

Rethinking Success in Contact Centers

Start Building a Winning Team

*Jason T. Alley, Vanguard Communications
October 2006*

As part of my non-work life, I coach my kids' sports teams. In working on my skills to be a better coach and mentor, I picked up a few great ideas from one of the most successful coaches of all times, John Wooden. Coach Wooden's Pyramid of Success contains a lot of winning strategies that can be applied to my professional life too. Wooden defines success as the peace of mind that comes from knowing that you did your best to reach your full potential. He uses his Pyramid to describe what qualities are necessary to achieve that success.

Contact center supervisors and managers are coaches for one of your company's most important teams. Are you getting your Team's best? Do you and your agents have peace of mind? Here are three steps you can take to get there:

1. Re-define success – aim high
2. Join your team on the court
3. Diligently pursue improvement

Re-define Success

First, empower your agents by getting them up to date on corporate initiatives and goals, and get them involved in customer contact strategies. Elicit their input and feedback on system designs. Use them to help modify and refine language changes on your IVR systems and websites that customers use daily. The effect will be to empower your agents with being a part of something bigger than themselves. It will help them understand that their contribution to the business is far more than "be able to answer x number of calls in y minutes."

Take the time to re-define what it means to be a success on your team, and help your agents understand how to get there. Get them thinking about how the center contributes to corporate goals. Aim high.

Join Your Team on the Court

Have you ever seen a coach run a practice or game from their office? Absolutely not! So, roll up your sleeves and join your team on the floor. Train, discipline, inspire and, most importantly, teach your agents by example how to succeed in customer service. Playing a part in their world will instill a strong sense of respect and loyalty. And, as coach Wooden explains, "Loyalty is the force that forges individuals into a team. It's the component that moves teams toward great achievements."

Diligently Pursue Improvement

Contact centers have many rich tools available to measure center and agent performance. However, these tools are often misused and too narrowly focused. While knowing the number of contacts handled and average handle time will tell you something about the skill and efficiency of an agent, these tools will not be able to measure enthusiasm, initiative and team spirit. Quality monitoring tools help fill this gap by enabling managers to review contacts for qualitative evaluation. However, the scorecards used often don't address success criteria or strategic goals of the corporation.

This doesn't mean you should throw away your reports and that new shiny quality monitoring system. Like any good coach, keep the game film. Make sure you are capturing the right information - information that is directly linked to success criteria and strategic goals. Take the time to analyze it first hand, prepare drills designed to drive specific performance enhancements, and follow through, diligently pursuing improvement.

Conclusion

In coaching my kids' teams, I experience first hand the benefits of re-defining success, entering the world of my players, and working hard to plan for improvement. I'd encourage each of us to raise the bar and make our workplace a venue where a sense of loyalty and team spirit flourish. A place where people are excited to give their personal best and are committed to contributing to common goals.

In future articles I'll explore how there is a direct correlation between this winning approach and the customer experience.

Jason Alley is a consultant at Vanguard Communications Corporation, a consulting firm that specializes in contact center processes, operations and technology. Jason leads projects to help clients improve operational and technological efficiency in contact centers. For more information, see www.vanguard.net or email Jason at jalley@vanguard.net.