



Ask Affy

Need advice? Ask Affy!

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Dear Affy,

While contemplating New Year's resolutions for 2011, it occurred to me that setting professional resolutions is just as important as the personal ones. I'd love your perspective on what we in the industry could do differently.

--Julia

A

Great leadership question, Julia! This part of the year is definitely the time to shine a spotlight on the challenges for the coming year. My advice is to direct your focus on mastering the basics of delivering exceptional service.

Consistently delivering on your service promise is not an easy task but one that will separate you from your competitors. Below are small but effective 'quick wins' that will actively create change in your centre.

1. Start using customer-centric language.

Best-in-class organizations start by changing their internal language from being call-oriented to customer-oriented. On a typical day in many contact centres, one might hear call centre terms such as call volume, abandons and call flows.

As leaders, we can easily change our language by using statements such as "How many customers did we serve today?" instead of "What was our call volume." or "How many customers hung up?" instead of abandons. To our front line, we often speak about call handling and call flows focusing on the process of a call instead of the experience delivered.

When you change the language to customer-centric terms such as customer experience blueprints, it changes the call objective for your team. Changing our own internal language is a grassroots approach to increase awareness and reinforce to our front line that we are here to serve our customers.

Language can be the catalyst for new behaviours and actions. This is a small but crucial step towards cultural change and greater customer centricity.

2. Find out what your customers really think of you.

Leaders in our industry know that high customer satisfaction scores, in the absence of accelerating revenues, are counter intuitive. We assume that high customer satisfaction will lead to satisfied and loyal customers that will stay longer and buy more.

Before jumping into root-cause analysis, determine if you are getting to the right cross-section of customers and that you are posing the right questions. A typical question in many surveys is: "Please rate the level of service you received today from our consultant? (1 to 5)".

That type of question is great if you want a measurement or benchmark. However, if you want direction on how to improve, ask a more direct question; "Was your experience with us exceptional? (Yes or No)".

No fence sitting allowed! If the customer responds "Yes", then the second question could be "To ensure that we continue to deliver this level of service, please share with us what we did that made your experience exceptional." If the customer responds "No", then the next question could be "We're sorry that we didn't exceed your expectations. To help us improve, please share with us what we could have done differently that would have made your experience exceptional".

Of course, the wording that you choose is discretionary but be sure that the questions that you ask yield data which is actionable.

3. Create and anchor behavioural changes through daily coaching sessions.

If the role of the frontline leader is to raise the performance bar of 15-20 agents every day and to be the instrument for change, then the path to achieve this must be coaching. We all know it works so why do we layer on other tasks such as meetings, projects, and administration to distract front-line leaders from the one activity that truly drives change?

My advice to you is to get focused and be proactive in working with your Agents side-by-side at least two hours a day instead of managing change through email or inside a meeting room. To get even more tangible and sustainable results, it will require a specific and repeatable Coaching Process that must be learned and practiced to develop mastery.

Don't let another year go by without making coaching a priority. The return will far outweigh the investment!

So, there you have it Julia, three practical 'quick wins' that you can control within your centre. I believe that if you commit to doing these really well, you will look back on 2011 feeling that you made a significant and valuable difference to your organization.

Happy New Year!

Afshan Kinder

Mahatma Gandhi said, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world". This resonates for me in the work I do and hopefully for the people I touch. Looking back at 20 years of running operations, there was always this excitement to initiate change, create innovative strategies, and build agile teams who can execute.

What has me jump out of bed in the morning (somewhere in the world!) is working with fast paced companies with complex problems to solve. Proudest moments? In the mid-1990's, we were voted Canada's #1 customer service centre at Sprint Canada at a time when we could barely catch our breath during double digit growth. Then more fun at ING DIRECT hitting Top Box customer satisfaction 6 years in a row. This Daniel Pink quote feels right on: "Meaningful achievement depends on lifting one's sights and pushing toward the horizon."

I live in Toronto, Canada with my husband, two children & two bossy cats.

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