

Service Case Study

Fertilizer Company: Inside Sales/Service Department

In today's high tech and demanding consumer market, customer service is mission critical. When customers are pleased, they're likely to spend more on your product or service and will call again. When sales and service representatives understand their role in this, they will keep customers coming back.

Winning Through Customer Service-New Edition was developed to help organizations win more business through excellent customer service. This sales and service program utilizes a variety of interactive training methods to target the skills, behaviors, and attitudes that have the greatest impact on understanding the customer while providing solutions. This unique approach allows organizations to customize customer service training with both classroom and Internet-based training options. In addition, the program includes the identification of essential behavioral/communication styles that help representatives understand their customers' individual styles and needs.

Impact

Participants learn to:

Demonstrate professionalism on the job while building a proactive, problem-solving culture.

Use essential communication skills in dealings with customers.

Recognize characteristics of human behavioral style and opportunities to adapt to their personal style.

Identify and utilize a structured process/model for conducting customer service transactions.

Master strategies for dealing appropriately with difficult customer situations.

This case study focuses on a fertilizer company that had a need to train their inside sales/service department in the area of customer service. Some specific objectives they wanted to meet included: how to deal with difficult customers; how to provide exceptional "internal" customer service; how to better their communication skills; how to be more professional and how to recognize and deal with different behavioral styles.

How They Did It

Winning Through Customer Service was chosen because the program covered all the skill points they were interested in; had strong learning design; had the element of behavioral styling; had an Online component, and could be worked into a format for only one day in the classroom. Most importantly, the cost was reasonable.

Time and circumstances made "shopping around" a no-value proposition. There was one other program considered but it wasn't quite right on content, skills and length.

The initial pilot included eleven customer service/sales representatives.

Fulfilling Goals and Objectives

On the day of the training, the economic buyer commented, "*The Winning Through Customer Service* program exceeded my expectations. We will now devote time to reinforcement and follow up activities to assure success in our efforts."

"The students also enjoyed the behavioral style profiling. The participants were asked to reflect on their own personal styles. This is usually an eye-opener for the participant that personalizes the differences in behavioral/communication styles and reinforces the concept of looking for and adapting to the individual customer style. It helps them to understand themselves better while recognizing certain styles of customers to make the customer service transaction end in a positive outcome for both parties involved, whether that be with an internal customer or an external customer," the Economic Buyer said.

The *Winning Through Customer Service* program allows the flexibility of choosing from many different types of communication/behavioral style survey methods. An organization may choose to use an instrument they are already using in their organization, or a product representative can recommend an instrument. This gave the organization the added benefit of choosing what was right for them.

Blending Classroom with the E-Learning Experience

The fertilizer company also incorporated the two Online skill builders to the *Winning Through Customer Service* classroom-based version. These Online customer service skill builders, *Delivering Customer Focused Service* and *Dealing with Difficult Customer Situations*, were incorporated into this training experience to use as pre-work to the Classroom-led program. Two weeks prior to the classroom instruction, all participants completed both Online courses.

The overall objective of this classroom-online "bridge" option was to cover the core skills and concepts of the program, while incorporating other media to reduce the amount of time spent away from the job. At the same time, the objective was to enhance the richness of the learning experience. Total time spent in the classroom was one day, or 8 hours away from the job.

The combination program moves at a faster pace, covering key skills and concepts, supporting details and information from the standard program. In-class reading is reduced to allow a faster pace and more in class skill practice. It requires a higher level of facilitator content knowledge and a greater focus on facilitator-led discussion. The success of the classroom/online combination is highly dependent upon participants effectively completing the Online assignments either as pre-work or post-reinforcement.

In this case, it was done as pre-work with a Help Desk Expert/Coach interacting with the students while they took the courses Online. The coach is someone within the organization that is set up as the Administrator for the Online portion of the program. Throughout these two online courses, participants answered short essay questions that were submitted directly to the online coach. The coach is notified via email that a student submitted an answer and they have the ability to respond with suggestions, comments and advice for the students. This online dialogue was useful as a starting point for some of the in-class review or role-play exercises/table group discussions.

The organization has the added benefit of keeping this information gathered through the online interactions and storing it in a database of their choice. This can serve as an organization-specific knowledge center for customer service. In addition, online passwords can be extended so that participants access the online courses again, after the classroom program, as post-reinforcement.

In this situation, the online courses can also be used as ongoing electronic performance support with responses and questions going directly to the email of a pre-assigned "customer service expert" within the organization to interact with participants. It is most beneficial if this "customer service expert" is also the classroom facilitator.

The online "coach", who also facilitates the classroom portion, has the option to get to know the students before they actually meet in the classroom. It will also give the facilitator a better understanding of individual participants and their specific customer service needs.

This case study dealt with a pilot group of 11 participants. One key learning aspect was how much more effective the initial in-classroom experience is, when the facilitator remembers something a student said in the online course and then incorporates that into a classroom discussion. The facilitator has already formed a relationship with these students through the online courses allowing the classroom activity to run that much smoother.

In this case, the students really appreciated getting feedback from their online coach. They took this information to the classroom and it made them feel comfortable and confident knowing they had some expert advice to share. With having this experience with the online courses prior to going to the classroom, the students were more willing to share experiences and participate in company specific role plays because they already had ideas on how to "win" through customer service!

Pilot Results

- 100% of the participants would recommend this course for further use in their company.
- 82% felt that the workshop was extremely relevant to their job needs.
- 91% indicated the content was clear and understandable.
- 82% felt the program was realistic in comparison with other similar courses in which they have participated.
- The video was rated as an extremely high quality video by 82% of the participants.
- 91% of the participants had an overall excellent impression of the workshop with 9% giving a good rating overall.

About the Winning Through Customer Service Family of Programs

The skills taught address the major concerns identified by over fifty organizations within the service industry and over 10 years of product field research. At the heart of this program, is a step-by-step process for conducting a customer service transaction.

Course Delivery Options

- Deliver the core classroom-based program in 1 1/2-days or three 1/2-day sessions.
 - A condensed one-day version moves faster with options for enhancing outside the classroom.
 - Organizations can choose to include behavioral/communication style profiling.
 - Use *Winning Through Customer Service* Online programs, *Delivering Customer-Focused Service* and *Dealing with Difficult Customer Situations* as pre-work or post-reinforcement.
 - Use online programs and campus chat room, discussion lounge, help desk and knowledge center for ongoing reinforcement.
 - Online courses can be used as stand-alone or with an instructor, delivered asynchronously or synchronously.
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