

Relying on Coaching and Training During a Trying Year

Premera Blue Cross is a member of a family of companies in the Pacific Northwest that provide comprehensive healthcare coverage, benefit services and related products to over 1.7 million people, from individuals to Fortune 100 companies.

The Challenge

With the rollout of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), health plans such as Premera Blue Cross faced a number of customer service challenges – and its reps were taking the heat on the front line. Premera began working with many people who were uninsured and unclear about the insurance options that were available to them. Adding to the challenge, these callers were displaying a heightened level of emotion.

“At the same time, we didn’t have all the answers because we were dealing with new procedures from the government, many of which had yet to be finalized” said Dave Floden, Director of Customer Service at Premera BlueCross.

During this year of change and uncertainty, Premera knew it would be difficult to maintain its superior FCR (first call resolution) scores. It wanted to ensure its reps would be able help consumers navigate the choices they faced and be able to diffuse challenging situations.

“Ulysses Learning really helped us manage FCR with all the changes due to the Affordable Care Act. The ACA introduced many new options and with many consumers purchasing our plans through state-based exchanges, we didn’t control a large part of the process which meant we didn’t have all the answers. Ulysses helped us through all of this.”

– Dave Floden,
Director of Customer Service at Premera BlueCross

Taking Empathy to the next level...

Washington State, which is in Premera’s service area, has recently seen a number of extreme forest fires. Premera realizes that when a member is faced with a catastrophe like this, they may not be able to pay their health plan bill on time.

“Even if their account is delinquent, we’re making sure they’re still getting their prescriptions and have access to care when they need it. At Premera, we empathize with their situation. We understand that that their health is more important in a time like this,” said Floden.

The Solution

Premera Blue Cross relied on its relationship and entrenched training from Ulysses Learning to drive a better experience for all of its members. Over the past several years, Ulysses Learning has worked closely with Premera to provide training, coaching, quality monitoring and on-going sustainment support. To counteract the impact of the Affordable Care Act on its customer experience, Premera has put even greater emphasis on training, coaching and mentoring.

“Ulysses Learning’s CoachingMentor has really helped. Our FCR stats tend to be higher than many in the industry and I attribute that to Ulysses,” said Floden. “We’ve developed vital skills such as asking clarifying questions, resolving the issue and following up. This helps us because the customer doesn’t have to call back.” While Premera isn’t able to control every step of a customer’s experience, it has been able to give its reps the tools to

navigate these challenging calls through all of the changes in the Affordable Care Act.

“We’re working with an entity we haven’t worked with before, the government. For example, the customer is saying ‘We’ve paid our bill’, but because they make their payments to the state’s exchange, we may not have any record of it. We’re empathizing with our customer and working to make sure they have what they need,” said Floden.

“Because of the Affordable Care Act, it had been an improvement year. We’re spending enormous effort coaching, mentoring and retaining – and because of this, I’ve seen a lot of positive changes progressing in the last few months.”

– Dave Floden,
Director of Customer Service at Premera BlueCross

An additional benefit of this training is a decrease in AHT (average handle time). While

Premera doesn’t focus heavily on AHT, it realizes that it is a component of the overall customer experience.

“The reps have become so much more confident,” Floden added.



Since 1995, Ulysses Learning has helped organizations of all sizes improve their customer service, sales and coaching performance. Using online, role playing simulations, Ulysses helps build decision making and advanced interaction skills in contact centers and at all points of customer interaction through the organization. We spent four years in research and development to create the validated content and proven methods to help companies effectively train their front line, engage their leaders and ultimately boost their customer base. Our simulations deal directly with the different type of emotions and challenges that customer service agents face today.

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