

MYcustomer guides

The contact centre guide

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Foreword



**Richard Mill, Managing Director
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3 Steps to using this Guide.

1. Clear out a special space on your bookshelf for this guide, you are going to come back to it time and time again.
2. Make sure you have a pencil and highlighter to hand as you read, so scribble-on, highlight and annotate as you go – these will be your action points for change.
3. Share with your colleagues – unless you ‘own’ the contact centre the only way to implement change and good practice is if others buy into the same ideas.

This guide brilliantly brings to life the bedrock fundamentals of running a contact centre married with the latest customer expectations, and the advances in technology which provide enablement.

Or to bring it back to basics, if we genuinely believe the old adage that ‘the customer is king’ and our goal is ‘customer loyalty’ then we constantly need to be upping our game in the Contact Centre because this is the heart and soul of customer experience.

In addition to recognising the value of the customer, it's been good to see the growing appreciation of good call centre staff and the value they represent. Long gone (and rightly so) are the days of, 'the lower the agent cost the better', 'quality-of-experience' is what it's all about for the successful contact centre, and applications that promote this ethos must be embraced by all.

So bring on 'the transformational contact centre', delve into the hidden depths of 'speech analytics', allow yourself to be authenticated by 'voice biometrics', round it off with a high score of 'gamification' and don't forget to give your 'net promoter score'.

Enjoy this guide and make it work for you.

Happy reading.

Chapter 9

How to build a staff training programme

Wendy Fraser, Hemsley Fraser

Customers who interact with contact centres have many stories to tell – and most of them are not good! At the same time, organisations are regularly investing in the latest programme of training for their contact centre employees. So, where is the disconnect?

People development in the contact centre environment is at an interesting crossroads. There is a recognition that the traditional approach of focusing on processes, with heavily-scripted conversations, is not creating a rewarding or differentiated customer experience. So, the prize for an organisation that can create a reliable and consistent culture, which translates into behaviours with customers, is considerable. The way in which people are developed, and how they are treated as learners, is at the heart of transforming the customer experience.

Since customer contact centres were first established in the 1990s, staff ‘training’ has followed a familiar pattern. At the heart of almost every contact centre training intervention, you’ll find a focus on processes, generic tips and scripted customer interactions. This creates two particular problems. Firstly, despite the prescriptive nature of the training, it breeds inconsistency for the customer because individuals apply the formula without having the freedom to

connect it to the customer's circumstances. Secondly, it often leads to stilted customer conversations which lack any emotional or personal connection. In simple terms, this approach to 'training' is at odds with the kind of interactions that most customers value – so no wonder repeated investment in the latest customer service training programme either fails to make the change or, at best, leads to short term improvements.

“In simple terms, this approach to ‘training’ is at odds with the kind of interactions that most customers value”

Contact centres have their specific challenges

With the repetitive nature of queries and a constant exposure to customers, working in a contact centre brings its own specific challenges. The traditional approach to contact centre training is failing to benefit staff, the employer or the customer because it does not equip people to have the kind of interactions that customers really want and find rewarding. At the same time, there are regulatory requirements for elements of scripted conversations that have to be covered, so there has to be an element of 'freedom within a framework'.

The challenge for every contact centre is to provide a service and an experience that is consistently positive for customers. The key to this is to define how

you want staff to ‘think and behave’ when they are interacting with customers. This is important because, when a staff member interacts with customers, the nuances of his/her behaviour can make the biggest possible difference. Contact centre training should therefore focus on embedding the beliefs and attitudes towards customers, which will translate into ‘real’ behaviours in the moment.

Addressing the behaviour of staff can offer a competitive advantage. When there is little difference between competing products and services, the level of customer service provided can be a major source of differentiation. It can also impact on bottom line business results by creating customer loyalty and advocacy.

Unquestionably, contact centres have a real opportunity to create a win-win benefit for themselves and their customers through the way they develop their staff.

“A key starting point is the mindset that every customer matters, in every interaction, every day.”

What attitudes and behaviours?

A key starting point is the mindset that every customer matters, in every interaction, every day. Agents also need a sense of ownership that they are with the customer on the journey, however long or short, to reach a good outcome. This mindset comes from

being deeply sensitised to what it feels like to be a customer – having a real sense of what the customer is experiencing and knowing that, at this point, they represent their entire organisation.

The key behaviours, which follow from this mindset, include empathy and emotional engagement, so that staff can establish trust and create a genuine personal connection with each and every customer.

Giving people permission to behave in a certain way with customers and to adapt their behaviour to fit the needs of each customer is the final step of freeing people from the scripted conversation. If we want our customers to trust us, we need, in turn, to trust our employees.

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Investing in learning that equips people with the skills and the confidence to behave in the desired way with customers can not only improve customer satisfaction, it can also enrich the employee experience. Showing employees that you value them, and how important they are to customers, can enhance their level of engagement and reduce staff turnover.

Encouraging the desired behaviour

To instil the key behaviours that will make a real difference when dealing with customers, you need

to create a learning experience that is creative, imaginative and compelling. It needs to mirror the kind of experience that you want to deliver to your customers. The aim should be to make staff excited and enthusiastic about what they can do for their customers.

Running a formal learning intervention in a contact centre is never easy because you are always constrained by the pattern and demands of contact centre work. A successful approach is to create a modular learning programme that challenges and explores attitudes and beliefs and then creates the link to key behaviours. The specific context of the contact centre is to design for immediate application.

What makes for a successful learning programme?

- **Bring in the voice of the customer into the centre of the learning:** This can be achieved through techniques such as live vignettes or vox pop comments from real customers. These can be used to create powerful connections to the real world of customers and to begin the awareness of just how much difference an individual in a contact centre can make. In some circumstances, the difference may even be life changing. By starting with this level of emotional challenge (we have, at times, seen people moved to tears by real customer situations), it creates an open mind to changing behaviours. Indeed, people will even begin to define those behaviours for themselves.

- Show how the key behaviours can make a difference: This is about making the practical connection through helping staff to understand ‘what good looks like’ from a customer perspective. At the same time, it is important to making things manageable by focusing on the many small things, which cumulatively, make a huge difference for customers.
- Design specific activities into the learning which help people to understand what it feels like to be a customer. For example, a ‘service hunt’ where people reflect on how they were treated in a number of contexts in the preceding week is a good way to raise awareness of how they would like to be treated – and indeed, what were the small things that were either brilliant or awful. Once people are really sensitised to how they would like to be treated, it becomes a powerful guiding framework for them when dealing with their own customers.
- Pay attention to tone: For many customers, the contact centre is not their only interaction with the organisation. The best contact development will integrate with the tone of all other customer communications (including written, through the web, advertising and PR). In general, there is a move away from corporate-speak to a more friendly and personal tone. In some cases, the tone used with customers has even shifted to quirky and humorous but, whatever tone of voice, make it sound human and real.

- **Share stories of excellence and examples of good practice:** When an organisation tells its own stories about great customer service, it is a sign that the changes are becoming embedded and part of ‘the way we do business round here’.
- **Support team leaders and managers:** The team leader’s role is central to creating and sustaining behavioural change. Through role modelling, recognising good behaviour and coaching, team leaders make the biggest, fastest and longer-term difference. Catching people doing things right turns learning into sustained behaviours and helps to create a customer-centric culture. Ensure that the learning interventions support team leaders and set them up for success.
- **Integrate a measurement strategy at the beginning of the design process:** Traditional efficiency measures (call duration and call volumes) are being replaced in some organisations by measures that focus on the quality of the customer interaction, call resolution and in more developed measurement strategies, links to customer retention and advocacy. The most integrated measurement links employee measures (turnover, sickness, morale, recommendations to new recruits) to leader engagement (there should be a direct link between engagement scores, quality and productivity). These are the leading indicators of a customer experience, which shows high scores for loyalty and advocacy. The most effective learning designs tap into these linkages at the beginning of the process, so the ability to communicate results is being considered as an integral part of the intervention and a powerful mechanism for supporting long term change.

The real message here is to inspire customer teams to understand that, at the moment when they interact with the customer, their behaviour can make a huge difference. This is particularly true if the customer is making an important decision or facing a personal, possibly life changing challenge, where they are very dependent on the support they receive. Learning interventions can make the same difference for employees in contact centres as they, themselves, can make for their customers. Just think of the stories we could have to tell!

*Wendy Brooks is a director of **Hemsley Fraser**, the learning & development specialist. Her white paper 'The call centre customer experience: Behaviours that make the difference' is available free on Hemsley Fraser's website: www.hemsleyfraser.co.uk. She can be contacted via wendy.brooks@hemsleyfraser.co.uk*

About Business Systems UK Ltd



Business Systems is the UK's largest independent provider of call recording and workforce optimisation technologies including quality monitoring, speech analytics, real time guidance and workforce management solutions. With over 25 years' experience, our clients benefit from our broad knowledge and expertise across multiple technologies and platforms and our understanding of the unique dynamics and drivers of the contact centre market.

With an established history of service excellence, Business Systems has one of the largest and most experienced engineering resource bases offering expert guidance and support across single and multi-site contact centre requirements. Working with customers to offer unbiased advice on 'best fit' solutions from industry leading manufacturers, our broad range of expertise covers: training, consultancy, systems design, implementation and ongoing service delivery and support.

Our solutions today range from on-premise equipment to cloud based services for home worker and mobile environments.

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