



Customer Service Excellence? What's (really) holding you back?

What can you do when despite all the training you can throw at it, all the knowledge management you can muster and all the away-days, intranet sites and e-Learning investments you've made, your customer service staff still makes errors in the way they deal with customer queries or complaints?

Operating with sophisticated products, services and processes, in a regulated and highly competitive environment is a constant challenge for any organisation tasked with delivering consistently excellent customer service. Couple that with pressure coming in the form of consumer comparison sites and league tables, a media all too keen to find and expose any possible chink in your armour and an ever vigilant and increasingly litigious regulator; it's easy to understand why so many well-known and high profile organisations are placing more emphasis on getting the basics right.

The problem is that the solution isn't immediately obvious. After all, most organisations of stature already have comprehensive Learning and Development tools and processes, in house training teams and their own Knowledge Management Facility too.





So what is it specifically that's not working and what do you need to do to fix it?

In our experience, the first symptoms the business experience may well appear as a lower than expected score on Customer Satisfaction Surveys, increased Call Backs to the Contact Centre, increased Customer Complaints or a longer than average time to resolve a customer query.

This is often despite satisfactory or even good results on tests, training courses and questionnaires and despite there already being comprehensive learning and support materials available via an internal Knowledge Management system.

The standard response of more training and one to one coaching is unlikely to yield any real improvement either and this is often the cause of significant frustration for the business and indeed the Knowledge and Learning and Development professionals too.

So what's the root cause?

1. Your people don't truly understand what you've "told" them.

Are you measuring the RIGHT thing?

Typically one root cause is that giving people knowledge **does not mean** that they truly understand how, when and why they should use it. After all, the typical multiple choice questionnaire handed out at the end of a training course, can only really measure the ability **to select the right answer from a list of possible answers more often than not**. It does not and cannot identify if a person *truly understands* in what specific circumstance they should apply their new knowledge. It does not and cannot allow for "grey" areas where there *is room for doubt or ambiguity* and therefore it cannot truly reflect *the typical environment, pressures and dialogues* within which we expect people to use the knowledge we have imparted. The typical response is to provide *more training*.

2. Your People are 100% confident they *do know* and *they do understand* – when in fact they actually *don't*.

Confident incompetence presents the greatest risk.

This root cause is insidious and is often the most damaging simply because it's very hard to uncover. It's further compounded by the fact that in the main most of your people will come to work believing they're doing a great job. They will believe wholeheartedly that the advice or response they've given to a customer query is the right one and they will be happy and confident that they've followed the correct company process and procedure along the way.

So, when you ask people to attend a training or refresher course on something they believe they already know and understand well, the evidence suggests that they approach the course with the wrong motivation; a desire and intent to simply "get through it and tick the boxes", rather than with a genuine interest or agenda for re-examining the subject and challenging their own understanding and experiences.



While they may well “pass the course” they’ve done so by rote, chance or knowing the questions or typical examples that are likely to arise in advance.

The net result is that “more training” often doesn’t equate to fewer errors, complaints or delays in issue resolution.

3. The tools and resources you provide are not used to best advantage

How can you get more value from your existing resources?

Most organisations make significant investment in Learning and Development Systems, tools, materials and expertise and many have made an even greater investment in organising, maintaining and syndicating industry and “Corporate Knowledge” via a central Knowledge Management System.

The professionals that plan, build and develop the tools and materials are of course expert in their field, they know how to build a logical hierarchy of information and how to present it in a highly structured format. However, it is often forgotten that the intended user is not an expert. They will approach the resources with a very specific question or need and can find it intimidating at best and impossible at worst to know where to start to find the answer they’re searching for quickly and easily. And so, they tend to use the tools and resources provided infrequently (if at all) and that further compounds their lack of familiarity.

The information provided via the Intranet or Knowledge Management solution may be excellent but if the people it’s designed to help, find it difficult, cumbersome, time consuming or intimidating to find, they simply won’t use it all.

Uncovering your root-causes

We suggest you start by looking *not* at what your people *should know* but rather identifying specifically what it is they *don’t understand*. So for example, to use a recent Retail Banking example, they may **know** it takes three days for a cheque to clear (that is what the training states and is correct) however the practical application of the **understanding**, is that if those three days fall over a weekend or bank holiday it may take five or six days. It is the *application* of the *understanding* that is key to providing accurate advice and therefore great customer service; and if you can measure *that* you can identify what the risk areas and root causes are for you.

Once you can see where the gaps in understanding are, you can design specific interventions and provide appropriate learning media (see root cause 3) and resources to address it.

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