

How to Boost The Performance of Your Call Center

When telephone sales and service reps aren't performing up to their potential, chances are they need help that they're not receiving. Here are six common failures. Why not take an inventory today to see where your organization could improve?

FAILURE TO FOCUS ON THE CUSTOMER

Reps suffer up to three serious errors in this department. They deliver more information than customers need or want, confuse them with technical terms or fail to obtain essential information. Any of these mistakes can create misunderstanding, insecurity, caution, resentment, or boredom.

Focus on the customer's welfare by preparing questions to ask before, during and after calls. Then it's easier to create and maintain their interest, personalize and condense remarks and fill one of humanity's highest priorities: the need to be understood.

When reps focus on serving and being invaluable, instead of making sales, they receive equal or greater value in return, and more important, they feel better about what they do.

FAILURE TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Questions involve. And unless reps ask the right questions, they don't receive enough facts, opinions, feelings, or values – and then confusion reigns over credibility.

Customers don't always mean what they say or say what they mean. For example, prospects commonly ask for something in the mail. Most of the time, printed data wasn't what they really wanted. More likely, they didn't have the time to speak, aren't the

decision-makers, or – they were being polite instead of telling you “no”.

Any request can waste time and money. Qualify requests to ensure they're in the customer's best interest and yours. For example, when prospects request proposals, reps have to ask what the prospect wants included in the proposal and then the decision time line, before creating the proposal.

Reps often think they're closing when they ask “do you have any questions?” or say, “We'd like to be your new supplier.” Many reps just don't understand their role is not to explain; it's to help people make decisions. To do that, they have to ask at last one commitment question after each major point in the conversation.

The purpose of the commitment question is to determine whether the prospect believes what they just heard or saw and/or whether the idea discussed brings sufficient value.

INCONSISTENT, INSUFFICIENT EDUCATION

Management often errs by training reps in a way that reduces their ability to use the information. Example, a company might deliver technical information for a week, organization and time management for two days, negotiation skills, market analysis, and motivation for a day each. This kind of training focuses on the information rather than on the application of the information.

Successful training shows salespeople how to use specific information to achieve specific results. Thus, techniques become links between problems and solutions.

FAILURE TO PROVIDE SUFFICIENT TOOLS

Headsets. Persuade your representatives to use headsets for 30 consecutive days and they'll never want to work without them again. Headsets boost energy and the ability to listen. They also reduce stress. One test shows that outbound callers using headsets produced 22% more call activity.

Database Management System. Without disciplined and consistent database management, your reps will lack essential data. Their close rates, average sales and retention rates will be lower. For your outbound efforts, this means fewer calls. Worse, the data you lose would boost the averages on your next attempts.

A calling plan. Calling plans range from verbatim scripts to basic outlines. They include specific openers, questions, closes, and descriptive statements for the most critical steps in the selling-process. Either way, performance improves when reps don't have to think about what to say and do next.

FAILURE TO SOUND CONVINCING

To sound convincing, people have to be well informed about your products or services. Yet, they don't have to know everything. It depends on the length and depth of the buyer relationship and how quickly any rep can retrieve and respond to unknown requests.

Belief is essential. Reps must believe in themselves, believe in the value they deliver to the customer and believe that they can sell everyone to whom they're speaking.

The third ingredient to sounding convincing is pathos. Feelings aren't created within others; they're transferred. So the reps need to act the way they want customers to feel when speaking. And when they're listening

your telephone reps need to listen actively. If they're too quiet or non-expressive, your customers may think they aren't paying attention.

FAILURE TO ESTABLISH AN ADVISORY ROLE

Salespeople deliver presentations, and advisors deliver recommendations.

Advisors preface their questions by advising customers of their intent up front. They speak directly; they don't use tricks and they accept responsibility for the outcome of every conversation.

Reps lose their positions as advisors when they identify themselves by first name only unless they've already established a relationship with the customer. Although customers may use the rep's first name, the position of authority, responsibility, and importance is established by how people introduce themselves.

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