



McKee Consulting, LLC

The International Authority On Contact Center Training

760-738-8200

Info@McKeeConsultingLLC.com

www.McKeeConsultingLLC.com

Thank you for downloading three chapters of
The Positive Coach Approach: Call Center Coaching for High Performance



We have pulled three chapters from our best-selling book to give you a preview of what you can expect when you become a trained Positive Coach.

Chapter 4 – Foundational Imperative One: Four Building Blocks

The Positive Coach Approach has been designed to stand on four major foundational imperatives. To become proficient in it, managers and coaches must understand and embrace the philosophy and background of the process as outlined in each foundational block.

Chapter 6 – Foundational Imperative Three: Eight Guiding Principles

The Eight Guiding Principles are the basic philosophy employed in establishing the “what to do, why to do, and how to do” elements of ***The Positive Coach Approach***.

Chapter 10 – Troubleshooting

Once you’ve learned ***The Positive Coach Approach*** the troubleshooting chapter will give you real examples of “*what to say and how to say it*” for some common call center coaching situations.

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Chapter Four

Foundational Imperative One: Four Building Blocks

Let's get into the "meat" of positive coaching. The first foundational imperative we'll be introducing you to is our Four Building Blocks:

- Intention
- Relationship
- Discipline (meaning Self-Discipline)
- Skill

We'll examine each element in detail, and then discuss how they must work together to make your coaching efforts more productive.

Many changes have occurred in the training industry; one of the biggest is the realization of the importance of having the ability to recognize what works and what doesn't work. The days of repeating what you did before and expecting to get different results are over. It's time to make sure the right and proper things are taught and used in the call center.

Over the years, many training ideas have been implemented; some have worked and some haven't. Out of this experience have come our thoughts that you must have certain elements in every phone call. The **Intention** to produce results must be present in the mind of every coach. The **Relationship** between agents and coaches must be positive and safe for agents to learn and grow. There must be an element of **Discipline** to learn new things and apply them to the daily business. And, agents and coaches must have the **Skills** needed to be efficient and productive.

Let's look at these concepts, one-by-one.

Intention

Intention is defined as "*a determination to accomplish a specific thing or act; to be determined in advance.*" Put another, simpler way, it's what you mean to do. For example, when you leave work at the end of the day, you intend to go home, or to the gym, or wherever you go. Another example is that you intend for your children to get a good education, become solid citizens of the community, and so on.

The things you intend to have happen may not always work out the way you planned or visualized, but if your intention is strong and positive, things are more likely to turn out the way you want.

“To be determined in advance” is an important part of the definition of intention. If you are truly determined in advance, you will take action to ensure your intention becomes reality. Consider intention to have three components: a goal, a willingness to act, and a plan of action.

My mother’s intention was to have all her children attend the college of their choice.

- Her goal was to earn the money to put us through school.
- Her willingness was to do what it takes to earn more.
- Her action item was, as a realtor, to sell more houses.

I am the youngest of three and we are each a year apart, so we would be entering college three years in a row. My eldest brother, Richard, had high aspirations; he attended Notre Dame University. My second brother, Stephen, attended San Diego State University, and I attended California State University, Northridge. We all graduated from these schools.

My mother’s intentions were very strong. She needed to make enough additional money to send us each to our desired school. Tuition was quite expensive, quite a bit more than she was making in real estate. Her intention was to earn enough for our education and for her to live on. To earn the money she needed, she had to sell more. The four years when Richard

was attending Notre Dame were the four most successful years she ever had. As soon as Richard was out of school, her real estate sales and income dropped. She no longer had the intention to sell a lot of houses. She could sell an average number of houses and still put Stephen and me through school. It was not a conscious choice, but her intention was not as strong and as defined as it had to be while Notre Dame was still in the picture.

What this example illustrates is that if you don't really take the steps required to move things along in the direction of your intention, you probably won't achieve what you want. With respect to coaching, you'll definitely find it more rewarding and productive if you intend that agents will react positively. Your own mental attitude will be seen as one to reflect and not reject or resist.

Creating outstanding results and consistent performance in the positive coaching process requires a major commitment. If you have the intention to make the coaching process succeed, you will succeed in attaining the positive results you expect.

To put this into the three-fold version of intention, you could say:

Your intention is to better your team by using positive coaching.

- Your goal is building a strong, skilled staff of agents.
- Your willingness is to do what works by learning this new approach to coaching.
- Your action item is to coach using the lessons learned in this book.

Your commitment to achieving results must consist of:

- Having the intention to produce results
- Setting targets and goals to measure the achievements of the agents you coach.

- Obtaining the proper support from:
 - Management
 - Trainees
 - Other coaches
 - Available technology

Some tips to help you build your intention are:

- 1) **Make it a game.** Set targets for specific accomplishments. Notice and keep score of what worked in your coaching sessions when you attained positive results and what didn't work when you attained negative results. This is vital to your success.
- 2) **Dwell on the rewards** of reaching your goals. How will you be affected? This can include getting promoted, increasing self-esteem, receiving recognition or acknowledgment, seeing mediocre performers begin to excel, etc.
- 3) **Build a strong belief** in the service you are performing and the effect it's having on your agents.
- 4) **View yourself as a value generator.** You really can make a dramatic difference in agents' lives!
- 5) Make a strong **commitment** and **intend** to succeed.

Relationship

In the coaching process, it's very important to build and maintain warm and trusting relationships with the agents you coach. This is sometimes referred to as "rapport," which is defined as: "*a close or sympathetic relationship showing agreement and harmony.*"

Relationship is "*the mode of connection between one person and another.*"

The key to establishing a relationship and rapport that will last lies in the ability to create what is called "a safe environment." Agents can be made to feel uncomfortable or "unsafe" during the coaching process if they perceive the coach to be glib, arrogant, sarcastic, impatient or bored. It's very important to use an honest, sincere, and unhurried attitude and tone.

Convey a feeling of willingness to serve. Make agents feel they are talking with someone who wants them to succeed and enjoy their jobs. The goal is to have the agents like and respect you, and if you achieve that goal, your job is going to be much easier.

When it comes to positive coaching, we have two sayings that summarize the intended relationship:

- Never make agents feel wrong or stupid.
- Always make agents feel right and smart to work with you.

This is probably the most important concept in this book!

These sayings have been around for a while and they've been in my life since childhood. Why I say they are so important is because they're not only applicable to work; they can make a real difference in your life. When we do our training around the country, this is the concept we get the most comment on. People find this to be a life lesson. I agree.

When we teach this concept in training, it really is more like "Never make *anyone* feel wrong or stupid" and "Always make the *other person* right and smart." Sounds simple, but it's not. The easiest way to explain it is to give you a real-life example and then show you how it can apply to you as person and to your work as a positive coach.

Although I have known these rules since childhood, I sometimes make people feel wrong. And guess what? Sometimes, so do you. So does everyone. We cannot stop ourselves. No one takes any action without thinking they are *right* for taking it. Everyone wants to be right!

The elderly woman driving 65 mph in the fast lane is right! She is going the speed "limit," the maximum speed allowed by law. She must be right.

The man driving in-and-out through traffic like he is moving pieces on a checkerboard is right. He can change lanes safely and get where he needs to be quickly. He must be right.

I am driving along fully aware of the amount of traffic on the road, the weather conditions, and my personal driving ability. I am driving at 80 mph. But I am safe. I must be right.

How can we all be right? I think the elderly woman and the checkerboard man are wrong, but they don't agree! I'm not saying that anyone in this example is right or wrong. What I am saying is that if I had to work with or build relationships with these people, I would not be allowed to make them *feel* wrong or stupid.

You must learn to communicate without judgment, either in your words or tone. It's important not to use sarcasm. Instead, state clearly what it is you want agents to know.

If you want a safe environment where agents can learn and grow, you must make them right as you teach and coach them. This is the only way to obtain the results both of you want.

Here's a short example of practical use within a positive coaching context.

You hear the agent, John, do something incorrectly on the phone call. John didn't ask if the customer needed further assistance at the end of the call.

The following statement makes John feel WRONG:

John, why didn't you ask "Is there anything else I can help you with?" You know you're supposed to do that on every call. It is on the Quality Assurance check sheet.

The following statement—while getting the same message across—doesn't make John FEEL wrong:

John, I noticed you didn't ask "Is there anything else I can help you with?" What happened on that call that caused you to make that decision?

Agents don't grow if made to feel wrong or unintelligent in their choices. A great coach will work with agents to make them either feel right about their current actions or feel right about changing them. An agreement will then be made on what will be different next time. When the agreement is made, agents and coaches can both expect bigger and better things. Making agents *RIGHT* works! Try it!

Discipline

When we say discipline, we mean self-discipline. When learning anything new, it's been noticed by us that it takes some form of change and the energy to perform. It's like exercise; most of us don't like the concept, but if we want change in our energy level it is advisable to do some exercise to make it happen. The same theory works in learning the techniques in the book and in this specific coaching course.

You'll generate much more success if you use the concept of self-discipline, which is honed through significant practice. If you want to become the finest coach and produce the highest results, you'll have to practice the methodology in this program...and that takes self-discipline.

You've probably heard the following: one man asks another on the streets of New York City, "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" The New Yorker answered, "practice, practice, practice." The same goes for those of us who wish to learn a new skill. Whether you want to play the piano in front of thousands of people in Carnegie Hall or simply sit in a chair and observe the performance, this concept doesn't change. If you want to do something better than you are doing it now, you'll have to practice.

In addition to practicing your coaching skills, you'll also be asking your agents to practice their new skills and to demonstrate to you after they've practiced that they can perform. Your self-discipline will be especially tested as you aspire to perfect the coaching techniques covered in the chapters that follow; you'll be learning a whole new way to communicate and converse.

Skill

This final building block element is the one that requires the most discipline. The skills required to be a positive coach can be written down in this book and read by you, but the concept of communication with *intention* to produce results—without making agents ever *feel wrong or stupid*—will require that you learn and apply this four-step method.

The next chapter introduces a core positive coaching skill, the LAMA Technique, which stands for listen, acknowledge, make a statement, and ask a question. Your ability to put this skill to work will go a long way toward determining your success as a positive coach.

You can do this! Make your job easier and communications more clear. Take the next step and communicate with the intention to never make agents wrong or stupid. Learn and practice the LAMA Technique and the other skills introduced in this book. Be the positive coach you want to be.

Chapter Six

Foundational Imperative Three: Eight Guiding Principles

It's time to move on to the eight principles around which the Positive Coaching Approach revolves. These principles have developed over time and some are still evolving.

Judy's thoughts:

When I began coaching many years ago, I remember being very uncertain about how my methods would be received. Explaining them was difficult because most coaching was done in a completely parental way. In the beginning, I didn't ever have the management listen in to me; managers and supervisors were glad I had taken on the job of coaching and they left me alone. It dawned on me that I had a good idea when the agents with whom I was working began to respond with happy attitudes and good ideas of their own, and their supervisors noticed it, too.

My agenda was always the same:

- *Make agents comfortable.*
- *Be clear about my expectations.*
- *Make sure they use the techniques taught in the training course.*
- *Show them how the training concepts work with customers.*
- *Let them know I believe in their ability to perform.*
- *Allow them to show me they can and will do what is expected in a timely manner.*
- *Set up some agreements with me as to how and when they will do the things on the performance list.*

Agents' supervisors were parental; they had a different agenda.

- *Point out errors.*
- *Give instructions on how to fix them.*
- *Be generally disheartened at agents' performance.*
- *Use parental commands.*
- *Provide constructive criticism.*

- *Tell agents what to say and how to say it.*
- *Mark their monitoring forms with less than best marks.*

From these thoughts, these principles were created. The coaching experience should not be parental and negative; it should be consultative and positive. Learn these principles, and live them, as you work with agents during coaching sessions.

Principle #1: Create and Maintain a Safe Environment

There is very little opportunity for agents to develop unless coaching sessions are considered a safe environment. As the coach, you are responsible for creating that safe environment, which means agents must *feel safe* and at ease in your presence and be able to interact freely without hindrance or complication. Most coaching sessions we've observed over the years have not had safe environments.

When you can make it safe for agents to express their feelings, ideas, and solutions to problems or issues, you will see a huge difference in their commitment to grow and perform. If you make it “unsafe” or are critical of their ideas, agents are usually reluctant to offer any suggestions and will not be inclined to attempt self-correction. They will wait for you as the coach or manager to tell them what to do.

Everyone likes to think they have ideas, systems and methods that work. If you wish to obtain the highest and best results from your agents, you must create a safe environment and let the magic happen!

The most important element of a safe environment is *trust*. This means you must create an environment in which agents believe you have their best interests at heart. You must be able to convince them that you can be trusted to inform, teach, and train them in what will work best for them and for the company. Trust is the key; you must make sure agents believe you can be trusted.

When you begin your first sessions using this novel coaching approach, you may notice that

agents are wary of you and may not understand that something different is about to happen. This is the right time to explain how this new method of positive coaching will affect your approach, and how it will make it easier and more pleasant for them to perform and grow.

Approach the positive coaching session with the intent to give up your personal judgments regarding the agents you are coaching. It's not easy to do that when you're supposed to be coaching someone to success, but it is precisely these judgments that get in the way of creating a safe environment. You must trust that agents want to succeed and will do what is required if appropriately guided toward that end.

The desired condition to be achieved is when agents feel free to discuss methods, ideas and suggestions in a way that can make a contribution to the company and to the situation. When this happens, you will know you are trusted. Then, all you have to do is to maintain this trust throughout your coaching sessions and enjoy watching amazing improvements in agent performance.

One way to facilitate a safe environment is to listen together with agents to tapes of the calls to be assessed. You shouldn't listen to the tapes in advance of coaching sessions; if you do, you won't be able to maintain a completely unbiased opinion. Preconceived notions don't allow for a safe environment. Make sure you don't form opinions in advance. When you tell the agents that you have not heard the call in advance, the agents are clear that you have no pre-conceived ideas. Then, when you ask for their input, it makes the agents feel safe and believe their input is valid. The aspect of listening to the call together promotes a mutual desire to work toward improvement.

Working together is one of the cornerstones of positive coaching. Please resist with all your might your strong tendency to want to tell agents what to do. Advice given before agents have had a chance to self-correct will be considered reprimands or criticisms of their performance. On the other hand, when you use the eight principles, which encourage self-discovery and self-correction, agents will feel important, adult and confident.

Follow these tips to help you in learning how to develop a safe environment:

- **Describe how positive coaching works.** Make sure they know that this coaching approach promotes an atmosphere of mutual trust, honesty and respect. Tell them they're going to have the opportunity to decide and participate in what they can do to improve their own performance, and that you, as a positive coach, will guide and work with them as necessary to make that happen.
- **Look for the “good stuff” and tell them about it!** Strive to notice the good and correct actions of your agents. Acknowledge them during walk-bys and in coaching sessions and any other times you hear something good. When you hear or see good behavior, tell them about it immediately, if possible, and be specific about what you heard and why you liked it. Let them know what you perceived as good and correct behavior.
- **Eliminate constructive criticism.** Nobody likes or responds well to constructive criticism, so don't use this parental approach when coaching. It does not lend itself to a safe environment; agents will fear you and dislike you for using it. When you come around to talk to them about their work, they will anticipate your attitude as being one of a parent. Instead, use adult training modes and principles. Treat your agents like the adults they are and you will obtain much better results.
- **Use positive reinforcement only.** If you hear or observe someone saying something incorrect or inappropriate, use positive reinforcement publicly and give additional feedback privately. Ask agents how they feel about what transpired. Then ask them what happened and how they might handle the situation in a better way the next time it occurs.
- **There are no right or wrong questions.** Encourage agents to ask questions. Allow them to ask any question they wish. Show interest in their ideas by asking: “What do you think?” or “How did you feel about that?” To create a safe environment, it's important to let them know that you are there for their improvement. Let them know that if they do well and look good, you do, too.

- **Encourage agents to self-discover and self-correct.** A safe environment is one in which agents can train themselves. There will be no need for negative feedback or constructive criticism. Start a process that encourages self-correction through a dialogue initiated by a series of questions.
- **Avoid asking questions you know the answer to in a way that makes agents feel wrong or stupid.** Here are examples of questions not to ask: “Don’t you think you should have asked that customer for more information?” and “What do you think you did wrong on that call?” Instead, ask something that makes agents feel right and smart like these examples: “What questions could you have asked to gather more information from that customer?” and “On that call, what do you think you might have said to make it go a little more smoothly?”
- **Develop a “work together” atmosphere.** Work together for the development of agents’ success. Later we will discuss exactly how to develop a progress plan in detail. Keep in mind that this not a “do what I say” situation. It’s more like a partnership, where working things out together will ensure mutual success. Visualize a situation where agents work with you, not for you. After all, your focus in coaching is their career, their job, and their pending success, and you are both after the same goals. So, do it together.

Principle #2: Create a Consultative Environment

You must strive to create a consultative-type environment, in which you and your agents engage in a dialogue, both observing, listening, and asking and answering questions. This means discussing the impressions formed by each of you to get a clear picture of strengths and weaknesses affecting agent performance. Following this procedure, you can collectively come up with recommendations and plans for perfecting techniques. A partnership needs to be formed to assist agents to learn and improve. Being consultative allows you to collaborate with agents instead of simply telling them what to do.

As the consultative partnership between you and your agents starts to form and a safe environment is created, agents will begin to take responsibility for their own growth. It’s

important that they gain a sense that you respect their intellect and feelings. This indicates to them that you want them to succeed, and at the same time encourages them to take on the challenges of higher and better performance on their own. You open doors with questions and agents respond with ideas and suggestions to increase their productivity and skill levels.

This is a new way of thinking for most supervisors and managers who are used to using the “finding-what’s-wrong-and-telling-how-to-fix-it” technique. The consultative method will take a little longer at first, but soon agents will be combining their knowledge and experience with yours, and both of you will grow.

After a few meetings that start with a safe environment and employ a consultative environment, coaching sessions will go faster. Agents will begin in earnest to accept responsibility for their own growth and the partnership consultation strategies will develop rapidly. This new approach will most likely require some changes in your operating style, but will pay off dramatically in time saved over the year because there will be no need for repeated correction and discipline. Agents will learn quickly that you are their consultant, working with them to enhance their success, and as a consequence, the time that coaching and mentoring takes will be dramatically shortened.

To be consultative in nature, remember these rules:

- A consultative approach takes time and practice to perfect.
- Coaching sessions are an exchange of ideas.
- Be supportive by asking questions.
- Consult with agents about methods of self-correction.
- Engage agents in the concept of thinking for themselves...so you can stop doing it for them.

Your hard work will be rewarded by the formation of partnerships for success between you and your agents.

Principle #3: Build Self-Esteem by Focusing on the Positives

Building agent self-esteem requires overt actions on your part. You must intentionally focus on

the positive aspects of agent performance. If your energy level is low, and your attitude seems to be parental or critical, you won't be doing yourself any favors. Being perceived as a critical parent will not endear you to agents, and it will do nothing to build their self-esteem. What will build their self-esteem is your positive attitude and the ability to tell them what they do most of the time is right and correct!

From the moment agents perceive the positive coaching process is designed to make their performance better and their success assured, you'll notice a dramatic change in their willingness to participate with new energy. Conversely, experience shows that if agents perceive coaching as constructive criticism, they will usually put up barriers to their own successful learning. You can break down the barriers by acknowledging positive performance. If you are parental or use constructive criticism, agents may resist every word you say simply because they feel criticized.

Why maintain a positive environment? It's simple, works best, takes less time, and is less frustrating...and you keep customers satisfied and agents working at a high level in a happy environment. The results go up and the problems go down. Performance will improve and the workplace will be pleasant.

Remember that your goal is to help agents be more successful and ensure customers are more satisfied with the treatment they receive. When agents have coaches who are creating safe learning environments by being completely positive, the goals become obvious. This type of attitude is contagious and the results will prove it.

Keep these simple points in mind:

- Stay positive in the face of adversity.
- Negative energy will not work; agents often see this as an attack.
- Agents will go to their own way if they are not given positive feedback.
- Show confidence with your attitude.
- Don't be right; let agents be right, so they grow.
- Demonstrate that you are positive with sincere words and phrases.
- Constantly build self-esteem. It will pay off big time.

What will it take to end your doubt that you can actually give up being negative and learn how to be positive? What will you need to do or know for you to see that negative energy causes resistance and positive energy causes positive responses? Seeing is believing...so change your behavior and watch what happens. Let go of the negative and put in the positive; never go over to the dark side again.

If you want to know what to say and how to say it in a positive way, you will find examples in the several of the following chapters. You'll find many examples of specific words and phrases to help you coach with positive energy.

Principle #4: Maintain an Adult Training Environment

You must have high expectations of agents to act and perform as adults. Open your mind to the fact that they want to succeed. If you maintain an adult environment and a positive attitude toward them, agents will respond as adults.

All positive coaching sessions must be based on the premise that agents want to improve their skills, perform well and do a good job.

Adult training philosophy precepts are simple!

- Be sure agents are trained in exactly what to say and how to say it.
- Make sure agents know what you expect of them; provide clear performance criteria.
- Allow agents to ask as many questions as they wish.
- Consult with agents and allow them to explain their points of view.
- Communicate clearly that you expect agents to self-correct.
- Let agents know you aren't going to be acting the part of their parent and they're expected to respond with adult behavior.

When you coach agents, treat them as equals and show that you respect their points of view whether you agree with them or not. Positive coaching is a consultative process created to help agents develop their ideas and their solutions to problems.

Maintaining an adult environment is important to make sure agents are treated with understanding and not made to feel small. Your job is to give agents the guidance they need to succeed and that means taking no joy in their weaknesses. If you can make the agents feel right and smart to participate openly in the coaching process, your coaching task will be much easier and more productive.

Let the adults you work with come up with their own solutions, allow them to know you have the confidence in them that they have what it takes to succeed. Be sure you tell them you are counting on them to find their own way to success.

Recently, after having conducted a training program, I was about to start the side-by-side follow-up coaching session. The agent and I had just listened to a recorded call and he said, "Okay....just tell me what I do wrong." This comment told me that he was used to his manager making him feel wrong and probably stupid. He was used to parental attitudes and correction by so-called constructive criticism. So, I said, "Whoa! This will be different, I promise. I expect you to listen to yourself, examine the call and make recommendations on the things that you would like to correct, fix or change. I'll also expect you to find three things you felt that you did well when you handled the customer. We're going to spend time making sure you know how much you do right on every phone call. Okay?" He changed instantly from a fearful person to one who was a little skeptical but willing to give this positive coaching method a try.

As you use the elements of positive coaching, give your agents a chance to discover what didn't work and acknowledge what did. Let them demonstrate to you that they'll continue to do what works and let go of what doesn't on their own, without you or anyone else holding their hand. They are not like children who need assistance crossing the street; they are adults who know to look both ways and make a decision. This is the adult principle that will give you the satisfaction of knowing you are helping someone else grow into their own success and, believe me, agents will thank you for it.

Agents left home a long time ago and they didn't do it to be put into another parental situation.

They did it to be on their own because they think they can be successful. You are the one to make that happen by ensuring they know what's expected and giving them the tools to succeed. Then, let them know you know they CAN and WILL do what works. This is a happy learning environment.

Principle #5: The Responsibility to Learn and Grow Lies with Agents

Your responsibility is to sharpen agents' skills. Their responsibility is to learn, grow and use their sharpened skills to the best advantage in their jobs. Your job as a coach will be much easier if you make this distinction very clear to agents at the outset of the process.

What exactly does the word responsible mean? Unfortunately, many parents instill in their children the idea that being responsible for something is akin to taking blame for it.

Responsibility simply put means: *the cause of a matter*. You should instill in agents the value of being responsible, keeping blame completely out of the picture. Blame is not an issue in the coaching environment.

Do whatever you can to help agents learn to be responsible for their own growth, learning and self-correction. If they need assistance, you're responsible for teaching them.

In a class we had at a huge call center, we were teaching the managers about how to handle difficult agents and what to do with them using positive coaching. I asked a manager to role-play with me and she handled the given situation beautifully right up to the end where she unknowingly negated this principle.

At the very end of the role-play, she said: "Now, Sally, if you need any support from me, if you need any help in doing this, you just come to me with your problems and I will help you solve them. My door is always open to you and since you are the most important part of my job, I will be available to you any time, any time at all."

I asked her if I could come by every day or have her listen to my calls every day until I got it right. Would she do it? She said, "Oh yes, I'm happy to help you any way I can."

I went back into training mode and asked her to look at who is now responsible for this agent's correction? She thought for a moment and her face lit up! She said, "I broke one of the main principles, didn't I? I took on this agent's whole job and did not leave it up to her to learn on her own." She realized she was being parental; she should be leaving the responsibility up to agents.

She said she'd used a heart-felt system all her career and she never got the results she wanted from it. She was very kind, but she always ended up with every monkey on her back...and she'd never understood that she was doing it to herself.

I then went back to the principle of responsibility resting with agents (or in this case, the manager.) I asked her to redo what she said, this time making it the responsibility of the agent to grow, learn and practice. Here is what she said:

"Sally, you did so well on that with your ideas on how to fix this issue with the customer. You came up with a fine solution and I am proud of you. The next time you engage the customer and change the way you handled it, let me know and I'll listen to your call. I would like to acknowledge you for making the change on your own. Okay?"

This is a lesson all big-hearted managers and supervisors need to learn. It's like teaching your child to drive; eventually you have to give them keys to the car and the job rests with them to do it right and be safe.

You can see how the principles continue to work in every situation, *including this one*. This manager just learned by hearing herself, she self-corrected and she came up with her own solution. Since she did this for herself, she learned instantly that this is the best way for her to teach and coach her agents. She realized the result will be to free up time for her administrative work and she will have time to coach more often. Wow!

The agent and the agent alone is the one who is to act on the correction needed, the method of learning and the method of growing. Learn to separate who is responsible for learning and

growing from who is responsible for teaching and coaching. This will give both of you a secure place from which to operate.

Principle #6: Timelines are Essential

During coaching sessions, you and your agents will learn to set specific, realistic and timely goals.

It's essential that agents set timely goals as to how long it will take them to change a habit, learn something completely new, or just do something they had never done before. Timelines are a requirement for growth. Agents will learn quicker when specific timeframes are set to accomplish their goals; there's nothing to shoot for when timeframes are left open ended.

Goal setting is typically challenging for agents, and new coaches may find it hard to put this component of positive coaching into practice...but this is the part that causes change. Some coaches will find it very hard to ask for this commitment because it is causing something to happen. Agents must come up with a time estimate and be responsible for changing their behavior by that self-imposed deadline. Agents need confidence in themselves and they need to know that you realize they are adults and believe they are capable of learning new things quickly. With that in mind, have your agents pick timelines that are realistic and commensurate with their skills and abilities.

You must allow agents to set their own timelines.

At times it may be difficult to set timelines that are mutually agreeable. It's typical in the coaching environment for agents to realize that coaches are usually willing to let them use their own discretion when learning new things as long as there's agreement on the timeline. At the same time, it's been our experience that agents often want a long time to learn something. It never seems to be a good idea to give them a very long time to learn a new technique or change a habit on a three-minute phone call.

Habits are hard to change. When people decide to quit smoking or go on a diet, it's always

difficult because there must be a timeline involved or everyone just gives up. Since positive coaching is something meaningful—serious business—it will take a certain commitment to time. You’ll learn later how to use the High Five coaching method, which requires only three new lessons a week at the most. Since there are only three things to work on at a time, setting timelines isn’t as hard as you may think.

When timelines are set, you’ll learn how long it takes to enact behavioral changes. What you’ll see is that it seldom takes too long. It only takes a short time for agents to make up their minds to learn and a short time to practice before something that works better becomes a part of their lives. Start today and watch your agents grow quicker when dates are set for them to reach their learning goals.

Principle #7: Use Bilateral Action Agreements

Bilateral action agreements—when you and your agents agree on the action to be taken—are an important part of positive coaching. If you want agents to act like adults, using their own wit and wisdom to learn something new, your coaching agreements will answer several questions. In addition to asking agents to make a behavioral change, you must consult and mutually agree on how they will learn and remember to make the given change, and how that will occur in a timely manner.

I like to use the principle of agreements when working with others. I heard once that “life works to the degree that you keep agreements.” For instance, if you don’t drive at the speed limit, you could get a ticket, or if you eat too much you’ll gain weight. Those are life-principled agreements, but if you want to encourage agents to learn new things, you also need agreements.

If they haven’t figured it out already, your agents will know by this activity that this coaching method is different; you’ll be letting them know you plan to support their growth by making these agreements. In addition, you’ll amplify that your meetings have meaning...they are meetings of adults who create a mutually safe environment, use established principles of learning, and consult with each other on the ways and means to successful results.

Principle #8: Questions are the Key

Questions are the key that will open up any conversation. If you ask them in a way that makes agents feel good, smart and right to answer them, you'll have very good coaching sessions.

I initially thought my methods were accepted because I was just more fun and I was an outsider providing a different experience. It was later when I realized that I did things very differently from agents' supervisors, monitors and coaches. Supervisors used subjective ways and means instead of objectives to bring about changes in behavior and it never seemed to work. Because supervisors had good intentions, they couldn't figure out what was wrong. They either did not ask questions or they asked questions that made agents feel small and foolish, and less than smart and right to answer them. Putting questions that made agents feel right and smart down on paper was the start of something big.

You will need to be prepared to ask your agents questions throughout coaching sessions. You'll find examples of good questions throughout this book. Your questions will guide your coaching conversation.

- After giving a list of your expectations, you'll ask agents if they think you've been clear about them.
- After you hear tapes or listen to calls together, you'll acknowledge agents and ask them to self-acknowledge with more questions.
- When you're preparing to open the conversation about challenges, you'll need a few more questions.
- After that, you'll begin the self-correction stage and need a question or two to engage agents in the process of self-correction and learning.
- At the point of the session when you allow agents to come up with their own ideas on fixing situations for the future, you'll need a couple more questions, spoken in just the right way so as not to make agents feel uncomfortable. You want to do exactly the opposite, ensuring your questions demonstrate your faith in them to learn, correct, grow and improve their performance.

Knowing how to ask questions is an important component of positive coaching. You need to

know what to say and how to say it to be a good coach, just as agents need to know what to say and how to say it to be excellent customer service representatives or salespeople. We have provided a selection of appropriate questions in the Appendix.

Simple Solutions Work Best

There's a lot to learn in this book, but much of it boils down to using these eight principles. They work!

- Create and Maintain a Safe Environment
- Create a Consultative Environment
- Build Self-Esteem by Focusing on the Positives
- Maintain an Adult Training Environment
- The Responsibility to Learn and Grow Lies with Agents
- Timelines are Essential
- Use Bilateral Action Agreements
- Questions are the Key

Give up ideas and thoughts that don't work and you'll start to have coaching sessions that:

- Enlighten
- Move
- Cause growth
- Allow agents to perform to their own best ways

You'll be so happy you learned these ways and means to coaching...and your agents will be delighted, too. By becoming a positive coach, you'll realize the best reward of all: the long-term success of your agents.

Chapter Ten

Troubleshooting

Just as you need to know how to handle things you might hear from agents, you also must be aware of how to deal with common issues that may come up during the positive coaching process.

Ten Common Stop Signs

Every company has a list of the most common “stops” on any call. We suggest you make a list of the most common ones and then learn how to engage agents in self-correction. Remember the following things:

- When you need assistance with explaining ideas and supporting agents, use the techniques contained in this book.
- Always model the LAMA Technique when you’re coaching.
- Take note that the LAMA Technique is used in every example in this book so you can see the power of positive coaching.
- Make a commitment to use positive coaching every time you attempt to coach or monitor agents.
- You will gain support and improve the performance of both you and your agents when you perform as a positive coach.

We’ve made our own list of 10 common call “stop signs.” We present it below, along with tips on how to address each situation.

1. Dead Air

Monitoring Session Observation:

The customer didn’t respond to an agent’s question or there was no question posed, resulting in dead air. The agent may have ended on a statement; there may have been implied questions, meaning the agent thought he’d asked something, or the question asked was not one the customer wanted to answer.

What happens to customers when there is dead air?

When customers don't know how to respond or don't realize that agents want a response, they may feel wrong or stupid to respond, so they say nothing. The resulting dead air is uncomfortable for both customers and agents.

Coaches' Advice:

Address agents by name and clearly tell them what you heard and observed on the tape. Tell them what you think the solution may be and ask the agent how they would apply this solution.

Here is how it might sound:

“(Name), you may or may not have realized that you stopped speaking at the end of a statement and left the call path control up to the customer. The solution is always to end on a specific question that will be clearly understood by the customer. Okay? Also, when you end on a question, you are always in control of the conversation. So, what question could you have asked to keep the call along your intended path?”

2. Impersonal Attitude**Monitoring Session Observation:**

The customer started with “I am worried,” providing reasons for the call before the agent could get the account number. The agent seemed detached and uninterested and asked for the customer's account number without responding to his initial comments.

What happens to customers in this situation?

Customers may feel that agents aren't listening, don't care or worse; they often get the impression they're just another caller--or just another number--to agents. Customers can become irate or more irritated because agents don't take their concerns seriously.

Coaches' Advice:

Address agents by name and clearly tell them you understand the difficulty in hearing the same things over and over all day long. Explain why your suggestion or recommendation will work

toward the resolution of the customer's irritation. Ask agents for agreement and ideas from them how they will handle this next time.

Here is how it might sound:

“(Name), it must be hard to hear the same things over and over again and still maintain a personal touch. Still, it is important that you show some empathy and understanding. You can do that by using a short acknowledgement phrase before asking customers for their account number. (It sounds like you are concerned. Let's see what we can do to help. What is that account number, please?) Responding with a more personal phrase and acknowledging their worries will keep customers from getting more upset. What words or phrases do you like to use to show empathy before you move the call along by asking for the account number?”

3. Call Control and Call Management

Monitoring Session Observation:

The customer controls the path of the call and asks questions. The agent responds, but only with answers or statements, and does not ask questions. The agent loses control of the call, finding it difficult to handle an upset customer, move the call along, handle an objection, offer products or determine customer needs. (This example assumes that the agents have been trained in the LAMA Technique for call path control.)

What happens to customers in this situation?

Customers have a sense of fear and doubt, and they feel uncertain. They may not know what the next question is or what to do or say. Customers may say they aren't interested because they weren't ever asked a question that made it seem like agents were interested in their needs. Customers will do and say almost anything so as not to appear wrong or stupid.

Coaches' Advice:

Address agents by name and clearly explain why call path control is important for them as well as customers. Offer a suggestion or recommendation, giving agents a reason for your solution. Ask agents for a question and encourage them to come up with the answer. Give agents a positive reason to use the LAMA Technique and model it.

Here is how it might sound:

“(Name), the LAMA Technique is a way to guide the path of your calls. It’s designed to let you lead customers to the end of the call. When you can do this effectively, your communication skills in every facet of your life will be enhanced. 1. You will not hear dead air. 2. Customers will always know what to do next.

3. You will feel a sense of control and ease of speech. 4. Your job will be more pleasant, because it’s always better to be in control, giving customers a feeling of certainty.

The questions are the hardest. What questions could you have used?”

4. Customers Don’t Get It**Monitoring Session Observation:**

The customer has to ask the agent to repeat what was just said. The customer doesn’t understand the agent. The customer ignores the agent’s speech because he didn’t hear what the agent said, as the words went by so quickly.

The customer gets irritated at the length of the fast talker’s information.

What happens to customers in this situation?

Customers may feel like they are being tricked or conned when agents talk too fast, and they may not understand what is being said. When agents say too much too quickly, customers may not be able to make decisions. Customers may not purchase just because agents pitched the product or service too fast.

Coaches' Advice:

Address agents by name and clearly explain why speaking slowly is important for them as well as customers. Acknowledge agents for being able to speak knowledgeably about the product or service. Ask agents if they will listen for customer doubt or wish for a repeat. Encourage agents to slow down. Give them a positive reason to make the change and model the technique they should use. Ask agents how they will fix the problem.

Here is how it might sound:

“(Name), the product is no trouble for you, is it? You really know your stuff. And, since you know your product and have given that pitch so often, you may be speaking just a little too fast for some customers. This customer had to ask you to repeat; he may not get it, or he may feel rushed or conned. I suggest you practice a shortened script then say ‘okay?’ to see if customers get it and are listening to you. Once they agree they are keeping up with you, you can continue on with your pitch. Where do you think would be a good place to slow down and check back with customers?”

5. The Positioning of the Price**Monitoring Session Observation:**

The agent tells the customer of a charge after the customer has agreed to buy and the customer becomes irritated. The agent misrepresents the cost. The product seems free and the customer becomes irritated when told the price in the disclosure. The customer is angry because that cost was not previously disclosed. The customer angrily says, “Why didn’t you tell me this earlier? How much is it?”

What happens to customers in this situation?

Customers always fear being tricked, conned or over-sold. They don’t buy because the price or the cost was delayed to the point of putting doubt in their minds. It’s called hedging on the price. Customers resent having to wait for the price as if there was some secret about it. They make many decisions based on price.

Coaches' Advice:

Address agents by name and clearly explain why the money issue is so important for them as well as customers. Offer a suggestion or recommendation, giving agents a reason for your solution. Ask agents for a question and encourage them to come up with the answer.

Here is how it might sound:

“(Name), the best way to offer a price is to provide it after you have given customers a feature and a benefit...before it’s too late. Let’s put the money in strategically between two other things. That way, customers know what they are buying, but they aren’t asked to buy until they have enough information to decide. What will you say to present the feature, the benefits, and the cost earlier in the call?”

6. Persistence Can Be Pushy

Monitoring Session Observation:

The customer becomes irritated because the agent will not give up. The agent acts like he won’t take no for an answer and the customer sounds disgusted. The agent uses a question that appears to have a threat in it. “Don’t you want to protect your credit?” The customer has to say no thanks or such three times.

What happens to customers in this situation?

Customers think your company is into selling stuff they don’t need. They get worried and don’t feel it’s “safe” to call the company. They may never call you again, which means you won’t be able to sell them the next product. Customers feel pressed or threatened and therefore lash out at agents.

Coaches’ Advice:

Address agents by name and clearly explain why there is a fine line between being persistent and pushy, and it’s important for them and customers to understand that. Then ask them what they can say to not sound or feel pushy next time.

Here is how it might sound:

“(Name), I may have confused you when I asked you to handle objections. I don’t mean that you should be pushy. I suggest you use the LAMA Technique. Offer customers features and benefits two times. If they refuse the second time, go ahead and complete the call. You don’t need to push after you have received two noes; not everyone is willing to buy today. What could you say after getting turned down that would not feel pushy and invite the customer to buy in the future?”

7. Requirement—A Second Attempt

Monitoring Session Observation:

The agent offered the product or service once, but did not make a second attempt. The agent made the attempt by reading a script and asking for the order, but when told no, he gave up and said goodbye. The agent quit too soon and only briefly described the product or service.

What happens to customers in this situation?

Customers may be happy that no further sales message came. However, customers may need the product or service, but since they weren’t provided with all the features or benefits, they couldn’t make an informed choice.

Customers may feel you had a product or service that you didn’t give them a chance to find out about and buy. The free trial period may have worked perfectly here.

Coaches’ Advice:

Address agents by name and make sure they understand your faith in them. Ask them to role-play to get them a little more comfortable when making that second attempt. Give agents a positive reason to use the LAMA Technique and model it. Ask them to try it on their next call.

Here is how it might sound:

“(Name), I count on the fact that you always ask for the order. And at the same time, I did not hear a second attempt. It is a little risky to go for the second attempt. I do understand. However, the first time customers say no, they often mean *I don’t know enough about it to choose*. Or, they may have thought they weren’t interested because you didn’t happen to hit their hot button in your first sentence. Please make it your goal to make two attempts to sell. Let’s figure out how

you are comfortable making the attempt and when you come up with a good way you'll use it. Okay?"

8. An Opportunity Missed

Monitoring Session Observation:

The agent didn't make any attempt at the cross-selling opportunity. He decided not to make the offer at all, even though there was a clear "buying signal." The customer ended the call abruptly, so the agent had no chance to make the offer. The requirements have already been met for attempts today.

What happens to customers in this situation?

If no offer is made, customers may not be aware of a product or service they may need. Customers may not think there is a way to save money with your product or service, they may want the peace of mind they would enjoy with the product or service, or they may wish to know about all the products and services your company offers. Customers want help, but agents don't know this because no attempt is made.

Coaches' Advice:

Address agents by name and clearly explain why hearing a buying signal and making an attempt is important for them as well as customers. Customers make decisions on the information we provide. Ask agents to give up their judgments and come up with a way to make the cross-sell.

Here is how it might sound:

"(Name), the best way to make sure that you have great stats and customers are completely served is to give up your judgments. Do not decide which customer might need our services. Instead, offer the services and let the customer decide. You will increase your sales, making you more money, and you will be sure that customers who need the service have had the opportunity to buy. Right? I know that you do this easily when customers are pleased with you. What can you do to remind yourself to give up your judgments and simply make an attempt on every call even when you don't have the most cooperative customer?"

9. When “Is there anything else I can do for you?” Doesn’t Work

Monitoring Session Observation:

The customer was not prepared for a cross-sell. The customer thought the call was over and started to hang up. The agent seemed to be scrambling to bring the attention of the customer back to the cross-sell opportunity. The call seemed over in every way.

What happens to customers in this situation?

When agents appear to end calls by asking if customers have any more questions, customers think the call is over if they have no more questions. Customers will feel that when agents continue, their time is being used without their consent. Customers think their business is completed, so why go on?

Coaches’ Advice:

Address agents by name and clearly explain that why and when you ask customers if they have any questions is important, both for them and their customers.

Here is how it might sound:

“(Name), you did the customer service side of the call so well that the customer felt completely taken care of. That is a good thing. However, most customers know that the ‘Is there anything else I can do for you?’ is really the dismissal question. So you want to make a transition to your cross sell before asking that question. Let’s figure out a good transition over to the cross-sell and then you can do it his new way and save the ‘anything else’ for the real end of the call. Okay?”

10. Customers Want Certainty

Monitoring Session Observation:

No acknowledgment was given to the customer at the end of the call. You didn’t hear any type of closing statement: “You will really love this service.” “You did the right thing by getting this service. It will save you money.”

“You can call us anytime and we will always help you. I am glad you called today.” “It was a pleasure to talk with you today.”

What happens to customers in this situation?

Customers like to have someone tell them they did the right thing to call. Customers want to know they made the right choice to call, complain, ask questions or buy services. They think you are there to serve them and they like to know that you are happy to do it. Customers expect you to be happy to take care of them; they like to be acknowledged.

Coaches’ Advice:

Address agents by name and clearly explain why certainty is important for them as well as customers. Ask agents how they prefer to give this acknowledgement.

Here is how it might sound:

“(Name), you always are so polite at the end of your calls (or you really handled that ending and wrap up well). May I recommend that you say one more thing at the end of calls that will give you an ‘exceeding customer’s expectation.’

Say a closing statement, like one of these: ‘You can call us anytime; we are always glad to help. It’s our job.’ ‘You did the right thing by trying out that product.’ ‘You are really going to like this service and it will save you money, too.’ What are the words you would use to make the customer feel smart and right to have called us?”

Troubleshooting Wrap-up

Take these examples and work with them to fit your specific needs. We provide them to plant the seed with you. There are many ways you can handle these stop signs and make them your own. In many of these examples, you will see that the coach expects the agent come up with his own solution or his own words to handle the customer.

We believe that after applying the concepts and methods presented in this book, you will come up with the way that works best for you. Take the Positive Coach Approach and make it your own. Follow the guidelines; your agents will receive you better and their performance will show marked improvement.



Info@McKeeConsultingLLC.com
www.McKeeConsultingLLC.com

Please Give us a Call (760) 738-8200

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