

## **Customer Care:**

### Cultivating the Culture and Language of Service at CLB 4-6

Public Report

Prepared by: Bow Valley College

July 2018

## Summary

Customer service is an intangible, culturally-based skill that requires explicit instruction and continual practice to develop. When landing their first jobs, many newcomers to Canada find themselves in entry level positions in retail and hospitality organizations where customer service takes a lead role. Language classes alone do not prepare these newcomers for success in providing good customer care in the workplace. In response to these challenges, Bow Valley College created, *Customer Care: Cultivating the Culture and Language of Service at CLB 4-6* a hybrid part-time course which will promote the development of customer service skills from both a language and cultural perspective for learners at Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) 4-6. This report includes activities and outcomes from the project.

## Activities completed and reported on in September 2017

Activities	Date Completed	Outcomes
<b>Stage One Development</b> January 2017 – August 2017	During this stage, the focus was to research, design and develop a customized customer care course and recruit learners for the first pilot.	
Develop project plan and hire project team	January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Project plan completed</li> <li>○ Project staff selected</li> <li>○ Partner meeting to confirm project scope and role</li> </ul>
Research best practices in customer service in the service industry	February and March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Current workplace best practice informs course development</li> </ul>
Conduct focus group with HR specialists	February and March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Three meetings with specialists to support research of best practices</li> </ul>
Design and develop part-time customer care course material including online scenarios, face-to-face materials, and coaching materials and strategy	March to July	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Course materials developed including, face-to-face, online and coaching materials</li> </ul>
Design recruitment materials and strategy and recruit participants for the first pilot (at least 12 learners per pilot)	July and August	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Recruitment ad, PowerPoint, and interview tool created</li> <li>○ 14 learners recruited for the first pilot</li> </ul>

## Activities completed from September 2017 to March 2018

Activities	Date Completed	Outcomes
<b>Stage Two Delivery</b> September 2017 – February 2018	During this stage, the focus was to deliver the course to three cohorts of learners. Upon completion of the pilots, revisions to the course content were made. Recruit learners for the second and third pilots.	
Deliver (pilot) 3 blended part-time customer care courses to at least 36 learners at CLB 4-6	September- November October-January January-March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Three pilots delivered to a total of 38 learners of which 37 completed</li> </ul>
Recruit for pilots 2 and 3 (at least 12 learners per pilot)	September and December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All potential participants interviewed and final selection made</li> </ul>
Revise course as required between pilots to capture lessons learned from each cohort	February and March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revisions to course materials and delivery as required</li> </ul>
Final revisions to the course at the end of the pilot period	March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Course materials finalized including, face-to-face, online and coaching materials</li> </ul>
Submit final report to Alberta Labour	May	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Final report including final budget submitted</li> </ul>

*I feel more confident. I learned more about Canadian culture in the workplace → greetings, feedback, how to handle an irate customer and I think one from the more important is how to saying no politely.*

Customer Care course participant

*The most important to understanding about the customer culture, and also to improve speaking skill and pronunciation and online home work is improvement to computer skills.*

Customer Care course participant

## Outcomes

The following immediate outcomes were realized in this project.

Immediate Outcomes	Outcome Measures
Increased workplace communication skills (customer service focussed) of course pilot participants within Alberta	3 cohorts (36 learners total) of the course piloted with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a completion rate of 85% (31 learners)</li> <li>• 100% of learners who complete the course increase their language skills in the area of customer service</li> <li>• 100% of course completers increase their self-reflection and assessment skills</li> </ul>
<p>A total of thirty-seven learners completed the pilots of the course with thirty-eight learners being accepted. This represents a 97% completion rate of the learners accepted, but a 100% success rate of enrolment targets. All of the successful completers of the courses increased both their language skills in the area of customer service and in their ability to self-reflect and self assess their learning (this was honed in the coaching component).</p>	
Increased pragmatic competence due to a reduction in communication mismatches between course completers and customers (and employers)	Course completers will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• complete a self-assessment on their increased pragmatic competence in a workplace setting</li> </ul>
<p>Learners commented on both the discrete skills acquired through this course and overall increase in their ability to communicate in culturally responsive ways. Most learners were especially impacted by the lessons instructing them how to say 'no' politely and also the lessons surrounding self advocacy.</p>	
The instructor teaching the course will have increased knowledge and skills in the development and delivery of language courses addressing labour force attachments (customer service field)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• complete an exit interview and feedback form</li> </ul>
<p>There were two instructors in the pilots of the course (one instructor taught the first two offerings and the other instructor taught the final offering). The comments here are an amalgamation of comments from both of them. Instructors felt that the course content while positioned at the appropriate CLB levels, would have a greater impact for learners at the higher CLBs (even higher than the projected levels of the course). The coaching component of the pilots was very useful for learners and for the instructors as they developed a new set of skills and worked with learners in a new way. They also felt that they were able to hone additional skills in both online delivery and intercultural learning. They were appreciative of the opportunity to combine their skills in one offering and felt that the learners benefitted from an offering that focussed on skill building in a variety of areas directly connected to the workplace. Both of the instructors felt like there were more topics and content that could be introduced to the course especially for those learners at higher proficiency levels.</p>	

## Challenges

This project was fortunate in that it didn't encounter many challenges. One area that posed a small challenge was recruitment of instructors who possessed the variety of skills that were required to deliver the content. It was necessary to have an instructor with intercultural competency, a background in teaching pronunciation, experience teaching pragmatics and comfort and experience teaching online.

## Successes

This project had many successes. Recruitment of participants was a smooth process. We met our target enrolment for each of the three intakes. Information sessions were held with over sixty attendees for thirty-six openings in the offerings. It should be noted that recruitment of the second and third intakes benefitted from word-of-mouth from participants in the first intake.

In addition to recruitment, the project experienced successes in the coaching innovation. Coaching was a new component for this type of offering. The responses from learners and the instructors was very positive. The value of contextualizing an intervention directly to both intercultural learning and advancement at work through pragmatic competence development was innovative and responded directly to the individual needs and learning goals of the learners.

The partnership with Talent Pool was a very positive one. It was essential for Bow Valley College to connect to employers to assess their needs in terms of customer service and Talent Pool was the conduit to make these connections. They were also essential in setting up meetings with professional coaches so that we could learn from experts in the field, make adaptations for language learners and conduct the coaching sessions. They provided responsive and ongoing support throughout the project where an employer lens was required.

## Feedback

### From learners

Feedback from learners was overwhelmingly positive. They enjoyed having multiple ways to engage with the content. Select comments from learners have been incorporated into the body of this report.

### From instructors

Both instructors indicated that they embraced the challenge to teach in both face-to-face and online mediums and they enjoyed the challenge of coaching. The development of additional skills was recognized by both of the instructors.

## Learnings

Learning occurred on a variety of levels during this project. Bow Valley College has further increased its capacity to deliver courses with more complex offerings (online and coaching). Planning effective lessons required the instructor to employ a different set of skills

incorporating language, intercultural knowledge, workplace realities and online learning principles. The instructors are now able to better inform their home programs with an enhanced skill set.

The course was offered in blended format both to allow access to learners who have competing priorities for their time and also to provide an opportunity to learn in a digital space. While this was a positive experience for the learners and they gained unanticipated digital skills, it required more planning time and development of online assets than originally conceptualized.

### Recommendations

*Offer programming at different times of the day to offer more access to learners.* Flexibility in offerings allowed more learners to enroll in the course. This is especially important when the target group is working English language learners who have competing priorities for their time.

*Incorporate reflection and self-assessment in course delivery.* Both reflection and self-assessment were integral components of the course. Learners were taught how to both engage in critical reflection and self-assessment. The instruction of these skills was based on skills required in the workplace (e.g. to participate in performance appraisals).

*Allow for enough flexibility in program design to build in extra supports when needed.* The conceptualization of a program and the final output can often look different. Allowing for enough flexibility in the design phase allows the final product to be responsive to emerging needs.

*Set language proficiency levels high enough.* The language of customer service is highly nuanced and culturally based. Learners need to have a strong command of English to be able to perform successfully in these types of language situations. While all learners in the course gained language and para language skills, those learners at the higher range of CLB (6) were able to apply their learning directly in workplace situations. A recommendation that these types of offerings target learners in Stage 2 of the CLB would support increased transference to workplace situations.

*Keep classes sizes small to ensure there is adequate energy devoted to coaching.* Learners overwhelmingly benefitted from the coaching sessions. The individualized approach ensured that they were able access content at a pace and level suitable to their proficiency and skills. When asked if the coaching component should be shortened, they responded with a resounding no. Many of the learners mentioned that if possible the coaching sessions should be longer. To provide this to the learners, the overall class size should remain at 12-14 learners to afford the instructor the time to prepare for these sessions.