

# Is Your Organization Truly Focused on the Customer?

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### Customer Focused?

Entering the call center/customer care world early in my career, I quickly learned that Customer Care function in any company, and specifically the contact center, can only be as efficient and effective as the organization as a whole will allow. We can have the best intentions, top-notch training and well-crafted processes but if other departments like technology, marketing, or product teams are not “on-board” with a customer first vision, our ability to operate an efficient call center is greatly diminished.

I bet that we could each come up with examples, perhaps within our current organizations, or at least our careers, when these other departments were not focused on the customer. You know the scenario, when a marketing team forgot to inform the call center about a new promotion or price-point, when a product development group overlooked something and you are hearing about it for the first time from a customer!

There are many examples unfortunately where we, as Customer Care leaders struggle, is not because of our shortcomings, but because our organization as a whole overlooks Customer Care and hopefully unintentionally, treats the call center as an afterthought.

We all have felt the operational difficulties and the strain placed on the call center when these mis-steps, these oversights occur. Increased

abandonment rates, unprepared agents, longer handle times, and ultimately, unsatisfied customers.

Obviously, not the makings of an efficient 'Culture of Caring'.

## **Developing a Culture of Caring**

In today's world, the contact center is often the main connection point between the customer and your organization. And while ultimately, the overall culture must be driven from the top, the ideas and passion about customer centricity have their genesis within the call center. It is our responsibility as chief customer advocates to act as champions within an organization.

Unfortunately, our advocacy has its limits, and we must be willing to take actions that will educate others within our organization to not only understand our vision but to help spread our virtues of service and develop a customer centric culture. So we must set out on a journey to find other executives who will help champion our cause. Finding these executives who "get-it" is imperative, since together you can plant the seeds and nurture these ideas within the rest of the leadership team about the importance of enhancing your customer's experience.

Recent studies have shown that about only half of senior level executives claim that their organizations are customer-centric. The disconnect is alarming and I always wonder about the other half, and would like to ask them what are they focused on if not the customer?

Unfortunately as a consumer, these stats do make sense. Companies claim to be focused on customer care but then leave you on hold for 15 minutes, or “fight their customers as they are trying to cancel” in order to reduce refunds/call, or even design a website that makes finding an 800# as difficult as locating “Waldo” in one of those puzzle books.

There exists a lack of a strategic mandate as companies fail to make the fundamental changes at the core of their organization to be customer centric.

Developing a true ‘Culture of Caring’ is a decision, and one that comes from the top. You will see it almost instantly and the impact on the call center will be amazing as operational obstacles are removed and companies start to act with a spirit of cooperation across the entire organization.

Harris Interactive reports that 86% of consumers surveyed have stopped doing business with an organization after a bad experience. Up 27% from 2008. Similarly, 82% of customers who had a bad experience will tell others about it, up 22% since 2006. While alarming, we must pay close attention to these stats. This is especially the case as consumers become more and more internet savvy, using the web to post complaints, review feedback and research your organization before making a purchase decision. The economics of building a customer centric environment are quite compelling and the financial impact from increased loyalty, customer retention, and ultimately call center efficiency is powerful.

### **Call Center Reps or Customer Advocates?**

With rare exceptions, our representatives are generally the only individuals who have direct communication with customers. By definition, this makes them experts, individuals who carry valuable information about how your customers are feeling and reacting to our organizations. Unfortunately, we often ignore their feedback or don't recognize their significance. All we need to do is simply ask for it and, believe me, they will be more than happy to give you plenty of insight, we just need to be willing to listen.

We often talk about developing VOC strategies but have we ever thought about gathering feedback from our representatives, the front line?

Implementing a front-line feedback program that welcomes reps' feedback and allows them to interact with members of the technology, product, and marketing teams will give your organization invaluable opportunities to learn information that might not have otherwise bubbled to the surface. While we can gather plenty of feedback from customers through CSAT surveys, social media outlets, VOC meetings, reps have the inside scoop on costly internal processes, wasted time due to inefficient administrative systems, and other deep-rooted issues that end up driving additional head count and unnecessary expenses. Front-line feedback programs also help support a culture of caring as it gives your reps a voice and underscores your culture by demonstrating willingness to involve everyone in the organization as part of the overall customer strategy.

Representatives can be some of the most passionate customer advocates within our organization. Unfortunately, they often have no voice, nobody who will listen. One of the biggest mistakes that we often make when

building a customer centric operation is isolating both our service touch points and the stakeholders which make up the service delivery process.

It is easy to do, I know I have done it many times earlier in my career. We dismiss their feedback as “whining”. Hourly employees from the call center “what do they know”? While they may not understand all the nuances and intricacies of our business, they often have a “gut-level” connection on how to improve the customer experience, something that many of us don’t!

We must embrace feedback from the front-line as we must be willing to obtain feedback from every touch point , integrate the feedback, and respond. At the core there can often be underlying problems with our product and service that, if fixed, can drive fewer calls into our centers, reduce the complexity of our interactions, streamline systems that often result in multiple calls, improve AHT, and reduce turnover.

### **Integrating Customer Feedback**

In addition to the feedback that we gather from the front-line, we also could gain a great deal of efficiency if customer feedback was integrated across our entire organization and then actions were taken to improve the service process. Successful VOC plans begin with a commitment from Sr. leadership that, at the end of the process, your organization will be willing to take action and actually “close the loop” on customer feedback.

Many Voice of the Customer efforts fail because of an isolated approach. VOC meetings are generally limited to Customer Care or Call Center leaders. Not surprisingly, the efforts often fail due to a lack of cross-

functional executive exposure. As chief customer advocates, we need to buck this trend, we need to drive customer feedback across organizational boundaries so that we can have a call to action and ultimately drive closure on the insights that are shared by our customers.

Changing the culture is not just a small shift in our overall mindset. It takes intention, commitment, and effort. Every action must be shaped by a commitment to meet and exceed customer expectations. Customer touch points and internal processes must be constantly reviewed, evaluated, and improved to meet and exceed those expectations, improve efficiency, reduce costs, and ultimately satisfy the customer.