



*Singing in the Rain:
Delivering Outstanding
Customer Service Through Any
Storm*

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IASFAA Spring 2026

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Customer Service Experience

All about perspective!

- Financial Aid staff position
- Students and families
- Coworkers (faculty and other staff on campus)




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Pair & Share

- Think about a recent customer service interaction that stuck with you? Which type of interaction was it?
 - A convo that escalated quickly?
 - A confused student who needed major clarity?
 - A student carrying heavy personal stress?
 - A very frustrated parent?
 - An emotional student that will not be able to re-enroll due to affordability?
 - A surprisingly positive interaction?
- Share with your neighbor what made that interaction memorable. What made it challenging or successful? What do you wish had gone differently?




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Why Customer Service Gets Hard


- FAFSA delays / policy shifts
- Technology failures
- Conflicting information across offices
- Staff burnout + emotional labor
 - Leads to turnover
- Students & families under financial stress




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Student Experience

I don't understand!
Financial Pressure!
Grades!



**Build trust.
Encourage asking questions.
Belonging.**



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Core Strategies for Strong Customer Service


- ✓ Communication
- ✓ Consistency & Clarity
- ✓ Empowerment & Boundaries
- ✓ Proactive Model vs. Reactive Model
- ✓ All about attitude
- ✓ Being adaptable
- ✓ Be prepared




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Core Strategies for Strong Customer Service

- What strategies have worked for you? What has not worked?
- What strategies do you use when engaging in tough conversations?
- What challenges do you have to work through?
- How do you wrap up these conversations without making the student feel shame or guilt?



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Managing Service Operations with Students in Mind


- Staff Training
- Support
- Difficult Conversations
- Balancing Act
- Operational decisions ARE customer service decisions



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Applying the Strategies

- What is the student really asking for?
- What would you say as your *first sentence*?
- What would a *poor* response look like here?
- What would an *excellent* response look like?
- What strategy would help most here?
- What tools or support would make this interaction easier?
- How could the office prevent this issue next time?




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Tools That Can Help!

- ✓ Standard response (consistency)
- ✓ Call guides
- ✓ Internal communication
- ✓ Data tracking
- ✓ Student feedback

What tools help you?



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Final Thoughts

What's your takeaway?
Reflect on your own customer service.

A customer service practice I want to strengthen is...
One operational change I want to advocate for is...
One way I can stay student-centered during stressful moments is...
One way I can support my team in delivering better customer service is...



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Questions?

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THANK YOU for all the hard work you do every day!

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