



Ask Affy

Need advice? Ask Affy!

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I am a senior call centre manager with six team leaders reporting to me. I am committed to transforming the mindset of my team to spend time on activities that directly improve the customer experience. One specific way that I believe I can achieve this is by changing the way we approach calibration sessions. I feel we get very little accomplished in these meetings and want to know if there is a better way of using this time?

Signed, Lily

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Getting a return on investment from all meetings should be on everyone's agenda. Assembling a group in a meeting room for one hour is a costly undertaking and is only worthwhile if the time spent leads to a specific result.

A number of contact centre leaders have told me about their cost per quality assessment (including calibration sessions) is in the range of \$100 per rep per month. Multiply that by 100 agents and it is not hard to figure out if the \$10,000 you are spending is making a difference to your customer experience.

Lily, you have figured (congratulations!) out that traditional calibration sessions do not improve the customer experience in a meaningful way. You are not alone! Many call centre professionals have similar views and have shared their dissatisfaction with calibration sessions with me.

You know the feeling...you listen to a random call and then argue or debate every line item on the call evaluation form...only to walk away with nothing valuable to implement with your reps. This is especially true if the call evaluation form has a confusing mix of compliance related items like accuracy of information, authenticating the customer, as well as customer service expectations like polite and courteous, built rapport, showed empathy, etc.

These sessions tend to be opinion based about how any one individual felt about the customer experience. The truth is there is only one person who can accurately do this evaluation and that is the customer! The customer can tell us if we communicated the information accurately and if we set them up for success going forward.

At SwitchGear, we've created a Leadership Best Practice that turns unproductive time into a win-win for leaders, reps, and customers. A proactive way to create consistent delivery of the customer experience is to listen to calls together on a regular basis and calibrate on WHAT and HOW you would COACH a similar call in the future. We call these sessions Coaching Collaborations and here's a high level "how-to":

1. Replace your calibration sessions with Coaching Collaborations- there is no need to create more meetings!
2. Choose a call to listen to – our advice is to choose one that is less than six minutes long, if possible.
3. Encourage the participants to take detailed notes of the call. A word of advice – there is an art to this type of note taking!
4. Ask each participant to be very specific and identify a "Did Well" from the call.
5. Ask each participant to be very specific and identify a "Do Differently" from the call.
6. We use our Hierarchy of Learning (a systematic method defining what a rep should know or be able to do first, second and third) to gain group agreement on one "Do Differently".
7. Team leaders should buddy up with each other and role-play the expected coaching session for the chosen "Do Differently".
8. Debrief the role-play and gain learning about coaching "Did Wells" and "Do Differentlies."
9. We have an established list of debrief questions that are highly effective for these sessions. If you are interested in obtaining the complete list, email me at afshan@switchgear.ca and I'd be happy to share them with you.
10. Repeat the process with another call.
11. Summarize the learning and ask each Team Leader, "What one or two insights will you be taking away and implementing in your coaching immediately after this session?"

Lily, my last piece of advice for you is to be sure you have a Customer Experience Map that everyone follows (i.e., Lifecycle of a Call or a "call-flow"). Keep the focus on skill and don't turn it into a compliance exercise. By replacing your traditional calibration sessions with Coaching Collaborations, you are on your way to achieving your goals – moving away from an evaluation culture, heading towards a coaching culture, and getting an ROI by improving your customer experience. Best of luck!

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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