
Call Center Call to Action

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With the fast pace of change in telecommunications and the ability of Call Center Representatives to touch millions of customers monthly, managers need to call their call center teams to action and help them to rapidly respond to changes in the marketplace.

Unfortunately, with the pace of mergers, and acquisitions, as well as product enhancements and introductions moving at light speed, customer service reps and call center teams are often the last to know how these changes will affect day-to-day interaction with their most important constituency...the customer!

Moreover, call center managers are regularly faced with the issue of how to motivate these reps in a high-turnover culture. All too often, incentive and motivation programs fail because they reward employees for reaching the finish line of a project goal, rather than rewarding them for the behaviors it took to get there fastest.

This situation is further exacerbated when call center employees react to times of change and begin to focus on systems, rather than customer satisfaction.

For example, are your call center reps ready to integrate Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) initiatives or answer questions about this expanding service technology? What if your company has recently merged and you have a mix of reps from company A and company B who do not share similar practices or product/service knowledge base?

Management needs to think ahead and prepare for changing market dynamics. Call centers can be more productive, profitable, and customer focused by implementing reward and recognition systems that reward for progressive learning based on market and customer needs. You start by benchmarking and identifying your own best practices.

At the onset of a program, managers need to work with their call center reps to benchmark or identify operational, technological or product/service changes that are having the greatest impact on customer satisfaction and/or customer purchases.

For example:

A large East Coast telecommunications company had merged and two years later merged again. The company, and the industry for that matter, had a history of single digit growth of 6-9 percent. In the late 1990's, the stock market demanded double-digit growth—so did this company's senior management—and 17 percent growth was its goal.

After the shock of the mergers and management's expectations, my company, Anderson Performance Improvement Company (APIC), and this telecom giant sat down to lay out a plan.

The company's objective was to increase sales by 17 percent while sustaining excellent customer service. The challenges they were facing included high turnover in call centers, staffing, and not enough time to train. Representatives' revenue per call range was 400+ percent. Finally, Team Leads were distracted from observations and coaching due to managing product contests and promotions.

Prior to APIC's involvement, the telecom giant conducted "consultative selling" training for all, but due to rescheduling and staffing requirements, many representatives in the call center received the new training over a two-year period. In addition, there was little to no recurrent training other than location directed.

Once APIC was involved and able to identify the best practices of Managers and Reps, Product Managers were teamed together to invest in a solution for product knowledge attainment with reporting that identified areas for additional training. A campaign was launched for all recurrent training by using high impact dimensional communications to create excitement about solutions for the customer. Representatives were able to test their knowledge at their convenience.

During the program, the management team received their direct reports' electronic product quiz performance results via email and was given award cards for those high performing reps. The awards were presented to the reps in weekly staff meetings. Call Center locations received a bonus when 75 percent of the location passed each product quiz. When managers observed reps using the new product knowledge, those reps were awarded scratch-off merchandise award cards.

There was a significant correlation between successful product quiz completion and the increase in product sales revenue. The methodology encouraged reps to learn and test, even if it was on their own time. In addition, senior reps were reminded of product benefits that they currently did not sell.

Revenue Per Incented Order (RPIO) was the revenue measure of success and was used to measure the financial benefit of the increased knowledge, coaching, and enhanced consultative selling. Prior to the incentive, the RPIO was \$265.40. After the incentive, the RPIO was \$357.70 — an increase of 135 percent! This client met its goal and more.

By rewarding these call center reps for their improvement along the way and the strides they made toward greater product knowledge, management kept their teams motivated and focused. In the end, everyone benefited from the program — especially the customers.

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