



customer care

Karen Woodham is a registered Immigration Consultant here in Port Macquarie. Karen is part of the Customer Care program and we catch up for a chat for focus.

Tell us about your business and how long you've been resident here.

I am a Registered Migration Agent (RMA0003601) operating Migrate Now, a successful Australian Immigration Consultancy business. I have worked in the Legal Industry since 1982 and have been a Migration Agent for nearly 10 years. Broadly, my role allows me to assist prospective migrants from all over the world fulfill their dreams of becoming participating members of Australian society. This may include assisting overseas family members to be united with loved ones in Australia or assisting the entry of overseas skilled and business migrants whose expertise contributes vastly to our economy. I am particularly involved in assisting local employers in securing overseas workers to fill labour shortages. I also advise foreign investors in relation to Foreign Investment Review Board approval.

I first arrived to Port Macquarie 31 years ago with my family from Holland. As you can imagine, I have seen it grow and change immensely! I am fortunate enough to have my parents, sister, brother and children all living in Port Macquarie. My partner, Craig, and I believe this region is one of the most beautiful areas in the world. Our community is fortunate in that it has a strong social fabric and a wonderful outdoors living environment.

At the same time, a continuing high growth rate, business networks and proximity to the Sydney and Brisbane markets provide the perfect opportunity for business.

> What prompted you to become part of the Customer Care Program?

I deal with a diverse range of clientele with different migration needs, from different countries and cultures and speaking various languages. In my work, I also communicate regularly with a variety of private and government bodies. I understand that providing good customer service leads to good working relationships which results in the provision of an efficient service.

There is a great deal of competition out there and customers will seek the whole package. My business relies to a large extent on word of mouth referrals. Excellent customer service is therefore crucial to the continuing success of my business. The Customer Care Program assists in ensuring my processes and methods for customer service provision are of a high standard.

> Benefits of being an accredited Customer Care Program member?

The program provides me with opportunities

to meet with and learn from others. I can pick up useful ideas and tried and true tips from other Customer Care participants. The speakers at our 'Meet and Mingle' nights allow me to learn new and innovative ways to improve quality customer service and therefore cultivate a healthy and sustainable business environment. The networking also allows me to promote my business to members and access peer support.

> Besides attitude, what advice would you give in order to excel in Customer Care?

We have been given two ears and one mouth so I always try and use them in this proportion. I believe good customer care involves:

- Being courteous
- Being responsive – react quickly!
- Keeping promises and meeting timeframes
- Being careful not to promise what can't be done
- Informing clients immediately of delays or unexpected problems
- Being honest and open
- Listening carefully, anticipating needs - check your understanding with clients
- Treating each client as an individual and
- Evaluating customer service regularly.
- Remember that without customers we don't have a business. It's that simple.

> What is it that makes your business successful?

Migrate Now's mission statement, 'Providing a professional yet friendly service with accurate, up to date and easy to understand immigration advice and assistance' portrays what the business attempts to provide on a daily basis.

Although I pride myself on the quality and precision of my work, my focus is equally on customer satisfaction. I make the Immigration process easy for my customers despite the complexity that comes with Australian Immigration Law. As much as I can, I alleviate clients of the worry and stress of what can be a difficult and frustrating process.

I prepare advice that is clear, succinct and easy to understand. My applications are complete, which assists in the processing of their case. At the same time being efficient, responsive, honest, reliable and approachable are integral in making my service successful.

> How do you build customer loyalty, trust and integrity?

I deal every day with a diverse range of clientele. This involves a balanced understanding of background, life experiences and cultures, together with an objective assessment of facts. I need to be empathic, understanding and provide a non-judgmental environment.

I go out of my way to make the client feel valued and cared for. It is not unusual for me to offer to visit my client if it is difficult for them to get away from a busy work environment or for me to arrange travel for clients coming to see me from out of town, especially if they are new to Australia. A cuppa is always available on arrival at my office.

I am also a big believer in acknowledging the assistance clients give me in preparing their case and saying 'thank you' for giving me the opportunity to assist them. In my service, clients must be at the forefront of good customer service. They are my business and I believe that my responsiveness to their needs has been integral in achieving loyalty and trust.

I think integrity is a value you have and you build trust and loyalty through demonstrating integrity and providing honest and relevant advice and services.

> How do you find the service standards in Port Macquarie Hastings compared with the rest of NSW?

I think there is always room for improvement. Businesses in Port are lucky to have access to wonderful business networking opportunities and support services. To name just a few, I have attended many such opportunities hosted by the Hastings Business Enterprise Centre, Port Macquarie Chamber of Commerce and the Hastings Business Women's Network as well as accessing opportunities provided by the Economic Development Team at Council.

We can always strive to continue increasing quality of customer services and Port Macquarie can be proud to set a good example in NSW.

> Do you attend the Customer Care Mix & Mingle (M & M) Networking functions regularly? What are the benefits?

I attend as often as my work and family commitment allows. Networking is a wonderful opportunity to learn from each other and to provide peer support. The information is relevant and helpful.

Attending regularly ensures we don't forget how important our customers are. M & M functions help us to evaluate our current service and promote high-quality customer service! As a sole trader the social side is also an additional benefit for me.

> Did you enter the 2008 Customer Care Service Excellence Awards?

No I didn't, but I certainly would like to enter this year. I believe that nominations are about to be requested under the Customer Care Program so local business should look out for, and be

involved, in the upcoming opportunity!

> What would you say to someone who was contemplating having his or her business accredited as a member of the Customer Care Program?

It is a great program and there are always new things to learn no matter how long you have been in business. The Customer Care Program highlights crucial elements of customer service, particularly the fact that inadequate customer service may result in business losing clients and developing an image detrimental to its success.

It promotes that business must care and nurture its provision of customer service to encourage trust and loyalty and increase the likelihood of continuing referrals. I'd say - Go for it! It's certainly worked for me!

> Thank you for your time.



The Customer Care Program is about raising and maintaining a high level of service and creating an LGA synonymous with a sought after destination in service excellence.

> Is your business striving for excellence in customer service?

Does it operate in an ethical manner and recognise that reliability and consistency in the performance of products and services is the most important element in the relationship of a business with its customers?

Then join 202 other certified CCP outlets and enjoy the following benefits:

- The right to display the CCP Decal, Certificate and promotional material for one year
- Recognition as an organisation committed to meeting set standards of quality customer service
- Marketing and promotion of your business, by Council and free of charge, as a member of the Program
- The establishment of clear standards of performance for your staff
- Opportunity to undertake continuous quality improvement and training
- Preferential support from customers as the reputation of the program is established
- Invitations to networking and learning evenings.

The opportunity to take part in the Annual Customer Care Service Excellence Awards.

We're on the Web at www.pmhc.nsw.gov.au/customer-care
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