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**Customer Service Notes for**

***Building Rapport to Enhance Participant Relationships and Results***

There is no question that WIC participants like to work with WIC staff and WIC offices that they know and trust.

As a member of a WIC team, you have the advantage of working for an organization that has been serving its participants for more than forty years. You are starting from a great place, but your actions make a huge difference in customer service excellence and long-term participant relationships.

Make the effort to understand your participants’ situations so you can best assist them.

Here are some reminders of how to build rapport in every participant interaction:

* **Start with a Smile:** Your non-verbal communication and a warm greeting will create an atmosphere of sincerity and trust.
* **Ask Open-Ended Questions**: These are questions that are answered with something other than a yes or no. They elicit responses that give you more information about the participants. Questions that start with What, Where and How will get the conversation going.
* **Use Active Listening Skills** – When the participant is speaking, be sure she has your full attention. Focus on what she is saying and listen for meaning. It is very easy to not listen and simply wait for your turn to speak. You can also take notes of key points and paraphrase. By paraphrasing, you demonstrate caring, listening, and professionalism. You might also uncover a misunderstanding that you can address.
* **TOPS/Empathy:** Being empathetic by understanding how others feel and putting yourself in **t**he **o**ther **p**erson’s **s**hoes (TOPS) will put you in the mindset of thinking about your recommendations from the participant’s perspective.
* **Be Courteous:** We know that every suggestion we make is not going to be accepted and acted upon by participants. Some will accept what you offer, while others won’t. We want to be mindful of the importance of long-term participant relationships, so be sure to be courteous, even when your suggestions are not accepted this time. Just because your suggestions were not accepted initially doesn’t mean that the participant will never accept them. Keep your participant relationships strong and you will always have additional chances to present ideas and provide stellar service.

Questions for Reflection

1. Do you consistently ask open-ended questions of participants? Keep track of the number of participants you help on a given day and the number of clients to whom you ask at least one open-ended question.
2. Do you demonstrate empathy with all of your participants?



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