

Change Employee Habits Through Better Communication

If we don't explain why we're asking employees to make a change and then tell them how to make the change, it's likely our organization won't see the changes we seek.

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When we were kids, we were asked to do things by our parents, such as brushing our teeth every evening. Some of us were told why and others were told, "JUST TO DO IT." A handful of the more dutiful kids only need to be told a few times to brush and then they'll do it on their own. Other kids brush nightly only if reminded by their parents. And plenty, if not reminded and not in habit of doing so, simply skip brushing. As adults, we know this isn't ideal, but for a kid who's unaware of the consequences, it's the much easier thing to do.

If you think about it, that's not much different than when we train our employees. We all have certain habits that are highly ingrained. Changing a habit, such as skipping brushing your teeth at night, and replacing it with a new one isn't easy, whether it's a life skill for a child or something related to work.



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Replacing Old Habits With Better Ones

Through our workplace training, we often ask our employees change their habits. Essentially, we're telling them, "What you've been doing has worked OK for you, but you now need to do it differently, and we're asking you for a specific reason."

However, it's the last piece of that statement that can easily go awry. If we don't explain why we're asking employees to make a change and then tell them how to make the change, it's likely our organization won't see the changes we seek.

Over the last several years, the profile of the customers calling in to contact centers has been changing. Customers are more educated about the issues they're facing and are frequently highly emotional. Companies used to be able to get by with "question asked, question answered" or just being nice, but today, that's frequently not enough. Customer service reps and organizations overall need to do more to satisfy their customers. They need to change their old, ingrained habits, such as simply

answering the question, which worked well enough in the past, and replace them with new ones that work even better.

Explain the "Why" to Your Employees

A health-care company decided to increase customer satisfaction by reducing customer hold time. Leadership decided the reps would "live-hold" customers. The reason for the previous long hold times was that reps were busy multitasking, doing things such as having conversations with peers and conducting research to solve the issue. Management thought that by placing customers on a live hold—essentially keeping them on the line while the rep was solving the problem, the rep would explain the process during the call, which, in turn, would increase customer satisfaction.

However, the company's leadership didn't explain how to actually do this and why it was so important. Some reps took the statement literally and began telling their customers every detail of what they were doing. One was heard saying, "I'm going to press enter and

it'll take 10 seconds to see the next screen. OK, here it is." As you can imagine, the customer wasn't impressed.

When asking your employees to change habits successfully, it's important to explain the reason behind the change, such as moving to a live-hold plan and exactly how to do it. It's not much different than showing children how to correctly brush their teeth and explaining what happens if they don't brush their teeth, which probably includes cavities and painful fillings.

Before you embark on a training program, make sure you communicate the reason for it, whether it's to increase customer satisfaction, increase sales, or something else entirely. Explain what the employees' role in the training is, what they'll be expected to do differently as a result, and how. By doing so, you're giving them the tools to learn and succeed.

Reinforce the Changes from the Top Down

Just as important as making sure employees understand why you want them to change their habits

is having leadership share these core values by being visible and walking the walk. Often as leaders, we set the course but don't always follow it through by letting our employees see us embodying the changes. One of the biggest roles we can play is being visible.

At some companies that have successfully implemented changes, their presidents and other leaders walk the floors and hand out candy bars or gift cards for customer-facing conversations they hear that they know are being done well. Other savvy companies reward employees by giving them lunch with an executive or the opportunity to attend a leadership meeting to hear what's going in the company first-hand.

The No. 1 thing employees want is to be in the know. If you want your employees to change old, ingrained habits and change the way they interact with your customers, it's critical to share those same values with your employees—so they're in the know. Ultimately, you'll see these changes ripple from your leadership team, down to your front line and out to your customers.

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