

## Title:

The 5 W's of World Class Customer Service Training

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## Summary:

The preamble to the United States Constitution begins, 'we, the people.' I feel strongly that we, the people, are what make the difference in life, both personally and professionally.

## Keywords:

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## Article Body:

The preamble to the United States Constitution begins, 'we, the people.' I feel strongly that we, the people, are what make the difference in life, both personally and professionally.

The interaction anyone has at any level with your employees, including you, gives a customer-- whether current, potential, internal or external--an opportunity to make a judgment about you, your company, all companies like yours. I'm not just talking about call centers here. All technical support or help desk personnel are included as well. As a matter of fact, anyone who is in the customer service business period.

With continued focus on customer satisfaction, customer retention, and lifetime value of the customer, it is no surprise that contact center operations continue to increase in importance as the primary hub of a customer's experience. For the customer, the person on the other end of the phone is the company. The contact center is still the most common way that customers get in touch with businesses. In fact, Gartner reports 92% of all contact is through the center. And it's been reported that 70% to 90% of what happens with customers is driven by human nature, having nothing to do with technology. State of the art technology is a necessity today, but it is meant to enable human endeavors, not to disable them.

I often talk about taking customer service and 'kicking it up a notch.' In the food industry, the word 'lagniappe' is often used. Its definition is "a small present given to a customer with a purchase. For example, when you go to the bakery and buy a dozen donuts or bagels, you oftentimes get a 'free' one or a baker's dozen. That's what customer service should be about--giving the

customer more than they expected! Let's bring lagniappe into the contact center industry.

If we're going to speak about world class customer service, let's have a working definition it so we're all on the same page. Customer service is those activities provided by a company's employees that enhance the ability of a customer to realize the full potential value of a product or service before and after the sale is made, thereby leading to satisfaction and repurchase.

Let's look at the first W which is Why?

The state of customer service today is not good, be it over the phone or self service. Because 92% of people feel their call experience is important in shaping the image of a company, this reinforces the importance of centers in branding the image of their companies.

In a Mobius Management Systems Survey, here's what happened because of poor customer service:

- 60% cancelled accounts with banks
- 36% changed insurance providers
- 40% changed telephone companies
- 35% changed credit card providers
- 375 changed Internet service providers

Are you one of these statistics? I certainly am.

In a study done by Purdue University and BenchmarkPortal.com, in answer to (1) how did agents satisfy your needs and handle the call, and (2) based on any negative experience, would you stop using this company in the future? the findings reveal a strong correlation between the participant's age and the tendency to stop using the company after a bad experience.

What does this mean? Younger participants were less tolerant and more likely to move to the competition. People over 65 were found to be more demanding than those in middle age.

What can you do? Give younger callers a 'wow' experience--maintain their loyalty. People over 36 probably have more of an 'emotional bank account' with the company they are dealing with--maybe had some good experience and therefore are more willing to 'forgive.'

In a recent study (CRM Magazine/PeopleSoft Web Seminar on How Usability Helps to

Drive a Profitable Contact Center), the number of applications required for agents to access customer inquiries were:

3.7%	just 1
81.5%	2 - 5
7.4%	5 - 10
7.4%	more than 10

As you can see, the majority of applications are 2 - 5. The goal, of course, is to link every point of contact to one central location for a customer-centric, synchronized approach satisfying customer experiences with every interaction.

Strategies for success for world class service should include:

Respond promptly

Handle requests through the customers' choice of medium

Be brief and clear

Reduce back and forth communications (especially in writing, i.e., email, kick it up to a phone call if it goes beyond two)

Personalized service

Delight the customer

What do we mean by delighting the customer?

Inform and educate them

Establish your expertise and professionalism

Offer options

Diffuse upset, anger, when and if necessary

Escalate, if required

Take Ownership of the call

Remember we're still on the first W - the Why. Today's pressures on agents are different than in the past. They are asked to handle more customer, more volume, more complex and/or complicated calls. After all if we could handle our issues with self service, we probably would not call. But if we tried self service and it didn't work, now we're upset and it's an escalated call from the get go.

They're asked to provide more information, do it faster and be available and accessible. But they are to lower costs, generate revenue, incorporate new technologies, ensure closure and commitment, deliver 'great' service and when? Yesterday, of course.

As a matter of fact the CDC (Center for Disease Control) has said that the

causes of death for people under 65 are:

- 21% - environment - war, accidents, crimes
- 9% - health care system - doctors, hospitals, medications
- 17% - human biology - not because of lifestyle
- 53% - because of the way people choose to live their lives!!!

This is the good news and the bad news. It's bad news because it's more than half. However, the good news is that this is something we can do something about, it's about choice.

The #2 W is Who should be trained?

We suggest front line agents/representatives, supervisors, team lads, managers, assistant managers, internal customers and other departments - anyone who is a touch point so that they can learn to speak the same language, and more importantly, not be in an adversarial position, but rather, together they are serving the external customer or end user.

The #3 W is Where should the training take place? Offsite vs onsite, and there are advantages and disadvantages for both.

Certainly it is most cost effective to have training on site. However, distractions are rampant as is the participant's availability to a person or problem.

Offsite is more costly. However, there are no distractions and the participants are unavailable to other departments, their managers, or any issues. I believe there is psychic value in taking people away from their work stations and off site to acknowledge the touch jobs they have.

The #4 W is What should be included in any training? We believe the following modules provide a robust, powerful, and succinct training curriculum:

- |                |                                |          |                     |
|----------------|--------------------------------|----------|---------------------|
| &#61558;       | Quality Customer Service       | &#61558; | Rapport Building    |
| &#61558;       | Customer Expectations          |          |                     |
| &#61558;       | Perception Shifting            | &#61558; | Conflict Resolution |
| &#61558;       | Language Skills                |          |                     |
| &#61558;       | Anger Management               | &#61558; | E-Mail Protocol     |
| &#61558;       | Stress Reduction               | &#61558; | Empathetic          |
| Responsiveness |                                |          |                     |
| &#61558;       | Change Management              |          |                     |
| &#61558;       | Communication/Listening Skills | &#61558; | Interaction/Role    |
| Play           |                                |          |                     |

&#61558;            Service with a Smile

Further suggested is university certification to up the ante. The more professionally you treat your employees, the more professionally they will treat your customers.

The #5 W is When. We say for new hires, monthly, ongoingly, consistently, whenever change occurs, when stressors increase, and as needed.

We further suggest that each employee get a minimum of 24 hours per year of ongoing training, spread out over time for the most absorption. We divide our trainings into two four hour sessions per day and deliver 6 days per employee. Therefore, 30 people can participate in the training per day. If there has been no ongoing training, we do four days once a month for four months and then a session three months later, and then another three months later. In this manner, training is customized, in real time, and can address whatever challenges are presented when they occur.