Yes, FCR continues to be a leading indicator for call center performance in 2013

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First call resolution (FCR) continues to be a leading metric to gauge the effectiveness of contact centers and how loyal your customers are to your organization. As you know, FCR is typically defined as the percentage of customer calls that are resolved on the first try.

But, I'm going to begin by letting you in on an industry secret: FCR is nothing more than a measurement of customer perception and whether or not the customer perceived the issue was resolved. Because this metric is based on subjective perception, trying to measure and improve FCR is a difficult task for most organizations.

There are several factors beyond the organization's control that influence the FCR score. First, the rep might do everything in his or her power to resolve an issue, but if the customer doesn't believe the issue was solved, FCR will suffer. Similarly, the organization might do everything it can to resolve the customer's issue, but again, if it can't solve the problem in the eyes of the customer, FCR suffers. Lastly, both the organization and the rep may do everything perfectly, but because customers' perceptions are shaped by other industries and factors beyond the organization's control, the customer still doesn't feel the issue was resolved satisfactorily.

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What can call centers do?

The answer lies in teaching reps how to make good decisions in the moment.

This Includes:

- Using confident word choices rather than weak ones, such as "I can absolutely help you" rather than "I'll try my best to help you"
- Giving customers the illusion of control, while maintaining it throughout the call, such as "Mr. Smith would you prefer to pay the fee with a credit card or a check?"
- Making sure the rep plants the seed around the idea of call resolution by using words like "resolve" and asking the customer "Did I answer all of your questions or "Did I resolve your issue today?"

Showing your reps the steps to confidently manage their calls will help improve FCR, even when the rep isn't able to solve the customer's problem.

For example, Hurricane Sandy recently decimated the East Coast and caused hundreds of thousands to lose power, many for days. Customers calling into the utility companies wanted to know when their power would be restored, but the reps – and the utility companies – had no way of knowing when they could restore power in the face of an unprecedented natural disaster.

While the actual answer to the customer's question would be "We have no way of knowing when your power will be restored," there is a better way for reps to respond. A savvy rep would let the customer know that the company is in control of the situation by saying, "We have all of our trucks and crews out on the road right now, working around the clock to restore power to our customers. We can provide you updates by automated phone updates or by email."

While the response doesn't solve the customer's problem, it uses confident word choices and lets the caller know that they are being taken seriously and that the utility is doing all it can to restore their power, as quickly as possible. It also gives the customers choices regarding how they want to be serviced. Responses like this have a direct correlation to increased FCR scores.

Developing Judgment at Work

The best way to teach reps to make these confident word choices and take control of each call is to help them develop their "judgment at work" skills.

When trying to best describe what judgment at work is, I like to use the analogy of stopping on a hill while learning to drive a stick shift. Making better decisions– and just better judgment – in the moment is being able to discern which pedal is the clutch and using it the right way so you don't roll down the hill and into the car behind you. Learning this takes practice, both in a car and in a call center.

To incorporate successful call strategies into their calls, reps need to be able to learn and practice in a safe environment – and not on actual customers. This is why simulation-based eLearning works so well. Reps are able to make mistakes and learn from them, which is proven to be the best way to teach key training.

The next step is coaching, which is proven to help agents reinforce key behaviors and skills. Coaching allows managers to give direct, prescriptive feedback on actual behaviors, making it easier for reps to view this feedback as developmental and not punitive.

Short-term FCR Fixes Don't Work

In the effort to accomplish first call resolution, many in the industry lose sight of the bigger goal, which is to provide a better customer experience. Short-cutting the process and using quick fixes may improve the FCR metric in the short term, but won't benefit the customer and the organization in the long run.

Fixes such as scripting a rep or telling the rep they need to meet a certain FCR score might work in short term, but those results won't be sustainable. The only way for reps – and organizations as whole – to improve FCR is to make behavioral changes. And, these changes only come with training and reinforcement.

Ultimately, improving first call resolution takes time. But the end result is better metrics for your call center – and a better experience for your customers... which is what I also call a win-win!