

Improving Quality Measurement and the Overall Customer Experience Means Moving Into the Gray

By Larry Willert, Vice President of Performance Development, Ulysses Learning

Today, savvy organizations realize that providing a better customer experience is what is going to set them apart and give them the competitive edge. In order to keep improving this customer experience, it has to be monitored, measured and coached, which is the basis for strong quality management.

Quality management used to be driven by quantitative results, which was technical and black-and-white. For example, the quality team would examine questions such as “Did the rep follow policy or stay in compliance?” If the answer was “yes”, the rep received a high mark.

Research shows that there is much more to managing quality – and driving a better customer experience – than simply being technically correct or following policy. The rep needs to do it in a way that is customer-focused as well.

To improve their quality results, organizations need to take a step back and examine the role that their quality team plays. Driving a better customer experience starts at the top of an organization, includes the entire contact center team and coaches, and integrates the quality team. This backing and support gives the reps at the frontline the tools they need to provide the experience today’s customers’ demand, while still meeting the demands of the organization.



QueuedIn Magazine A Contact Center Association April 2012

Quality best practices include:

1. Balance your scorecard: In the past, the quality process was largely defined by quantitative metrics such as talk time, abandonment rate, after-call work and overall AHT. Today, in order to drive a competitive customer experience, the quality process must focus equally on qualitative measures, known as soft skills. To balance the scorecard, it should include an “overall customer experience” rating that shows if the final customer impression was a “Wow”, “Neutral” or “Negative” – and which of the qualitative behaviors most contributed to the customer experience. As such, a rep’s quality score needs to be reflective of behaviors that drive a better customer experience, such as “acknowledging the customer,” “tone of voice,” “strong word choices” and “effectively managing dead-air.”

2. Live in the gray: As mentioned above, a quality score used to be defined by black-and-white standards. Reps were scored on how quickly they answered the call and whether they gave accurate information and followed appropriate guidelines. Now, we’re asking reps to step into the gray and intuitively understand the intent of the behaviors they’re being asked to do. For example: reps are told to use strong,

confident word choices. A rep may say, “I can see what I can do.” While they said the words “I can”, the word choice doesn't instill confidence, so they didn’t intuitively meet the intent of the behavior. They need to live in the gray and intuitively understand what the customer needs.

“Quality measurement is so much more than a checklist of behaviors, a form or a score,” agreed Judy Matijevich, Customer Contact & Operations Executive. “It’s a sum of many parts. In my contact center organization, quality was based on customer feedback and ‘journey to excellence’ performance – our call monitoring and coaching philosophy. It’s absolutely critical that reps, supervisors and quality coaches are all on the same page in terms of what customers expect and how to meet and exceed those expectations.”

3. Build judgment at work skills. The difference between a good and bad customer experience is your rep’s ability to use good judgment and your quality team’s ability to use good judgment on how they score it and coach it. Reps need to learn how to use the appropriate behaviors in the appropriate situation, which can be difficult to teach since most managers

are more comfortable coaching to metrics versus coaching to the subjective behaviors.

For instance, an elderly caller was having technical difficulties with the automated payment system, specifically stating that he preferred to talk with a live person. If the rep attempted to cross-sell or upsell the online self-service option at the end of the call, because the supervisor told the team to focus on that, this would be an example of meeting a behavior, but not using good judgment as far as the customer is concerned. Another example is the requirement to ask if there is anything else the rep can help a customer with at the conclusion of the call. This may not be the best idea if the call was emotional, if the customer did not get the answer they wanted (because it was not possible) or if the caller is still unhappy at the end of the call. Asking “is there anything else I can help you with?” may send the customer into a fury again.

Instead, a rep using good judgment would ask a closing question to satisfy the needs of the customer without creating more emotion.

4.Morph your quality team into your coaching team. Quality– and the people who measured it – used to be relegated to the background of contact centers. They didn’t put their names on quality scorecards and even sat apart in the lunchroom. To improve quality, the quality team needs to partner with the frontline. They need to be visible, out on the floor on a regular basis and able to give feedback that is meaningful and useful. In addition, the quality team needs to be involved in the training and coaching process. This way, they are able to have open, honest discussions with the team to focus on the customer experience. Quality should be viewed as performance development, not performance policing.

How organizations are transforming quality at work.

The move to break down the barriers between the quality team and frontline is happening with increasing frequency. A Fortune 500 company knew it needed to improve its customer experience. It reviewed its quality process, which was cumbersome at best. It involved having its quality team conduct assessments on calls and then sending the recorded calls and scored monitoring form to the supervisor. After the supervisor reviewed the call and score, they either disputed the score and returned it to the quality team for another review or forwarded it to the rep. Not surprisingly, this process was time consuming and didn’t have the desired impact on key customer experience measures and behavioral change.

To revise their quality process into a more holistic approach, the company began by including both the quality team and supervisors on weekly calibrations, where calls were played and assessed as a team. The team discussed the behaviors that impacted the customer experience and practiced how they would coach the rep on this critical behavior. Next, the company rolled out a team coaching concept that enabled both the supervisors and quality team to provide face-to-face feedback to the rep.

Once this was in place, the company saw a drastic improvement in the post-call, customer experience assessments. And because the quality team was able to offer coaching and problem-solving to the frontline, they saw their perceived value rise.

Judy Matijevich’s contact center took a similar approach.

“Developing partnerships between quality teams, training teams and frontline teams is an excellent way to ensure everyone is on the same page when it comes to the customer experience,” she said. “I found that building customer-focused quality goals and metrics into everyone’s performance objectives reinforces the partnership and improves the customer experience.”

In short, when it comes to delivering and measuring quality, learning to live in the gray can lead to a pot of gold.