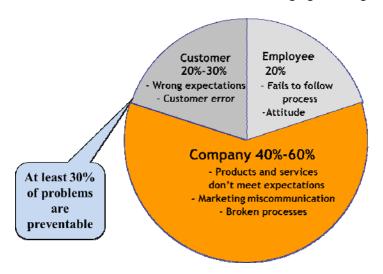# Your Customer Service Reps are NOT the Primary Cause of Customer Dissatisfaction – Reallocate Your Quality Resources to the Real Causes

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Almost all service executives and call center directors spend most of their management time focused on the front line customer service representatives (CSRs). While this may seem logical, it is based on the incorrect supposition that the CSR is the primary cause of customer dissatisfaction. In fact, my analysis of data from several hundred service operations is that, at most, 20 percent of dissatisfaction is due to CSRs misbehaving, e.g. attitude, sloppiness, errors, failing to follow proscribed policy.   A much greater percentage is caused by the CSR delivering service exactly as mandated by management – it is just that such service and policies do not leave the customer satisfied. This is not the CSRs fault, it is management's fault.

Overall causes of dissatisfaction

Across all industries, I have found the following figure is a good portrayal of the cause of customer dissatisfaction.

There are four broad causes of dissatisfaction. The specific allocations vary by industry:

- 10-20% is due to employees with will or skill issues, e.g. poorly trained or motivated
- 20-30% is due to marketing and sales not setting proper customer expectations during the sales or onboarding process
- 20-50% is due to product and process design issues, problems are built into the experience
- 20-30% is due to customer actions such as mistakes, not reading directions or unreasonable expectation

The proper approach to allocate your scarce surveys and monitoring resources

Most companies allocate the bulk of their survey and monitoring resources to identifying the performance of every CSR. This is done by doing random sample surveys of all contacts. The first problem is that the CSR is not the cause of most dissatisfaction. The second problem is that 70-80 percent of all contacts are so simple anyone could handle them and you are not learning anything from either listening to the call or surveying the customer (while you are creating extra survey burden on the customer).

A better approach to allocation of survey, monitoring and analytical resources is as follows:

- 30% to CSR and team evaluation – focus on the difficult calls and "plug" the score for the 70% of simple calls you do not bother to listen to because they you will not learn anything from them. Encourage your supervisors to listen to calls real time and give real time positive feedback on the fly.

- 30% devoted to identifying response rules and processes that systematically lead to dissatisfaction, escalations and repeat calls.

- 40% to identification and documentation of strategic issues such as customer errors, marketing and onboarding that leads to incorrect expectations and unpleasant surprises and product and process design issues with inherent problems.

Getting Started

- Analyze your survey data by type of issue. You will find 70 percent of issues are consistently resolved by all reps. Identify the five issues where, regardless of CSR, the customer is less than satisfied. These are issues where the response rule or process are not effective.

- Ask your CSRs for the top five types of contacts that are preventable if marketing communicated more effectively and/or customers were better educated. You will find that just those five issues probably are responsible for at least 10 percent of your workload. Identify how marketing and website resources could be modified to more properly set expectations and reduce those contacts.

- As you modify response rules and processes as well as marketing and customer education processes, communicate to the front line so they have hope and see that their input is being used. I find that newsletters posted in bathrooms cut through filtering by supervisors. Two of our clients have named such newsletters, 'Flush Facts" and " The Stall Street Journal."

- The company's website must be reoriented to balance education and support with traditional marketing and sales activities. Education, support, expectation setting and a new customer orientation portal should all be featured prominently on the home page – not three clicks inside.

- Educate the marketing and sales departments that proactive communication is a delighter and that setting proper customer expectations will create long term loyalty.

Achieving each of these prerequisites is an ongoing journey, not a quick action.

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