

3.1 Customer Relations

PASSENGERS

PASSENGERS are the most important persons in our business -- IN PERSON, BY PHONE, or BY MAIL.

PASSENGERS are not dependent on us—we are dependent on them.

PASSENGERS are not an interruption of our work—they are the purpose of it. We are not doing them a favor by serving them—they are doing us a favor by giving us the opportunity to serve them.

PASSENGERS are not a cold statistic—they are flesh and blood, human being with feelings and an emotion like YOU and ME—and with biases and prejudices, likes and dislikes.

PASSENGERS are not persons to argue with or match wits with—or even to outsmart. **NO ONE ever won an argument with a passenger.**

PASSENGERS are persons who bring us their wants. It is our job to handle their requirements pleasantly so that they will want to ride with us again.

The objective of this training program is to provide you with the tools to become a professional transit operator. You will notice as your training progresses that we will not refer to you as bus drivers, because driving a bus only begins to scrape the surface of what will be expected of you. Later in your training we will be discussing defensive driving techniques and specific driving skills. Those sessions will prepare you to deal effectively with the purely technical aspects of your job, i.e. driving a bus safely. At this point, however, it is important to touch upon the non-technical, though no less important, human relations skills, which separate drivers from operators.

Think of yourself as a businessperson representing the transportation system. The most important people in your business are the passengers you carry. You may be the first and only representative of the transportation system to come into contact with the passengers. Therefore, the impression the passengers have of you will be the impression they have of the entire system.

Your product is service, and your obligation must be to make that service as attractive as possible so that your customers (passengers) will want to continue using your product. If you do not successfully fulfill that obligation, then they will buy another product—perhaps in the form of automobile transportation—and your very livelihood may be in danger. Remember that you are not doing them a favor by picking them up; their fares pay your wages.

Keeping schedules and delivering your passengers to their destinations safely are important measurements of the quality of your product. However, they are not the only ingredients

because you are engaged in a "people" business and people react in a variety of ways when they board a bus and become a "passenger".

You must be aware of these reactions, make allowances for them, and make your passengers feel as confident and comfortable riding with you as possible.

"One possible reaction is a feeling of loss of control. As adults, we like to be in control of our lives. By stepping onto a bus, we are turning over this control to an unknown person. Since many adults drive, it is sometimes unnerving to trust another person to be as good as we each think we are. I can trust myself. Can I trust this operator?"

Another reaction not uncommon to passengers is the feeling of self-consciousness and insecurity in facing rows of staring strangers. Choosing a seat becomes a big deal. "What will people think if I sit there?" Usually, people will sit alone until there is no choice, and then they must choose a seatmate; a small decision, maybe, but a decision forced upon the passenger and often unwelcome and uncomfortable.

Some passengers find the confinement, especially in a crowded bus, to be intolerable. They feel pushed and crowded by other people and resent the close quarters. Each of us has our circle of privacy, and when this is invaded, we shift and try to gain the space back again. As an operator, you know—or will know—how close a person can stand to you without invading your territory, and when he or she stands too close or leans toward you to talk within your circle of privacy, you feel uncomfortable and lean away. Passengers also suffer this feeling of intrusion.

Some passengers become unusually obedient and child-like on a bus. By giving up responsibility for their motion, they give up even more, and look to the operator as the all-knowing and all-powerful parent. They see the operator as "authority", and are willing to obey, but don't take appropriate actions themselves.

Other passengers, again feeling child-like, react in another child-like manner. They become belligerent and must test this authority and themselves by making unreasonable demands and complaints.

Passengers are just like us, but in this unique role as a passenger, they are helpless to hurry or slow the bus, helpless to guide it safely through traffic, and helplessly stranded with strangers who are, at the least, unknown and unchosen, and at the worst, possibly dangerous. Passengers look to the operator for their security. Your attitude, manner, greeting, and driving behavior send a signal that they are entering a safe environment or a hostile one where they must be on guard and defensive.

We all make mistakes. The operation of a transportation system involves a complex set of interacting tasks and there are bound to be some errors. Your job will be to try to correct problems as quickly as possible regardless of whether the error was yours or the passengers. Remember, **THE PASSENGER IS ALWAYS RIGHT**, even when you feel they may be wrong. When you do make a mistake, correct it as quickly as possible and avoid making excuses. "I'm sorry" is the only apology necessary.

Most people are patient, understanding, and cooperative; and if you do your very best under the circumstances, the public generally senses this fact and is appreciative. You will be amazed at how far a pleasant smile, a sincere greeting or a helping hand will go in creating a good relationship between you and your passengers. Not only will they like you as a person, but will also be more inclined to help you should you ever need their help.

Operators must exercise patience and self-control. Anger at the wheel interferes with safe operation; but self-control and a good attitude win the respect, admiration and cooperation of all concerned. You will find that many motorists drive differently when they are around buses or other large vehicles than when they are around other passenger cars. They will pull out in front of you from parking spaces and intersections, they will go out of their way to pass you if they are following you in traffic, and they will make right hand turns in front of you as you are pulling out of near-side bus stop zones. They put themselves, their passengers, you and your passengers, and pedestrians in dangerous situations partly because they are intimidated by the size of your vehicle, partly because they simply can't get a full view of the traffic picture when they are around large vehicles, and partly because they are just impatient.

Operators must never forget that they are Professionals, and as such, must make allowances for the lack of skill, or improper attitudes on the part of others no matter how trying the circumstances seem to be. Pedestrians and drivers of other vehicles with whom you share the road should be treated with the same courtesy and respect shown to your passengers. Your attitude and conduct as a participant in the total traffic picture may well determine whether these non-passengers become your passengers in the future. Actually, it is far easier to be courteous, considerate and cooperative than to be indifferent, inconsiderate, and uncooperative. Among the great dividends payable directly to an operator as a result of improved treatment of people is a far more pleasant feeling about their job.