service communication?

- Customer service communication refers to the exchange of information between a customer and a company while resolving the taxpayer's issue.
- From email responses to social media updates and phone calls – there are so many different ways to communicate with your taxpayers and offer assistance.





Excellent customer service communication

requires

1. Skills like speaking and writing

**clearly,
effectively,
efficiently,
and politely.**

2. And enables

Collaboration
to provide the best customer service!

Write & Speak Clearly

Think before you speak or write and then state your message clearly.

Don't waffle on your position or introduce confusing acronyms or terminology that a taxpayer may not understand.

When writing, use proper grammar and punctuation.

No slang – Marley :-\



Write & Speak Effectively

- Assure that you have all the facts and information needed to make a good determination.
- Make sure that you think through your answer before you start.
- Be able to explain your answer and give examples if appropriate.



Write & Speak Efficiently

- Don't take 10 minutes or 10 pages to write what can be said in less.
- Don't give unnecessary explanations and never give excuses.
- Think about what you want to say then consider the most direct, concise way to say it.

Write & Speak Politely

- ALWAYS use manners and courtesy.
- Explain your position or decision but include a human touch.
- Be firm but fair, direct but humble.

While excellent speaking and writing skills are essential for good communication, there are other factors that can impact how you communicate with customers and deliver excellent customer service.



An illustration of a person in profile, wearing a black shirt, holding a smartphone. The phone screen displays the word "BUY" in orange letters above a circular orange button. From the phone, several green, leaf-like shapes radiate outwards, each containing a different icon: a shopping cart, a heart, a thumbs-up gesture, a delivery truck, a Wi-Fi symbol, and a speech bubble with three dots. The background is a light, textured grey with faint outlines of buildings.

(1) Convenience

Giving your customers the freedom to choose the communication channel they prefer is part of an excellent customer experience.

In fact, according to Microsoft, 54% of consumers worldwide favor brands that respond to customer service questions or complaints on social media. In today's technology driven world, give your customers a variety of choices of ways to contact you or take care of their business.

(2) Personalization

The experience of talking to a person using a script versus communicating empathetically with someone is entirely different.

Customers will feel heard from the beginning if you can relate to their needs.

When we contact customer support, we are looking for someone who can understand what we are looking for and help us with a quick resolution.

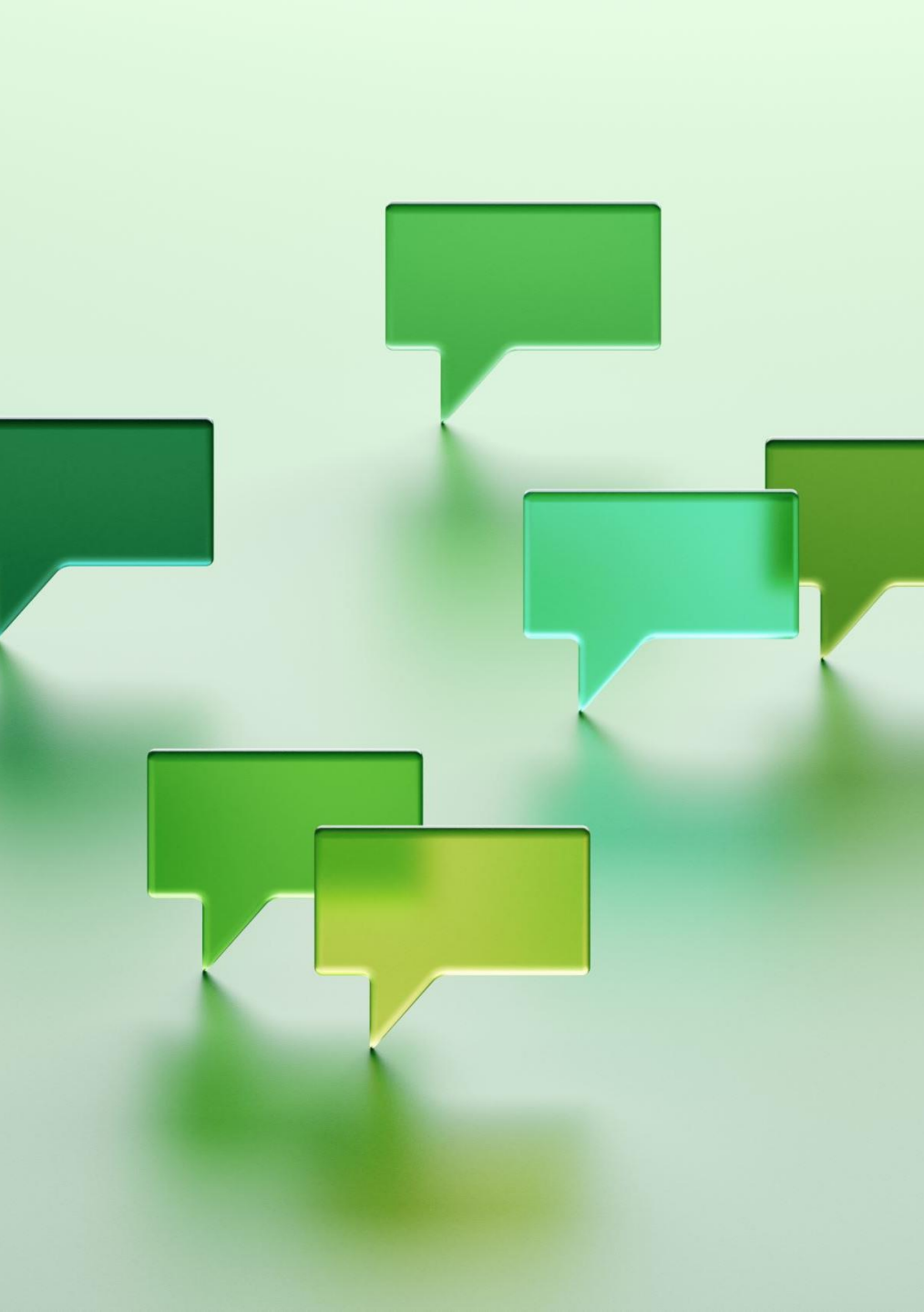


(3) Consistency

Consistency means that the service experience doesn't change depending on who's offering support or the channel of communication.

As discussed earlier, when customer support reps communicate with your taxpayers, you want them to use consistent guidelines to ensure that each taxpayer gets the same excellent experience.





(4) Feedback responses

Each interaction with a taxpayer is an opportunity to collect valuable data about how your customers feel about your office.

According to Microsoft, 89% of customers view brands favorably if they proactively invite and welcome customer feedback.

You can use the given information to learn more about their likes, dislikes, and think of ways to improve your service.

It also gives your customer the impression that you care, helping you to strengthen relationships.



Good Communication skills go beyond speaking directly to taxpayers or taxing entities.

They also include the way we work with one another and COLLABORATE on issues to get the job done as quickly and efficiently for all involved.



Collaboration Skills in the Workplace

- **Know Your Team Goals**

Make sure you are not isolated from your project's goal. Align your actions with the goal of your project and let that drive decision-making.



Collaboration Skills in the Workplace

- **Strike off the habit of complaining**

Our brain has a tendency to focus on the negativity. Complaining can take the whole ship down.





Collaboration Skills in the Workplace

- **Use your time wisely**

Be sure to communicate with your team because how you use your time can impact the team's goals.

Collaboration Skills in the Workplace

- **Be an Active Listener**

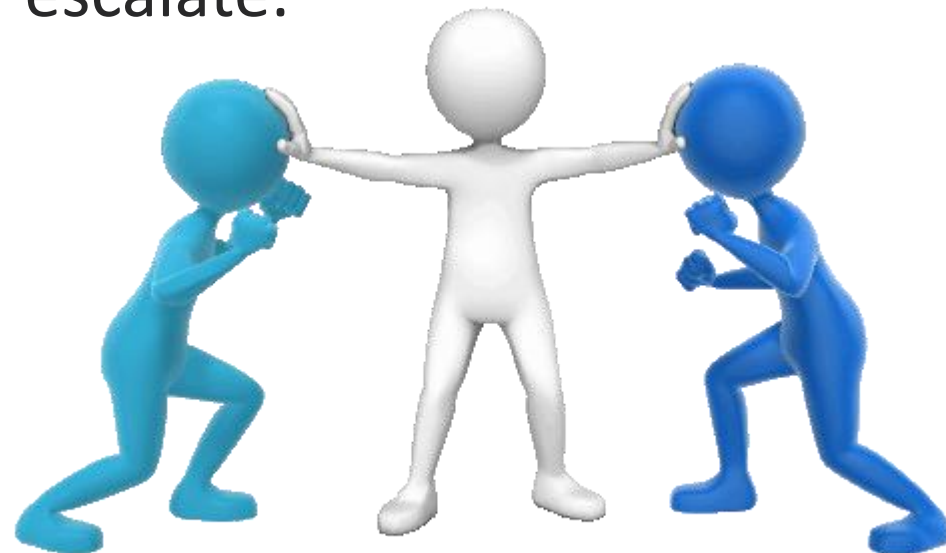
One important part to develop your teamwork skills: be an active listener to make your team member feel valuable and cut off misunderstandings.



Collaboration Skills in the Workplace

- **Know how to Manage Conflict**

Settle disputes through conflict management. Help mediate problems between team members. Learn to spot potential problems and stop them before they escalate.



Collaboration Skills in the Workplace

- **Be Reliable**

This is important to make sure you're the one who sticks to deadlines and completes any tasks you are assigned. If any team member fails at their task, the whole team/project can fail. Team members need to be able to trust one another in order to be successful.





Collaboration Skills in the Workplace

- **Show Respect**

Simple actions in a team like using a team member's name, making eye contact, and actively listening when a person speaks demonstrate respect and with respect comes success for all.

Collaboration Skills in the Workplace

- **Share your enthusiasm**

This will keep the excitement to work together ongoing throughout.



Collaboration Skills in the Workplace

- **Communicate**

Share ideas with each other and be open to feedback – the good and the critical.





Collaboration Skills in the Workplace

- **Develop Strong Interpersonal Skills**

It is important to speak one-on-one and interact with the team properly.

Recognize personal boundaries and cues for others and don't be afraid to show them yours.

Collaboration: The Ultimate Test

- One night, four college students stayed up late partying, even though they knew they had a test the next day. The next morning, they came up with a plan to get out of having to take their test.
- Each student rolled around in dirt and then went to the teacher's office.
- They told the teacher that they had gotten a flat tire the night before, and they spent the *entire night* pushing their car back to campus.
- The teacher listened, and to the students' delight, he offered a retest three days later.

The Ultimate Test

- On the day of the test, the students went to their teacher's office. The teacher put all four of the students in separate rooms to take the test. The students were okay with that because they had been given a chance to study.



The test had 2 questions:

1) Your Name _____ (1 Points)

2) Which tire was flat? _____ (99 Points)

- a. Front Right
- b. Front Left
- c. Back Right
- d. Back Left

The Moral:

Aside from making wise decisions, **you always need to take responsibility for your own actions.**

This means

- not blaming other people for your mistakes,
- not complaining about the reality of the present moment, and
- not giving in to other people's pressure.



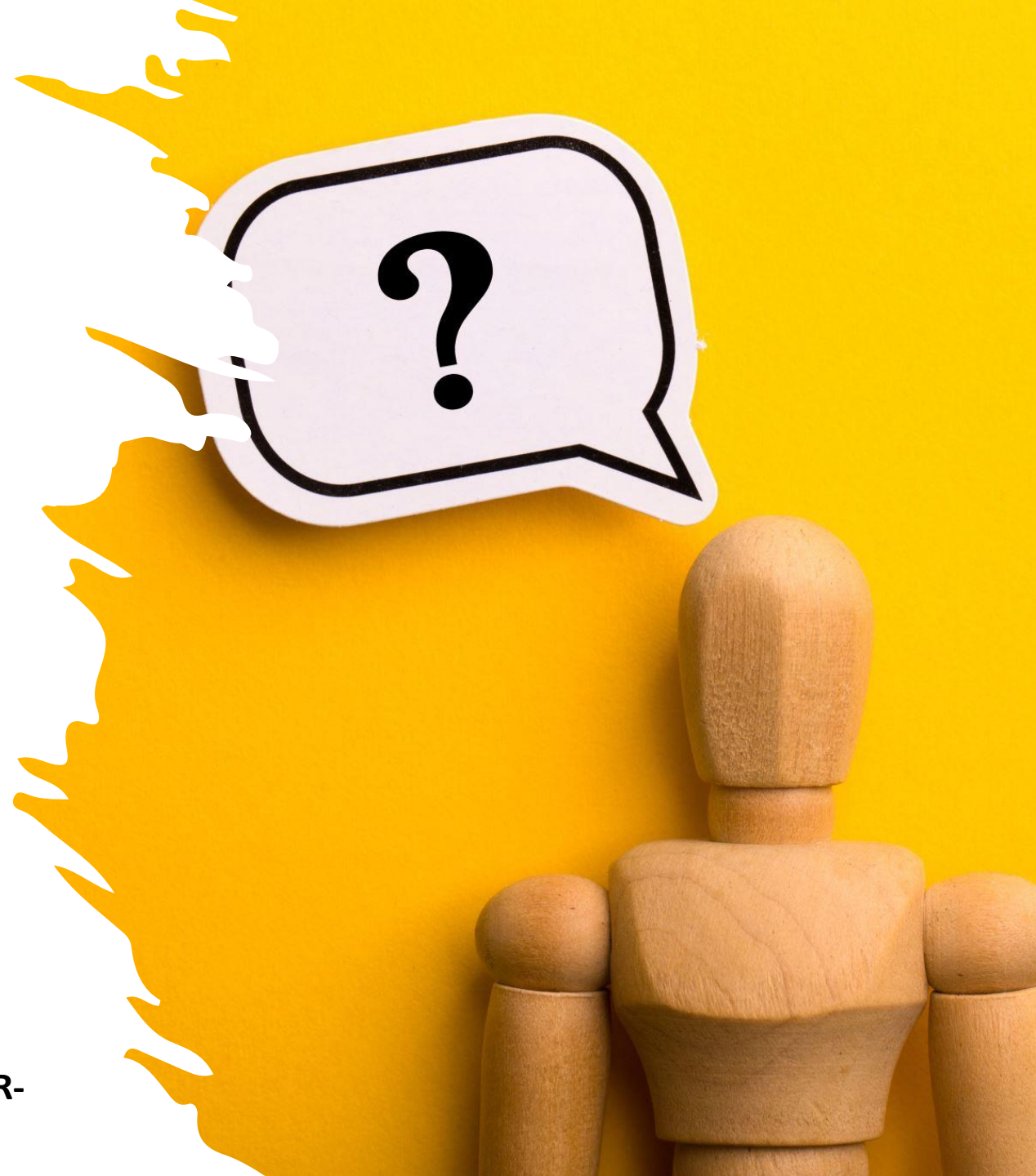


Here are 10 areas to focus on to improve your Customer Service Communication.

10 Tips To Improve Customer Service Communication

[Sarah Chambers](#)
October 6, 2021

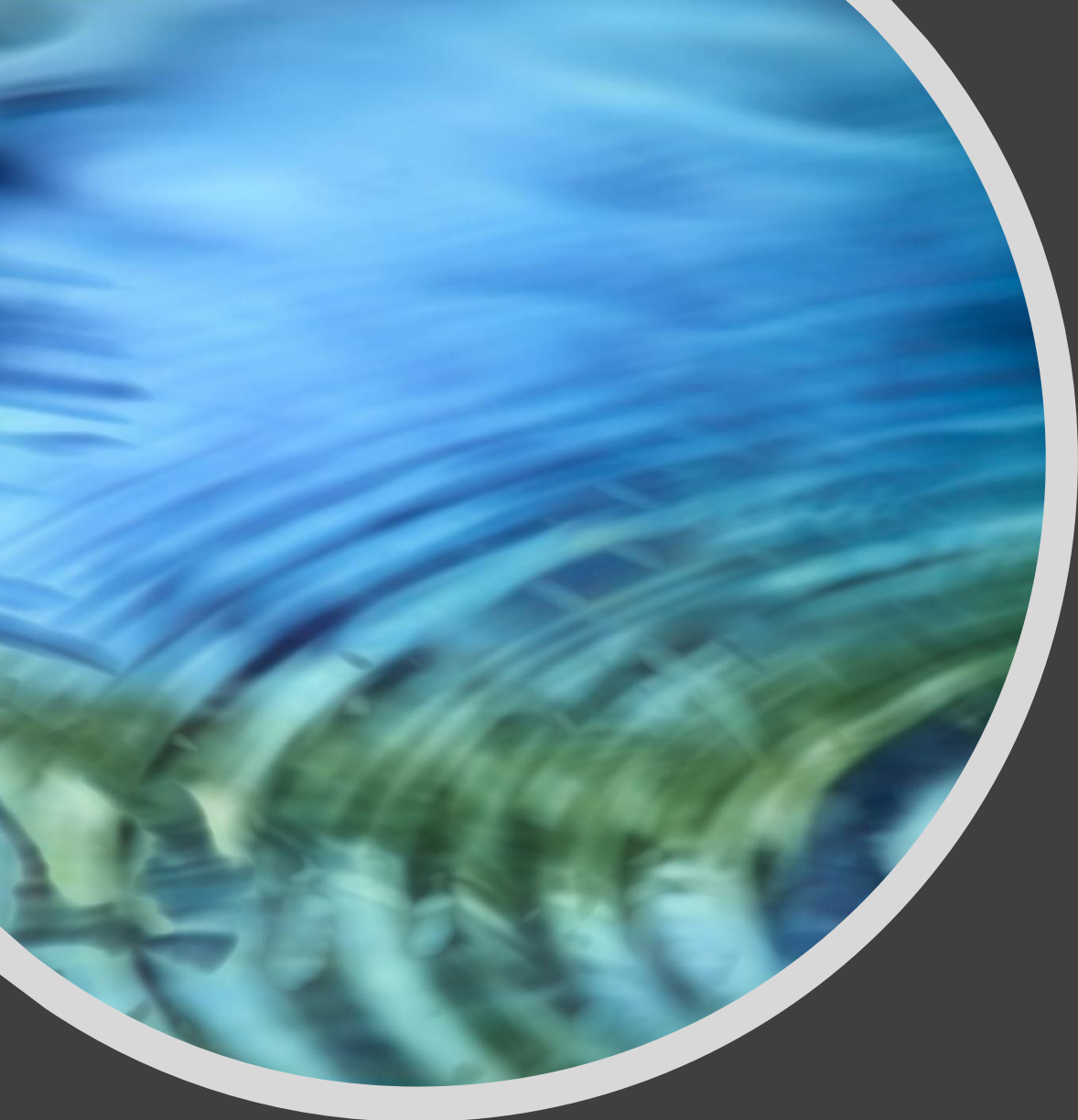
[HTTPS://FRESHDESK.COM/CUSTOMER-SUPPORT/CUSTOMER-SERVICE-COMMUNICATION-TIPS-BLOGAUTHORS](https://freshdesk.com/customer-support/customer-service-communication-tips-blogauthors)





#1 Practice patience and empathy

Show that you care for your customers even if they share their frustration. Some customers need that extra word of assurance or a higher level of engagement to feel satisfied with the outcome. Also, being patient allows you the time to figure out the root cause of the problem and how to provide an effective solution instead of closing the loop in a hurry.



#2 Communicate using POSITIVE language

Make sure that you're using positive language when communicating with a taxpayer. Positive language means telling them what you can do for them rather than what you can't.

For example, instead of saying, "That's not something I deal with. Jessica is in charge of that, and she's not here right now," say something like, "I understand. Please let me find that out for you and get back to you as soon as I have this information."

#3 Listen to hear your customers, not to answer

Listening carefully to what customers are saying is probably the single most effective strategy to provide the solution they need.

Listen with intent of hearing what they are saying.

Don't listen with the intent to answer.



#4 Display emotional intelligence

- Speak the customers' language and acknowledge what issues they are facing by putting yourself in their shoes. Empathizing with a problem or frustration your customer can go a long way – customers *feel* better when you're honest and genuinely care about fixing their issue.
- Here's an example of how to display emotional intelligence while dealing with an angry customer:
 - **Customer:** "I called about this a month ago, and when I finally reached a human, they said that they would take care of it! I've been on hold forever — you seriously treat taxpayers this way?! I pay your salary!!"
 - **Representative Response:** "I'm so sorry you had to wait. From my understanding, you are trying to get a homestead exemption on your new home, you have submitted the paperwork, but have not heard about the exemption. Do I understand this correctly?"

Other examples of emotional intelligence you can use during a conversation are:

- “I understand what you are going through.”
- “I would be equally frustrated in your place.”
- “I want to help you.”
- “I can see why you’re frustrated.”
- “Thanks for bringing this to our attention!”
- “I completely understand why you’re asking for this.”



#5 Be proactive in your approach

- Going the extra mile with a customer is a fantastic way to delight them. Anticipating potential issues that your customers may face and providing a solution can save them a headache.
- For instance, you can help them in advance when they come in to protest and you see that they don't have an exemption that they are entitled to.





#6 Add creativity into the mix

Property tax, like most jobs can get very monotonous. So, when the right opportunity presents itself, add some creativity to spice it up a bit. Done correctly, creative responses can get a positive response, even if it's for solving a grievance.

However, use discretion when it comes to humor and creativity. There might be some situations, issues, or customers that would not appreciate a light-handed reply. To avoid mishaps, teams need to discuss the lines of acceptable or unacceptable scenarios.



#7 Enable employee engagement

Support your staff, enabling them to discuss their problems with others who can connect with what they go through.


Not only will this encourage knowledge sharing and collaboration across the organization but also present newer opportunities to delight customers.

Take them to conferences or seminars on Ethics and Customer Service, areas that all of us need to focus on.



#8 Ask for customer feedback and fine-tune your support

[Customer feedback](#) is one of the most important aspects of improving your customer experience. When a customer picks up the phone, sends you an email, or messages you on social media, they give you the chance to improve – don't miss out. By listening to what customers are saying, you can refine and improve your customer support.



#10 Manage time efficiently

As the saying goes, “time is money.”

Meeting deadlines is a critical part of the property tax profession.

If you can't meet the deadlines or get the work out in a timely fashion, stop and ask, “Why?”

Do you enjoy what you're doing but need to speed up your process? If so, seek guidance from team members with more experience.

Working smarter usually results in working faster.





Examples of Customer Service Communication That Work. . .

- A phone call is often the first human-to-human exchange between taxpayers and your office so you must develop the best skills possible to make your customer service communication a success.

- Here are some ideas . . .

12 excellent customer service phrases to use

Part 1: Customer service greetings

“Nice to meet you!” “How can I help?”

First impressions can go a long way in customer service interactions too.

When you’re speaking to a customer for the first time in person, offering a polite greeting like “nice to meet you” helps set a positive and conversational tone.

Over the phone, a nice “How can I help?” will do the same.

Getting the tone right at the beginning of the conversation creates a good impression that can get carried throughout the conversation and subsequent ones.

12 excellent customer service phrases to use

Part 1: Customer service greetings

“How can I help you today?”

The previous customer service greeting is perfect when you're interacting with a customer for the first time. However, using the same greeting while interacting with customers you've spoken to might not be the best thing to say.

You need to treat repeat customers with a sense of familiarity. So, in this case, a greeting like “how can I help you today?” works better — it's direct and shows that you're eager to help.

12 excellent customer service phrases to use

Part 1: Customer service greetings

“I hope you’re doing well.”

- Small talk is not for all service reps and certainly not for all customers. However, taking the time to check on your customers is not wrong — especially the customers with whom you have built a strong rapport.
- “I hope you’re doing well” does not necessarily force the customer to dwell on how they are doing. It’s just a polite exchange that fits well given all that’s been happening in the world in the past year.
- **A word of caution:** Use this phrase after sensing the customer’s tone. You might want to refrain from using this when the customer is angry and jump right into resolving the issue instead.



12 excellent customer service phrases to use

Part 2: Phrases for common support instances

“I hear what you’re saying.”

[Empathy in customer support](#) serves as a bridge that connects you with your customers, making it an important customer service skill.

Letting the customer know that you share their sentiments with a phrase like “I hear what you’re saying” helps them feel heard and understood. Another great customer service phrase that can help with this is “I understand why you’re feeling this way”.



12 excellent customer service phrases to use

Part 2: Phrases for common support instances

“I’m sorry you’re facing this <issue>.”

In addition to being empathetic, you can also take things a step further by [apologizing for the inconvenience](#) caused.

By apologizing, you are doing your bit to ease the customer’s anger and show that you genuinely feel bad for the trouble caused. “I’m sorry you’re facing this <issue>” makes for an excellent customer service phrase, especially when the customer is visibly upset.

12 excellent customer service phrases to use

Part 2: Phrases for common support instances

“Thank you for taking the time to explain that to me.”

When a customer explains their problem in great detail, they save you the time and effort spent to gather context. A simple, straightforward, and positive customer service phrase like “Thank you for taking the time to explain that to me” will do just the trick.



12 excellent customer service phrases to use

Part 2: Phrases for common support instances

“I need a little more information to understand what’s going on.”

Asking your customers to give you more information about the issues they face is not an easy task. However, there is a quick, easy and friendly way to go about this.

You can start with the phrase **“I need a little more information to understand what’s going on”**.

Follow this up with all the details you need to collect in one shot.





12 excellent customer service phrases to use

Part 2: Phrases for common support instances

“Although I’d love to help you with this, ...”

As a customer service agent, you might come across instances where customers ask you to do something beyond your scope of help.

“Although I’d love to help you with this, <reasons>” is an excellent customer service phrase that offers a polite and [positive way to say no](#) and shows that helping your customer is your priority.



12 excellent customer service phrases to use

Part 2: Phrases for common support instances

“I will have an update for you by <time>.”

When you’re telling your customer that you’re going to get back to them about something, you need to choose your words carefully.

There’s no need to spend too much time going into details about how you’re going to find the answer. The customer does not want to know if you’re going to speak to your product team or pass the ticket to the sales team. They just want to know when they can get an update.

“I will have an update for you by <time>.” works perfectly.

12 excellent customer service phrases to use

Part 3: Closing statements and questions

“Is there anything else I can help you with?”

Using the phrase “Is there anything else I can help you with?” towards the end of the conversation helps you stay a step ahead and capture those ‘oh wait’ and ‘one more thing’ from your customers.

12 excellent customer service phrases to use

Part 3: Closing statements and questions

“Thank you so much for your feedback”

Customer feedback of any form is helpful. Allowing your taxpayers to give feedback to you either via your website or some other outlet that you control, you may avoid them complaining to the TDLR or Comptroller.



12 excellent customer service phrases to use

Part 3: Closing statements and questions

“Happy to help.”

Another heartwarming phrase to end your conversation with your customers is “Happy to help”.

It proves that you value the customer and shows that you are true to your job.



5 customer service phrases to avoid

- While customer service phrases help you converse more efficiently, not all of them are fit for use. A few common customer service phrases are outdated, seem forced, and might tick your customers off.
- Here are five lines that you should avoid, and how you could frame them instead..

5 customer service phrases to avoid

“Thank you for reaching out” -> “Let me know how I can help you today.”

Thanking your customers for contacting you won't add any value to your conversation with the customer. Plus, this phrase has been overused to a point where it's redundant to say it.

Instead, you can use the phrase **“Let me know how I can help you today.”** — it is to the point and helps the conversation progress forward.

5 customer service phrases to avoid

“I don’t know” -> **”I don’t have the answer for this right now. I will have an update for you by <time>.”**

As a PTP, it’s realistically impossible for you to have all the right answers. But your taxpayers reach out to you expecting to get solutions.

So, when you don’t have answers saying “I don’t know” just won’t cut it.

When you don’t have the answer, you can use this phrase, “I don’t have the answer for this right now. However, I will have an update for you by <time>”.

5 customer service phrases to avoid

**“That’s not allowed under the Code”->
“Although I’d love to help you with this, I can’t because <reasons>.”**

When the customer’s request is not possible, it’s completely fine for you to refuse to help. However, customers hate hearing that. Especially when you bluntly put it as “That’s not allowed by law.”

“Although I’d love to help you with this...” — works best for this.

5 customer service phrases to avoid

“Please refer to our website” -> **“Here’s a step-by-step guide on how to <solution>.”**

Redirecting a customer without any assistance can create a less than ideal experience. Its akin to saying that you are unwilling to help.

Instead, share a direct link to an article or form that will help. And explain what they need to do next.

Or refer them to the website and then stay on the line to see if you can be of further assistance.

5 customer service phrases to avoid

Chatbot: “I’m not sure I get that” -> “Let me connect you with an agent.”

Customers hate ~~having to repeat information, especially when they are crystal clear with their requests.~~ Chatbots.

Program your chatbot to hand over the request to an agent right away.



CONCLUSION

- Words and positive language carry a lot of weight in customer service.
- Using the right words and phrases can help improve customer experience and increase customer satisfaction.
- Don't forget to be authentic and display your personality while interacting with your customers — this is what makes you sound more human and strengthens customer relationships.

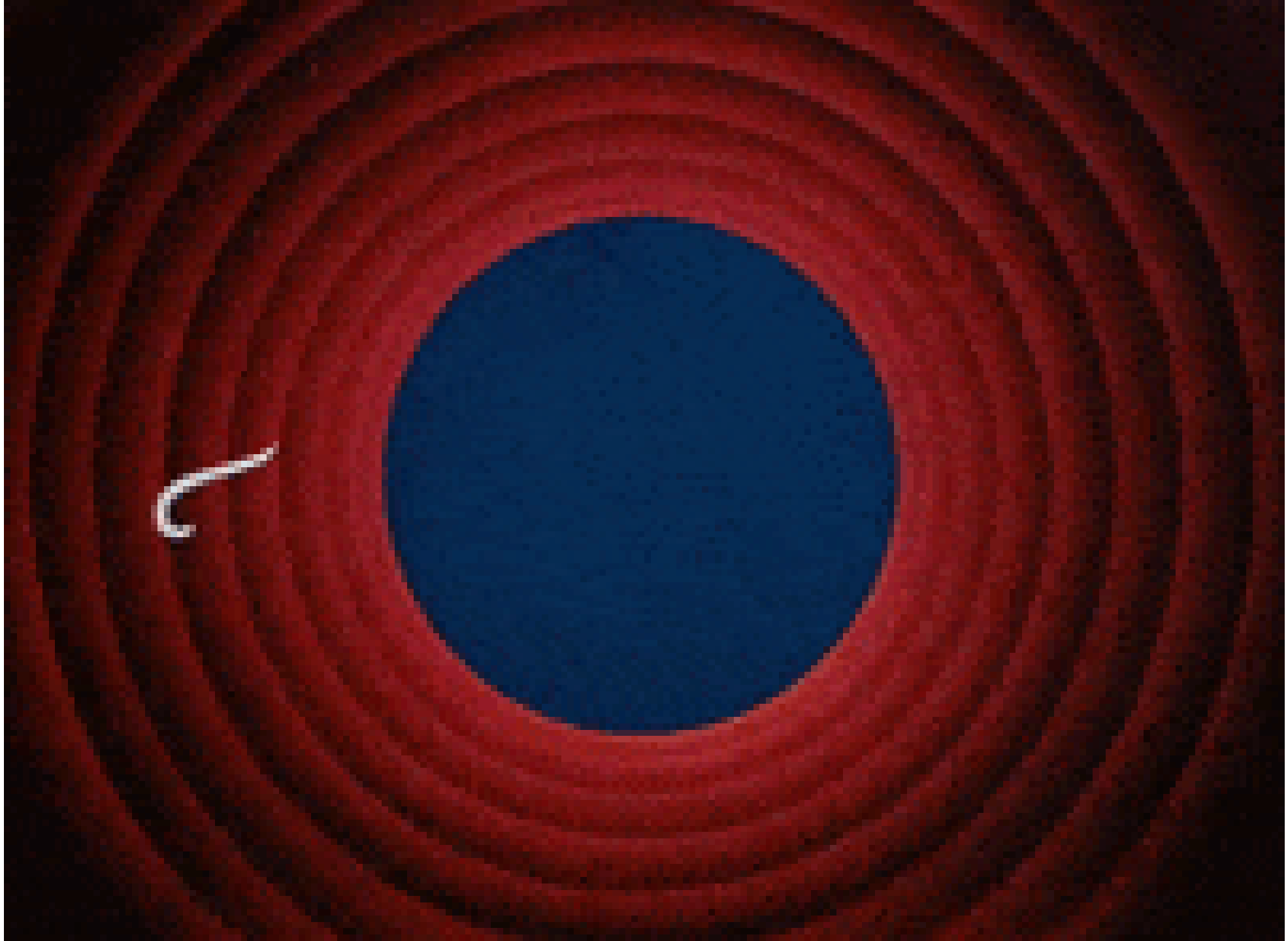
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