

The Missing Piece for Great Customer Experience

Customer service and call centers have undergone a massive shift over the last few years, with billions of dollars spent on technology to drive down costs and increase customer satisfaction. Countless studies have shown the importance of the call center on Customer retention. Poor Customer service is the primary reason Customers site for leaving. You and I are as displeased as ever and mainly with the amount of time we spend talking to computers or unpleasant or incapable call center agents.

How can this management challenge have received so much attention and investment, yet still be so problematic?

Customer Satisfaction = Agent Satisfaction

Despite the growth of mobile access to the web, customers still first call a company for help, Harris Interactive in 2013 showed that 70% still go to the phones as their first contact with a company. Customers have said time and again that they prefer to speak with a “live” person rather than a voice response system, and 80% believe that the experience they have with an agent represents the products and services of the company itself.

Does this mean that call centers should stop using auto-response and voice interaction systems? No, but it does mean that customers must be given a chance to speak with a “live” agent – and when they do they must have a positive experience.

Customers have simple expectations. Research shows they expect agents to be respectful, knowledgeable, friendly, patient, sympathetic, and to be able to solve their problems. Simple as they are, call center agents certainly cannot deliver on these expectations if they themselves are having a bad experience at work. In order to deliver the best customer experience a company needs to deliver the best experience to their agents. An unhappy agent cannot make a happy customer.

New Priorities

When you have companies sitting somewhere between “agents are the problem and a necessary evil to be replaced”, to “agents are our most strategic asset in retaining and acquiring customers” you end up with a lot of money being misspent on changes, training, technologies, that ultimately don’t affect customer satisfaction. Why? Because the investments were not made with the explicit objective of first improving call center agents’ experiences.

There are four priority areas that drive an agent’s experience – and their ability to perform at their best.

Motivation

Agent motivation comes from satisfying basic needs, like feeling secure in their job and receiving fair compensation, to understanding a motivating corporate mission and feeling like they are contributing to it, and being recognized for that contribution. Some agents may even want to see career advancement opportunities within the call center or in other parts of their company. In many organizations call center agent turnover is very high and often driven by the lack of motivation of the agents. Many call center managers have resigned themselves to this and believe that the high turnover is a fact of life. It is not. Management best practices coupled with the technology

to allow improved communications, career management, performance feedback, gamification, and teamwork can have a dramatic effect on agent motivation and effectiveness.

Knowledge

Knowledge is about training and access to information or expertise. When agents are provided with one-time training and are looking up information in paper-based or even searchable online manuals, the collective knowledge and experience of the entire agent staff (and any other internal capabilities) are wasted. With the speech recognition, active directories and online collaboration tools that are available today there is no reason why agents cannot quickly and easily find what they need to solve a customer's problem. Build in mechanisms to provide on-demand training and online chat rooms for agents to brainstorm new ideas and the agents' collective knowledge base will expand exponentially.

Empowerment

When agents lack knowledge or access to information they can be neither trusted nor empowered to solve the customers' problems. Their autonomy is limited and they must hand off calls to multiple internal groups to get resolution. The same is true when the agents do not have user-friendly tools. It's impossible for an agent to be empowered when the thinking and processing time is eclipsed by time figuring out cumbersome tools. Give them the tools and give them more authority and their ability to service their customers will surprise you. Empower them further by allowing them more options for creative input into the work they perform, and giving them flexibility in scheduling their work, and you unlock their ability to get their job done in the most effective and efficient way.

Visibility

Agents cannot be effective when they are working in a black box. They need to know where they stand on customer satisfaction, personal and team operational metrics, personal time, and they need to be able to make their own thoughts and feedback visible to their supervisors. Today many companies still rely on periodic reporting mechanisms to provide incomplete performance information to agents and supervisors. It is clear that real performance improvements come when agents and supervisors can get immediate feedback on interactions. When more immediate results can be tracked then it

becomes possible to run real-time competitions and directly tie performance enhancement to incentives. That is where companies see the best results.

From Leap of Faith to Plan of Action

Many call center investments are made with simply the hope of improving customer satisfaction. There has been precious little measurement on the impact of the investments on the agent experience and ultimately on the resulting improvement in customer satisfaction and efficiency. Our experience shows that organizations are effective at improving their overall performance and achieve the highest return on investment when they define plans that explicitly consider the following:

- Keep the agent's experience at the center of the changes you are making. If you can't see how a change improves the agent experience, don't do it.
- Use technology, automation and tools not for their own sake or for the sake of taking agents out of the contact loop, but to support agents and supervisors with what they need to be effective in their jobs.
- Plan to improve on all four of these dimensions of the agent experience simultaneously – and have a roadmap that the organization agrees to. Trying to become world class in one of these areas is virtually impossible if the company is far behind in the others.
- Define and measure the impact that you expect and achieve. This means track the change in agent experience as well as customer satisfaction and operating costs. Determine how those metrics are connected. If changes are not having any effect then adjust course.

Don't be confused, you agents and their supervisors are not the problem, they are at the core of the solution to effectively managing relationships with your customers. What it takes is a different management perspective, focus and priorities of your investment and management practices. Some day soon, when your agents ask "How can I help you?" they will really mean it and will be able to deliver.

Aspect Performance Improvement

Aspect's Performance Improvement Team can help you understand and take steps to improve your Agent and Supervisor experience. We focus on four key areas: Motivation, Knowledge, Empowerment and Visibility.

Experience Framework

Motivation

Inspiring agents and supervisors to go above and beyond the call of duty, feeling fulfilled and appreciated.

Knowledge

Ensuring agents and supervisors have the right training and tools at hand to make them successful.

Empowerment

Enabling agents and supervisors to reasonably control their day-to-day life.

Visibility

Enabling 360 feedback and providing agent and supervisors visibility into their performance.

We assess your current agent and supervisor experience, compare you to leading practices among your peers, measure you against Aspect and industry benchmarks, work with you to define how to address gaps with solutions that make sense for you, and put in place an actionable near-term execution plan.

Agent & Supervisor Experience is just one facet of the expertise Aspect's Performance Improvement Team can bring to your business. Our Community of Experts brings deep industry expertise, world class thought leadership, and hundreds of collective years working in the customer experience industry. Our focus areas – Operations Excellence, Product & Technology, and Customer Care – are designed to help you meet the challenges of today's contact center head-on, while achieving your business objectives:



Operational Excellence

Improving contact center operations resulting in enhanced overall customer service

- Agent and supervisor experience
- Customer experience evaluation
- First call resolution



Product & Technology

Helping organizations leverage their Aspect solutions to their fullest potential

- Performance tuning and optimization
- Platform migration strategy
- Disaster recovery planning



Customer Care

Preparing organizations for the relationship revolution

- Omni-channel readiness assessment and strategy
- Service delivery model strategy

Our Performance Improvement offerings can be tailored to your needs ranging from rapid self-assessment workshops, detailed opportunity assessments, and ongoing retainer-based relationships.

Contact us today to learn more about how the Aspect Performance Improvement Team can help you achieve your business goals.

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About Aspect

Aspect's fully-integrated solution unifies the three most important facets of modern contact center management: customer interaction management, workforce optimization, and back-office. Through a full suite of cloud, hosted and hybrid deployment options, we help the world's most demanding contact centers seamlessly align their people, processes and touch points to deliver remarkable customer experiences. For more information, visit www.aspect.com.

