

# Are You Nasty or Awesome?

*What Kids Think of Us and Why We Should Care!*

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## COURSE SYLLABUS

**Course Length:** Flexible – up to 4½ hours of teaching time, not including breaks

**Instructor:** John Bennett, B.A., M.A.

**Course Description:** Through various exercises, group activities, discussions, and demonstrations, managers and employees will learn to better understand both the need for effective marketing of child nutrition programs and their own crucial role in assuring the success of any marketing effort. Moreover, they will learn the importance of finding out exactly how their customers perceive their products and services; they will have the opportunity, time-permitting, to see themselves and their coworkers in action in customer service scenarios; and they will gain a concrete understanding of how their customer service practices and habits affect the bottom line.

**Who Should Attend:** If at all possible, all managers and front-line employees should attend. The marketing and customer service concepts taught during this day of training reinforce and build on those from the "Turning Service Into Sales" session that many of your employees will have already attended; but, although general concepts are re-learned by participants, no material is repeated. Those employees who saw the original session will have the key ideas from that seminar reinforced with all new examples and illustrations, and will be exposed to several important new concepts that build on the key ideas from "Turning Service Into Sales." New employees and those who missed the original seminar will be able to pick up the original concepts and gain exposure to the new techniques at the same time.

### Course Outline:

**Introduction:** In this section, the class will be reacquainted (or acquainted for the first time, as the case may be) with the absolute necessity for positive customer service and proactive marketing and promotion in their child nutrition operations. Moreover, we'll attempt to empower participants with the knowledge that they are the most important "players" in the school meals marketing "game" (we'll be using this "game" metaphor in various ways throughout the session). We'll set up the comparison between products and service that customers consider "Nasty" and those that they consider "Awesome."

**Lesson One – Seeing:** How do others see us in child nutrition? What persistent myths affect perceptions of our programs and services? How can we influence key groups, especially customers, to have more positive perceptions about school meals? And, just as importantly, how do our own perceptions of our customers affect the service we provide to them? This section uses a combination of group exercises and humorous examples of perception problems from the larger world to dramatize the importance of "Seeing" \_\_ i.e., the habit of appreciating others' perspectives

and points of view that is central to successful marketing.

**Lesson Two – Exciting:** The second section demonstrates that, once we've established who our customers are and begun to understand their perspectives, we need to use that understanding to consciously motivate them to choose our products and services. We'll share stories of good and bad customer service experiences; we'll work together to define what constitutes good service for us when we're the consumers; and we'll apply these self-selected service criteria to participants' own work in child nutrition.

**Lesson Three – Exchanging:** In this section, we'll leave the largely theoretical realm and enter the nitty-gritty of what works, day in and day out, to make our school restaurants more exciting and appealing places for our customers. First, we'll tap the group's own expertise for insights into what has – and hasn't – worked for them in the past. Then, we'll look at examples and case studies from programs around the country, with slides, video, and hands-on examples of materials used in successful school restaurants elsewhere.

**Lesson Four – Inquiring:** We can't begin to change our customers' perceptions until we know what those perceptions are. This section uses actual market research data on school meals collected among parents and students to test participants' knowledge of what our customers think about our products and services. We'll note any discrepancies between what we think customers believe and what they actually tell us. Then, we'll view video clips from focus groups in which students in small groups shared their feelings about school meals with researchers. Finally, participants will receive and review several surveys that they can use as tools to do their own market research.

**Lesson Five – Evaluating:** In the last "content" section, time-permitting, we'll put participants in action in various service scenarios and videotape their own techniques for dealing with and responding to customers. Then, we'll view and analyze the tapes, pointing out positive aspects of their approaches to customers – and, ever so gently, negative aspects, as well. The goal here – beyond the obvious goals of instruction in good customer service techniques, reinforcement of positive practices, and application of what we've learned throughout the day – is to make customer service behaviors more apparent to participants, who may not consciously see their behavior around customers as separate or different from their "ordinary" behavior.

**Lesson Six – Recognizing:** The final section ties the others together and underscores our recurrent theme: that any marketing initiative, public relations effort, or promotion for a child nutrition program will never work without the commitment and enthusiasm of the people on the line. Do customers consider us nasty or awesome? The answer to that question can make the difference between a thriving, successful program and one that's going downhill. Participants are encouraged to recognize their own centrality to the on-going success of the School Meals programs. Each of the previous sections is recapped and connected to the others; diplomas are awarded; and final comments and examples reinforce the need to think differently and act differently to proactively improve the ways that our various customers perceive our products and services.

**A Word on Course Pedagogy:** Although this syllabus may seem dry and technical, the method of the course is anything but boring or academic. The instructor is an accomplished showman as well as a trained academic, and the course mixes humor, sophisticated AV tools, video, and individual student participation to maintain interest. Most of the lessons are learned transparently; i.e., the students won't consciously think they're sitting in a classroom or "learning," but rather that they're having fun! This approach both makes a class of this length more tolerable and makes the lessons more likely to take root and flourish. Some concepts are repeated from the original session, but all of the material is new. Among returning participants, this technique encourages what psychologists call "relearning" (learning a concept a second time, even years removed from the first learning experience, greatly facilitates retention) without boring them, while at the same time guaranteeing that first time participants can jump right in.