Aligning Customer Expectations with Delivery Course: Commitments, Gaps and Difficult Requests

14 – 18 December 2026
Cape town

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Ref: 910_41431 **Date:** 14 – 18 December 2026 **Location:** Cape town **Fees:** 4800 GBP

Programme Summary

Aligning customer expectations with delivery is the subject of this one-week training course for service, sales and customer experience managers, taught at managerial level and ending in a customer commitment framework. Customers judge an organisation against what they were led to expect, and gaps open when sales and service promise different things. The programme moves from expectation theory to gap diagnosis, commitment design, difficult requests and a final application. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this programme on customer expectations to mixed-organisation cohorts.

The Business Case

Customer dissatisfaction often starts before service is delivered, when a promise is made that operations cannot keep. Leaders who can see what customers expect, set honest commitments and handle requests that exceed them reduce avoidable complaints and protect relationships. The programme works on the measures below.

- Complaint Volume: Falls when commitments are written clearly and checked against capacity before they are made.
- Customer Retention: Improves when gaps between promise and delivery are found early and closed.
- Service Cost: Reduces when repeat chasing and avoidable rework are removed.

Principles and Evidence Base

- SERVQUAL gap model: A framework by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry comparing expectation with perception, applied in Sessions 1 and 2 to locate a service gap.
- Kano model: A classification of basic, performance and delight needs, applied in Session 1 to separate what customers assume from what they value.
- ISO 10002: The international guideline on complaints handling, applied in Sessions 3 and 4 to link unmet expectations to a response route.
- ISO 10004: The international guideline on monitoring customer satisfaction, applied in Sessions 2 and 5 to track whether expectations are being met.

Intended Participants

- Customer experience managers who own the standard promised across channels.
- Sales and account managers who make commitments to customers before delivery begins.
- Service operations managers who must keep the commitments that others have made.
- Heads of customer service who handle escalations from customers expecting more than was agreed.

Typical settings include banking, telecommunications, healthcare services, logistics and public service delivery.

Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to classify customer needs as basic, performance or delight needs.
2. Participants will be able to diagnose the point at which a gap between expectation and delivery opens.
3. Participants will be able to construct service commitments that operations can meet and customers can verify.
4. Participants will be able to evaluate a difficult request against capacity, precedent and relationship value.
5. Participants will be able to prioritise expectation gaps by customer impact and cost to close.
6. Participants will be able to justify a customer commitment framework to a leadership team.

Programme Structure

Day 1: How Customer Expectations Form

What shapes the expectations customers bring to a service before it begins?

- Expectation Sources Map
- Kano Need Classification Sheet
- Prior Experience and Peer Signals
- Sales and Marketing Promise Inventory
- Adequate and Desired Service Levels

Day 2: Diagnosing Expectation Gaps

Where does the distance between what was expected and what was received begin?

- SERVQUAL Gap Model Walkthrough
- Customer Perception Evidence Grid
- Promise Versus Delivery Trace
- Satisfaction Monitoring Under ISO 10004
- Gap Ranking by Impact and Cost

Day 3: Designing Commitments Customers Can Trust

How are commitments written so that they are honest, measurable and deliverable?

- Service Level Agreement Drafting Frame
- Capacity Check Before Commitment
- Plain-Language Commitment Statements
- Progress Update and Warning Rules
- Handover Notes Between Sales and Service

Day 4: Handling Difficult Requests and Broken Expectations

What should be said and done when a customer asks for more than was agreed?

- Request Triage Decision Tree
- Saying No With an Alternative Script
- Escalation Route Design
- Recovery Response Under ISO 10002
- Precedent and Exception Log

Day 5: Customer Commitment Framework for One Service

Do the findings join into a framework that a leadership team can approve?

- Applying the Session 1 Promise Inventory
- Testing the Session 2 Gap Ranking
- Checking the Session 3 Commitment Statements
- Reviewing the Session 4 Request Tree
- Completing the Customer Commitment Framework

Methodology

The programme is a structured exercise built on prepared service cases from banking, telecommunications and healthcare services. Participants trace promises, rank gaps, draft commitments and respond to difficult requests, then defend their framework to peers acting as a leadership panel.

- Suggested activity: Tracing one broken promise from sales call to complaint.
- Suggested activity: Rewriting a vague service commitment in plain language.
- Suggested activity: Role-playing a request that exceeds the agreed scope.

Capstone Output

Each participant completes a customer commitment framework for one service. It holds an expectation map, a ranked gap list, commitment statements, a request decision tree and a monitoring routine. At work it is presented to the leadership team for approval and sets the rule for what is promised.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is a customer expectations course suitable for managers who do not work in customer service?

Yes. This customer expectations course is taught at managerial level through prepared cases and templates. You need responsibility for promises, delivery or customer relationships, but no specialist background.

Which models does the customer expectations course rest on?

The customer expectations course rests on the SERVQUAL gap model and the Kano model for diagnosis, with ISO 10002 and ISO 10004 guiding complaints handling and satisfaction monitoring.

How is the framework from a customer expectations course used at work?

You take the customer commitment framework to your leadership team, use its commitment statements in sales and service conversations, and keep its request tree as the rule for difficult requests.

How does a customer expectations course differ from a course on complaint handling?

A customer expectations course concentrates on what is promised and how gaps open before a complaint exists, while a complaint handling course concentrates on resolving a dispute after it has been raised.