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Seven Key Elements

Inbound Edit

Originally, a call center was a centralized office designed to receive and process a large volume of inbound telephone calls. This operation was set up as part of a single business with the mission of efficiently taking customer calls and either resolving issues or taking a specific action and, at times, passing the call on, if the operator could not quickly complete the required actions. Over time, however, the world of call centers has changed. Some significant changes are:

- Automation
- Virtual centers – either global or a single center with home agents or satellite offices
- From single shift to 24/7 operation
- Call centers became contact centers with a diverse plate of roles:

  - Outgoing calls for product and services sales, and debt collection
  - Handling letters, faxes, live chat and emails
  - Performing remote diagnostics and dispatching activities

Call centers come in all sizes from a single person to tens of thousands dispersed globally, all handling the same customers at any time depending on staffing levels and call volume. In addition to these roles, call centers also have a number of strategic objectives which impact their make-up, evaluation and training requirements, such as:

- Create loyalty and retain customers
- Generate new or incremental revenue
- Serve as a competitive differentiator

Regardless of the type of call center or the strategy, what has become a key to success is the level of employee engagement.

Today there are many definitions of employee engagement. We prefer a very simple one...the emotional attachment and passion an employee develops in pursuing the success required in their position. Most often employees demonstrate their level of engagement through their confidence, helpfulness toward their customers and others and by acting in an enthusiastic and positive manner.

We must ask ourselves, how important is employee engagement? Well, today, in a world where service is the key differentiator and companies earn loyalty through engaged employees, who in turn engage customers, the absence or low levels of employee engagement are devastating. Towers and Perrin conducted a study of 40 global companies and found companies with the highest level of engagement had increased operating income by 19% and earnings per share by 28%, while companies with less engaged employees, had declines in

Article

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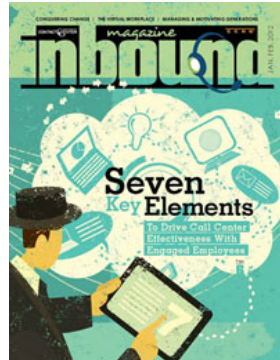
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Letter from the Editor

Cover Story
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income of 33% and earnings of 11%. RJ Milnor pointed out in an article on Dis-engagement that disengaged employees are 3-5 times more likely to leave a company than the average employee and cost their employers an average of 46% of their salaries in lost productivity.

Let's remember our intent is focused on the customer experience. Consider that a fully engaged employee delivers the moments of truth that make a difference. They deliver the value proposition you look for as a leader. Your customer sees you as a customer-centric culture and one they want to remain engaged with.

So, it is not only essential to make sure you have the tools in place to drive employee engagement, but also, measure engagement, especially at the Top Box. However, don't average your measurements. If nothing else, call centers generate massive amounts of data. Operational data comes from Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) and other monitoring. Also, because businesses understand the importance of Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty, they frequently launch an e-mail survey invitation as soon as the call is closed. In fact, this process is now considered a best practice. It generates large amounts of data and is frequently combined with operational data to create actionable insights and continuous improvement. Additionally, no matter the role or size of your center, there are a number of unique ways to analyze performance.

Some ways to view your Call Center are:

- A total entity
- By customer (if you support multiple businesses)
- By vertical market served (if captive)
- By geographical location
- By shift

The primary advantage of segmenting data is to be able to tailor improvement plans for each specific group for desired outcomes (i.e., customer experience).

As we pointed out previously, research has shown engaged employees are more productive employees, more customer-focused, and create more profitability. Conversely, non-engaged employees and actively disengaged employees erode an organization's profitability and spread dissention and unrest among adjacent employees. The Gallup Organization reports that in world-class organizations, the ratio of engaged to actively disengaged employees is slightly over 9:1. In average organizations, the ratio of engaged to actively disengaged employees is slightly under 2:1.

It is often said that employees join organizations but leave bosses or managers. Thus, the quality of the local unit or workgroup manager becomes a key element in sustaining engaged employees. Gallup developed the model shown in Figure 1 describing a core set of employee's emotional requirements. Similar to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, this is a basic set of requirements for employee engagement. Local call-center managers can use this model to demonstrate caring and commitment to individual employees and to influence the productivity of the local team.

Four Dimensions of Employee Engagement

Among the many variables that discriminate between highly productive workplaces and those that are unproductive is the quality of the local workplace manager and his or her ability to meet a core set of employee's emotional requirements. Work units that meet these conditions of engagement perform at a much higher level than work units that fail to meet them.

12 Core Elements Q12®

- Opportunities to learn and grow
- Progress in last six months

HOW CAN WE GROW?

- Best friend
- Coworkers committed to quality
- Mission/Purpose of company
- My opinion counts

DO I BELONG?

- Encourages development
- Supervisor/Someone at work cares
- Recognition last seven days
- Do what I do best every day

WHAT DO I GIVE?

- Materials and equipment
- I know what is expected of me at work

WHAT DO I GET?

4 Dimensions

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Figure 1

To measure levels of employee engagement, Gallup identified twelve core elements that link powerfully to business outcomes, known as the Q12®. These twelve key expectations measure employee perceptions of the quality of people-related management practices in their business units and, when satisfied, form the foundation of strong feelings of engagement. For example, one of the first and most fundamental elements of engagement is for employees to know what is expected of them at work. It is incumbent upon call-center managers to ensure that each employee is clear in terms of their expectations within their workgroup. To ensure that each employee knows what is expected, we frequently ask this question (or something similar):

I understand what is expected of me within my workgroup.

You can, for example, measure this with a 1 to 10 scale where 1 indicates an extremely low engagement and 10 indicates an extremely high engagement, then interpret scores of 8 through 10 as engaged, 5 through 7 as not-engaged, and 1 through 4 as actively disengaged.

Some other example questions to consider when assessing employee engagement are shown in the table in Figure 2 but are by no means exhaustive.

I receive regular and due recognition for the work that I perform.
I feel I am listened to and that my opinions count.
I feel my personal development is being adequately addressed.
I feel that opportunities to learn and grow are presented to me.
I feel that my role is essential to the success of my workgroup / company.
I feel that I fit within the culture of my workgroup / company.

Any number of questions and resulting metrics can be used to audit the engagement level of a call-center, but the important thing is to recognize the critical role that a manager plays. Aggregated results can be measured on the example scale described above and averaged by each element of engagement. The concept here applies not only to call-centers but to any workgroup within an organization. Organizations having multiple-call centers might find this as an attractive way to compare and ensure consistency of engagement across the enterprise.

Consider these seven key elements as needed to manage, improve, motivate, and sustain employee engagement:

1. Ensure that the vision and mission of both the organization and the local workgroup are clear and can be articulated.
2. Create performance expectations up front so that everyone is clear and everyone accepts their role and responsibility.
3. Show employees regularly how their work contributes to the success of their individual workgroup and overall company success.
4. Invest in employee training and development.

5. Regularly ask employees for feedback and respond accordingly.
6. Rewards and recognition forwork well done.
7. Compensate commensurately.

In the end, you will be perfecting your customer's experience through the level of your employee's engagement. Your customer's input will be actionable in modifying the employee's behavior. The organization will be more on target with the strategic objectives. The Voice of the Customer will be told and heard. Your business will meet or exceed any reasonable financial targets. All of these successes relate to the level of employee engagement and result in building and maintaining customer loyalty, which we know, leads to increased and more profitable revenues. That is the value proposition, isn't it?

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