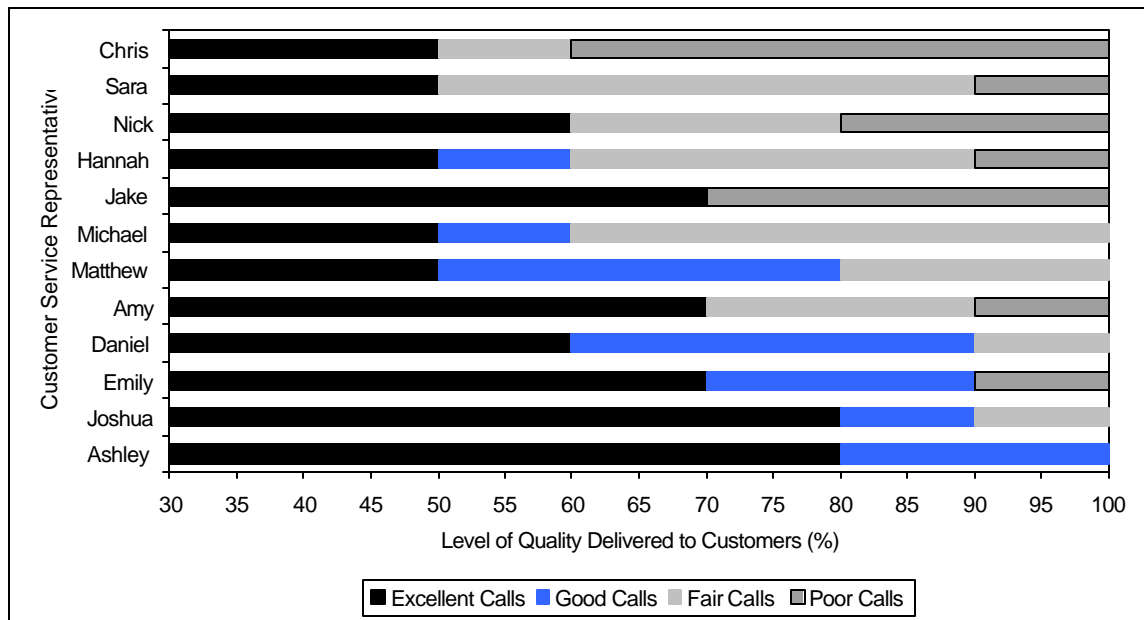


PUTTING CUSTOMERS FIRST HOW TO PROVIDE CONSISTENT, PROFESSIONAL, QUALITY SERVICE FOR INBOUND CALL CENTRES



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RESEARCH SAYS

Between January 1998 and March 2000, Canadian Call Centre Advisory Group Ltd. (CCCAG) conducted over 35 call centre seminars across North America. Attended by over 400 call centre professionals from a wide variety of public, private and not-for-profit call centre organizations, CCCAG seminar leaders opened each of these seminars by asking "What key call centre issue or question do you want to gain insight into over this two day seminar?" The top five issues - ranked in order of frequency of mention - were:

1. How to achieve a consistent service level that meets customer needs;
2. How to provide consistent, professional *one and done* customer service and how to measure it;
3. How to improve employee:
 - Morale
 - Retention
 - Absenteeism and
 - Performance;
4. How to optimize costs while balancing quality and productivity;
5. How to manage and measure the integration of the Internet into the call centre with a specific emphasis on e-mail contacts.

While call centre professionals mentioned a variety of other topics, this list clearly reflects the top five issues that are on many call centre teams' minds today.

CCCAG RESPONDS

CCCAG is producing a series of Classic Call Centre White Papers that address each of the issues that call centre professionals have identified. The white papers give CCCAG's perspective on these important issues and specifically what call centre teams can do to understand and improve them. As our call centre seminars and other work with clients continue, we will closely observe for new trends and update our top five list as changes occur in our industry. In this issue of Call Centre Classic White Papers, we explore the challenges of *Putting Customers First by providing Consistent, Professional Quality Customer Service.*

OUR ASSUMPTIONS

In preparing this paper, the author has assumed that:

1. The call centres in question are primarily responding to inbound calls and are using an Automatic Call Distributor (ACD), equipped with management reporting capability
2. Readers of this white paper have a basic understanding of call centres;
3. Call centres that will benefit from this white paper are in union and non-unionized environments.

THE CASE FOR QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE

A 1998 study by Ernst and Young for the Telecommunication International Benchmarking Consortium (TIBC) focussed on identifying the costs of providing service to customers using various formats. The illustration below summarizes the results.

Leading Practice: Channel costs vary with Functionality

Channel	Cost/Channel	Functionality
Call Centre (Human)	\$1.56/minute*	Two-way communication channel used for complex, value-added functions.
Kiosk (Bank machine)	\$1.05/transaction*	Distribution outlet for automated transactions: money, tickets, certificates, cards, bill payments etc.
IVR (Self-Serve)	\$0.35 - \$0.56/transaction*	Automating transactions: a) More effective call routing b) Information c) Advertising (while on hold)
Internet/Web	\$0.01/transaction*	Convenience of self-service and flexibility (value add): a) Information vehicle b) Advertising vehicle (pull/push) c) Education d) Tools e) Sales and services (becoming two-way)

*Sources: Financial Post (January 25, 1997) end-to-end costs; TIBC Ernst & Young

THREE KEY OBSERVATIONS

1. The cost of providing transaction type service to customers, i.e. Kiosk, IVR, e-commerce, is getting less and less expensive. In fact, an e-commerce transaction on the Internet today is estimated at less than one cent. By contrast, the cost to build and retain relationships with customers by Customer Service Representative continues to increase in cost.
2. To remain competitive, call centres must correctly position their customer contact strategy so as to ensure that customer service representatives are handling the complex, more difficult customer requirements and positioning technology to manage the simpler, enquiry type transaction.
3. Moving forward, call centres need to ensure that customers are receiving consistent, professional service and that the measurement systems in place support the need to resolve complex issues and add value beyond the initial task/call.

THE CHALLENGE - DO CUSTOMERS COME FIRST?

If quality were easy to measure in a call centre environment, everyone would be doing it, right? Let's be clear. As you read on, you will discover that measuring quality is not easy or simple to do in a call centre environment. It takes resources, commitment and a sincere desire to want to improve service to customers - to put customers first. Having said that, the reason most call centres do not measure quality is because they are not prepared to invest the time, money and resources required to do it. A realistic prediction for those call centre teams that continue to choose *not* to measure and improve call quality is that they will likely perish. Perhaps by being put out of business by their competitors or perhaps the call centre business will be outsourced to a third party who is able to meet customer needs and expectations.

FACT: Of the 14 different companies that provided third party call centre services that attended CCCAG call centre seminars in the past year, 86%, or 12 out of 14, had in place some form of advanced quality call measurement system. Of the more than 140 companies attending the seminars that provided call centre type service for their own company, 16%, or 22 out of 140, had in place some form of advanced quality call measurement system. Do you notice a trend here?

FACT: Of the more than 140 companies who attended CCCAG call centre seminars in the past year, 100% believed that customers wanted: a) first call resolution, b) would pay extra for it and c) that first call resolution should be measured. Of these companies, 83% were not measuring it.

Today, both customers and organizations place more and more emphasis on first call resolution, which is clearly a quality issue. It follows then that to improve first call resolution, one has to understand it from a skill and knowledge enhancement opportunity. This issue is one that many call centre teams are struggling with today.

THE RESPONSE - BEST PRACTICES. SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE.

What if there was a way to measure call quality that was every bit as accurate as the productivity, service level and financial measures that are primarily derived from Automatic Call Distributors?

What if there was a way to measure the quality of call handling that had the means of providing Quantitative and Qualitative feedback to frontline representatives?

What if there was a way to measure quality that was equally effective in a union or non-union environment and that established clear Call Quality Standards and Expectations for the call centre team?

Read on - there are ways.

CCCAG is pleased to provide an overview of the Guiding Principles and Best Practices for sampling call quality that are the framework of CCCAG's Total Quality Competency™ (TQC™).

TQC™ GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND BEST PRACTICES

Guiding Principle 1: Quality Must Be Defined

Call Handling Quality needs to be defined and understood by everyone in the call centre who either delivers or supports the delivery of call quality to customers.

TQC™ Best Practice 1

With the aid of a call centre cross functional group, a Quality Call Description is prepared that describes what excellent quality would represent under the following four Quality Pillars:

- What benefits the Customer
- What benefits the Organization
- Courtesy and Etiquette
- Call Length

Guiding Principle 2 - Quality Is Every Employee's Responsibility

Quality is not the sole responsibility of management. Quality is everyone's responsibility that works in and/or supports the call centre frontline employees.

TQC™ Best Practice 2

A cross section of call centre employees is invited to apply to become Quality Call Samplers. These include: Customer Service Representatives, call centre supervisors and managers, trainers, coaches, information technology resources, etc. Examples of prerequisites for quality call samplers would include meeting job requirements and have the competence to sample the quality of the calls they will be listening to.

Guiding Principle 3 - Sampling Quality Requires Training and Certification

A rigorous certification process exists to ensure that those who sample call quality are and remain certified to do so as long as they hold the title of Quality Call Sampler.

TQC™ Best Practice 3

Using a proven technique called Call Quality calibration and the Quality Call Description (as described in Best Practice 1), Quality Call Samplers work together listening to pre-recorded calls and, through call calibration, rate each call. After rating each call, the samplers discuss each call until an overall rating has been agreed to. This process is continued until the group reaches an acceptable level of calibration - typically achieved when 85% of the time they rate a call with the same overall quality rating.

Guiding Principle 4 - Quality Feedback Must Be Meaningful

Quantitative and Qualitative weighted scoring systems provide insight into individual, team and the call centre's level of call quality.

TQC™ Best Practice 4

Using a holistic approach to listening and sampling quality, where the entire call is listened to and compared to the Quality Call Description (refer to Best Practice 1), the following two measurement approaches are taken:

Quantitative - Each call sampled is assigned one of four possible ratings.

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

Each of these ratings is linked to a value that has a numerical equivalency.

Qualitative - In addition to assigning a numerical rating for each call sampled, quality call samplers are trained to write useful comments that relate directly to the Quality Call Description. These useful comments follow a *quality present, quality absent* format. The comments support the numerical ratings assigned to the call while providing insight into skill and/or knowledge areas of improvement.

Guiding Principle 5 - Quality Feedback Must Be Valid and Frequent

A statistically valid sample size must be collected randomly on a frequent basis. Feedback must be provided on a regular basis.

TQC™ Best Practice 5

A statistically valid sample size of calls is collected every two weeks for each customer service representative. The feedback is provided every two weeks in the format prescribed in Best Practice 4.

Guiding Principle 6- Quality Improvement Through Skill and Knowledge

Call centre frontline employees (including supervisors and managers) have access to skill and knowledge enhancement tools and techniques.

TQC™ Best Practice 6

A job competency process, including self-assessments and personal growth and training tools, is readily available and employees have been trained in their use and application. Respecting the commitment to schedule time for customer service representatives' skill and knowledge improvement activities, a corresponding process is in place so those that need training the most have first access to the training time available.

Guiding Principle 7 - Quality Standards and Expectations are Clear

Skill and Knowledge competency for call quality is defined and communicated to all employees for front line customer service representatives and their managers.

TQC™ Best Practice 7

After installing a quality process as described in Best Practices 1 through 6, the results are used to determine a *range* when quality training is complete, or put another way, Job Competency has been achieved. Using data and ensuring that the call quality competency range is challenging yet realistic, specific quality standards and expectations can be established for individual employees, teams and the call centre.

Guiding Principles + Best Practices = Total Quality Competency™

By using the Guiding Principles as a framework, and implementing the Best Practices as a system, call centres that implement this type of system can join best

in class call centres that are enjoying outstanding quality results. Organizations like Nortel Networks, CIBC, IBM, Bell Canada, SHL Systemhouse, Bank of Montreal, FEDEX and many others have implemented call centre quality systems that share similar described best practices.

IN SUMMARY - CUSTOMERS DO COME FIRST!

Let us look at the benefits of the Total Quality Competency™ system through the lens of the C.E.O. - C.ustomers, E.mployees, and the O.rganization.

C.ustomers

Our research shows that the key drivers to achieving high levels of customer quality are Access, Resolution and Treatment. Let's look at each briefly:

Access - is providing fast access to a customer service representative;

Resolution - is resolving the reason why the customer called, in one contact;

Treatment - is treating customers with dignity and respect.

Each of these components is critical for providing consistent and reliable service to customers. It is not surprising then that CCCAG has taken each of the ART factors into account when developing Total Quality Competency™ (TQC™).

E.mployees

Providing regular, meaningful quality call feedback is something that call centre employees have been asking for and now are demanding. The feedback loops in TQC™ have received high praise from call centres where it has been implemented.

O.rganization

Within nine to twelve months of implementing and supporting TQC™, most call centre teams report quality improvement of between 15 and 30%, reduced handle times and significantly improved first call resolution. The other benefits most often mentioned are that of having a quality process in place to provide a balance to productivity, and finally, having a measure of First Call Resolution.

Customers tend to judge organizations that use call centres as a customer gateway in a number of ways. Certainly, the first impression is based on how long customers have to wait to talk with a customer service representative. Understanding that providing a stable, consistent service level that meets customer needs is important, this alone, however, is not enough. It's what we do after we answer the call that leaves the lasting impressions with customers. These lasting impressions are what cause customers to recommend our call centre and repurchase our products. These lasting impressions are also most often delivered by a customer service representative. If follows then that if we are to improve call centre quality, as delivered through customer service representatives, we must understand the skill and knowledge improvement opportunities and have a focused, effective methodology to do this. It is important that we understand that regardless of which type of call quality improvement we choose, it has the capability to do this.

Achieving consistent, professional quality customer service is the most critical standard by which customers judge call centres. Today, having products and services that are in demand is merely an entrance fee into the market - it no longer predicts that you will be a long-term player. How these products and services are delivered is what will differentiate you in the marketplace and determine whether customers continue to do business with you. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, providing and measuring consistent, professional quality service is not easy. In fact, the second top reason (behind service level management) to outsource the call centre is the inability to consistently provide superior, quality customer service.

Customers Do Come First! Senior call centre leaders have a serious and significant responsibility to equip the call centre team to be completely successful in providing consistent, professional quality service. "If you build it they will come!" Customers will reward the call centres that do by coming back repeatedly to repurchase their products and recommend the

organization (represented by the call centre) to their family and friends.

CANADIAN CALL CENTRE ADVISORY GROUP LTD.

**A Promise of Performance.
A Tradition of Trust.**

This past year, three ministries in the Ontario Government; NOKIA Mobile Phones Technical Support Center in Tampa, FL; United Airlines Flight Attendant Service Center at O'Hare International Airport, Chicago, IL; City of Burlington; and many other call centre teams have relied on CCCAG to help them resolve their most pressing concerns - like helping them Put Customers First by implementing the Total Quality Competency™ system of best practices.

CCCAG's sole focus is in providing advice and guidance to call centres. We have over 40 years of call centre operations experience. Our proven approach and methodologies - to identify call centres' most pressing improvement issues and helping to resolve these through the proven application of call centre best practices - work. Maybe it's time you considered putting some of CCCAG's proven products and experience to work for you!

"Why would you not call CCCAG to learn more about Total Quality Competency™ and how CCCAG can help you and your call centre team?"

If you are interested in receiving other Call Centre Classic White Papers or want further information about CCCAG's proven products and services, please contact us at:

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