



Contact Center Best Practices: Using Training to Achieve Enterprise Goals

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Using Training to Achieve Enterprise Goals

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I. Training is Essential for Business Transformation

Whether your contact center is committed to improving productivity, enhancing the customer experience, converting from a cost center to a sales-oriented profit center, or introducing a work-at-home program, one of the most important change management tools is training. Unfortunately, this crucial step is too frequently skipped when implementing a new system, or cut out of the schedule when time frames are tight, despite the proven cost of this omission.

Training – which can be delivered in the form of stand-up training, coaching (see [Contact Center Coaching Best Practices: Outstanding Agents Strengthen Your Brand](#)), or eLearning – is necessary to teach agents how to apply a new procedure/policy or navigate a new system, and to change their mindset and departmental culture. Contact center agents, like most people, are happy to try something new, if they are given a reason and taught how to do it. This paper presents proven techniques, best practices and a case study that show managers how to effectively integrate training into the overall framework of projects. It reflects the benefits and mission-critical nature of training in helping contact center leaders achieve their strategic objectives.

II. Scenario 1: The Role of Training in Converting Service Agents into Highly Effective Sales Advocates

Contact centers are looking to convert their cost-oriented organizations to revenue-generating profit centers. This concept has been around for over 12 years, but has not been as widely accepted as might be expected, given its potential to improve the corporate bottom line. The value proposition is simple – customer service, technical support, and field service and dispatch staff have a better understanding of their callers than most other departments within their organizations, sometimes even more than sales representatives. Agents who know how to “spin” this information to sell can extend the customer relationship, earn incremental revenue and enhance their brand at a lower cost than an outbound sale.

DMG has worked with several service and support organizations to assist them with this cost-to-profit conversion process. While a number of these projects have involved system enhancements and implementations, the primary success factors have been motivation, training and recognition. If the agents are not “on board” with the concept and unwilling or unprepared to up-sell or cross-sell, the transformation of service to sales is not going to succeed. Training is an ongoing education process that should be used to alleviate agent concerns and educate

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them in the necessary techniques. The companies that make it happen ensure that their staff has the skills, tools and “know-how” to identify and close a sales opportunity.

Motivate Agents with Compensation

The first step in converting service/support organizations into revenue generators is to motivate agents to extend beyond their comfort zone. Many service/support agents have an inherent fear of sales that the company must help them overcome.

Critical Success Factor Number 1: Introduce a compensation program that rewards agents for their extra effort. (The commission should be tied directly to each sale and be significant enough to motivate service agents to take on the sales challenge.)

Alleviate the Fear of Selling with Training

The proven technique for persuading agents to try up-selling/cross-selling is to show them through training that when selling is done right, it is one of the best and most rewarding forms of service. The training should be experiential and customized for the organization. It is also important to keep it within the staff's comfort zone. Use communications training to teach agents to identify and close sales opportunities. The initial training should make extensive use of role playing and incorporate practical examples to make the scenario as real as possible for the participants. Agents who “play” the customer/client will learn as much as the representatives who act as the service agent. The purpose of the initial training is to help agents overcome their fear of selling and to show them that it can be fun and rewarding, both for them and their customers. Ongoing training, delivered on a continuous basis, should build on the foundation by reinforcing proven sales techniques and giving agents tips to enhance their skills and sales closure rates. It's also very helpful to incorporate actual winning calls into best-practice coaching sessions.

Critical Success Factor Number 2: Use training and coaching to alleviate fear of selling, and instruct agents how to use their service skills to become leading sales agents.

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Recognize Outstanding Performance

Money is nice but recognition is essential; combine the two and agents will see and appreciate the value and benefits of changing their ways. (Most departments have a few people who will refuse to take on sales. If they are outstanding at customer service, try to find a way to keep them, as it's hard to find highly skilled people.) Management should modify their balanced scorecards, quality assurance guidelines, policies, procedures and key performance indicators to ensure that they remain relevant as service organizations take on sales responsibilities. Agents should be rewarded for providing an outstanding service experience to all customers, as they still need to earn the right to extend a relationship. But now they also need to be recognized for their ability to close sales.

Critical Success Factor Number 3: Recognize outstanding service and sales performance.

There are many other steps to building an effective service to sales program, but these three are critical path, and will help you to rapidly realize the best results.

III. Scenario 2: Training is Essential for Helping Agents Cost Effectively Deliver an Outstanding Customer Experience

Service and support from telecom and mobile providers reached an almost epically poor level during the 2007/2008 time frame, both inside and outside of North America. Wireless vendors had spent years investing resources in building out their infrastructure and customer acquisition, while neglecting customer service and retention. The results were striking, as was reflected in J.D. Power and other industry customer service satisfaction studies; there was an unprecedented level of dissatisfaction and distrust among customers.

Case Study

The Problem: One cell phone provider with more than 50 million customers realized that they needed to make major changes to improve customer loyalty and advocacy. They wanted to make cost-effective and lasting investments to

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help them reduce the need for people to call their care organization, and to improve service quality and efficiency when they called.

The Resolution: In order to reduce the underlying reasons for customer inquiries and complaints, this wireless provider made investments in the following areas:

- Network and devices
- Pricing and billing policies
- Service and channels
- Self-service applications

At the same time, this mobile provider invested in their contact center and service organization. They made investments to:

- Align pay with quality and service
- Identify and fix operational and systems issues
- Reward quality and consistency in providing an outstanding customer experience

Their proven critical success factors were investments in a series of performance management-oriented tools that enabled them to rapidly capture, identify and take action to resolve service and training issues. This company went back to “basics” and invested in business and agent-related scorecards and dashboards; training, coaching and eLearning; and agent segmentation capabilities. These investments contributed to measureable improvements in service quality while reducing their servicing cost structure.

For example, quantified benefits from delivering eLearning automatically during periods of low call volume included:

- Ability to deliver more training to a site in 5 days than was previously delivered in 1 month on a manually scheduled basis
- 71.7% of agents took the courses, as compared to 59.4% when scheduled manually

The Benefits: The company dramatically altered its view of its customer care organization and empowered them with the tools to do their job. The results included:

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- Being ranked #1 in business customer satisfaction for both wireless data and voice in well-known studies
- 9 straight months of improvements in customer care satisfaction and first call resolution rates
- Well-documented improvements in dropped calls

These industry-recognized improvements were accompanied by 9 straight months of reduction in customer care operating expenses. The results reflect the value and benefits of concentrating on agent-related performance metrics and activities. Since agents typically represent 60% to 80% of the costs for contact centers, the greatest returns are realized by investing in their success.

IV. Scenario 3: Training is the Missing Link in Building Successful At-Home Agent Programs

Work-at-home (WAH) agent programs have attracted the attention of many contact center managers in the United States in the last two years, although this interest has not been accompanied by substantial investment dollars. The three primary drivers of WAH programs are:

- Contact center cost reduction
- Disaster recovery/contingency planning
- Better quality/skilled agents

Managers have high expectations for WAH programs, and are looking for cost-effective tools to help them realize their goals. Two of the most challenging and interrelated aspects of WAH programs are management and training. It's hard to manage people you cannot see, and very challenging to instruct trainees remotely. To address the training issue, many companies hire WAH staff located within 100 miles of their site, but this approach offsets some of the benefits of these programs.

eLearning is the best method for dealing with WAH agent training, and it also helps with the related management challenge, as it's a way to keep in constant touch with remote agents. Keep in mind that both managers and WAH agents have to be trained. New agents have to become familiar with all of the department's content, systems and policies/procedures. Agents moving to WAH positions have to adapt to processes for the remote environment, and managers have to learn new techniques to oversee WAH staff.

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Contact centers need eLearning tools that allow them to rapidly create and issue training programs to agents, regardless of where they are located. These tools should make it easy for an on-site (or remote) trainer to produce a new-hire training program, communications training, and ongoing content/system updates that are typically delivered in on-site team meetings. Of course, WAH agents should be part of a team and participate via conference call, webcast or video in their team meetings.

A side benefit of training is that it plays an important role in keeping agents connected and feeling part of an organization. Systems that can deliver the right content at the right time are likely to be instrumental in the future of work-at-home agent programs.

V. Final Thoughts

The three business scenarios reviewed in this paper show the importance and benefits of concentrating on agent performance-related issues when investing in business transformation. Whether a center is transforming from a service organization to a revenue generator, needs to improve the customer experience (and market perception) while reducing operating expenses, wants to build a work-at-home agent program, or undertakes any other strategic initiative, the most important ingredient is a well-trained agent. When managed effectively, treated with respect and supported by training and the right tools, agents will be well prepared to do everything in their power to help the organization succeed.

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About Knowlagent

Knowlagent is the only talent management software solution specifically developed to meet the unique training, coaching, and hiring needs of the 10 million call center agents around the world. By automating traditional call center management processes, Knowlagent's solutions for training, coaching and hiring enable clients to hire the right agents and make them better by pushing training and communications when call volumes are low. Knowlagent's solutions are on-demand, easy to use and require no capital expenditures. Over 200,000 agents and managers around the world use Knowlagent's talent management software solutions every day. For more information, call 888-566-9457 or visit us online at www.knowlagent.com.

About DMG Consulting

DMG Consulting is the leading provider of contact center and analytics research, market analysis and consulting services. DMG's mission is to help end users build world-class, differentiated contact centers and assist vendors in developing high-value solutions for the market. DMG devotes more than 10,000 hours annually to researching various segments of the contact center market, including vendors, solutions, technologies, best practices, and the benefits and ROI for end users. DMG is an independent firm that provides information and consulting services to contact center management, the financial and investment community, and vendors in the market.

More information about DMG Consulting can be found at www.dmgconsult.com.