

Physician Referral & Telephone Triage TIMES

The National Publication for the Physician Referral,
Health Information and Telephone Nursing Professional

Vol. 7, No. 2

February 2007

Improving Your Customer Service

INDIANAPOLIS, IN—One of the ways healthcare call center professionals can assess their level of customer service excellence is to ask customers directly. However, this strategy has a few caveats, according to a new book *TURN your customer ON: 23 Ways to Motivate Employees and Make Customers Love You* (Literary Architects, 2007) by Kevin Billingsley and Brooke Billingsley, president and vice president, respectively of Perception Strategies, an Indianapolis-based firm specializing in mystery shopping in healthcare (including call center) environments.

One caveat is that it does cost money to hire someone to objectively conduct interviews and focus groups. Another caveat is connected with surveying customers for feedback on the service. Asking the kind of questions that ought to be asked “in survey form might not get a well-thought-out response,” the authors write. “Obviously, customers do not give your business the same attention you do. However, the outcome could be devastating if the customer’s perspective is not taken seriously. Don’t confuse the customer’s seemingly superficial behavior with

a lack of resolve.”

A way around this focuses on self examination. The authors suggest that those individuals interacting with customers (such as call center representatives) answer for themselves a list of questions. Among the questions that may have relevance for call centers are:

“The mystery shopper cited the employee for being ‘as helpful as she was able.’ Without the apology, the shopper may have considered the employee unhelpful or evasive.”

- “Have we made it obvious how much we appreciate your business?”
- Are we in any way making things harder for you instead of easier?
- What could we do to get you to think of us first when you need the products or services that we offer?
- Based on your experiences with us, do you get a sense of what is important to us?

Then, there’s the apology. The authors give an example from a

mystery shop in outpatient diagnostics that also can translate into something that could happen in a call center. The shopper asked for an explanation of stress testing. The employee deferred this to a doctor and “followed that up with ‘Sorry I can’t be of more help.’ The mystery shopper cited the employee for being ‘as helpful as she was able.’ Without the apology, the shopper may have considered the employee unhelpful or evasive,” the authors write.

Another area for customer service improvement can be to look beyond the call center to other phone interactions in the organization that initially began in the call center. The authors give an example of one healthcare call center in which levels of customer service and professionalism took a steep dive after the call was transferred from the call center to the various departments in the organization.

“It became obvious that the client needed to educate their other departments about the standards to which the call center operators were being held, train the staff on telephone etiquette, and then hold them to the same standards as the call center,” they write. ■