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Talent Development, Engagement and Benchmarking

Call centre agents must perceive that they are coached and developed, as well as challenged and unleashed, to execute the work that enables the organisation to thrive and succeed.

★★★★ (4 Votes)

Friday, March 13, 2009: Effective talent leadership results in robust measures on two critical metrics for every call centre: employee engagement and turnover. Engagement, in fact, makes or breaks the bottom line. And turnover, a hot topic presently, is quickly becoming a formidable obstacle to profitability. Effective talent leadership in the immediate and foreseeable future will determine for many businesses, especially call centre outsourcers, whether or not they remain viable.

What matters now for all call centres is know-how to manage both engagement and turnover. To do this, call centres must know:

- (a) How committed their people are
- (b) How capable their people are.

This returns us to the dictum reiterated throughout this series: Commitment and capability must be measured continuously, because accurate information drives effective strategies.

There have been many reports on the issue of employee commitment. They have generally been pretty bleak, stating that the workforce is either disengaged or is "fundamentally disconnected" from the work they are paid to perform. The good news is, as an industry, call centres seem to understand the importance of engagement and tend to measure engagement diligently. Being "fundamentally disconnected" would be hard to get away with in most call centre environments. But, as much as call centres know about engagement, many understand far less about capability and they understand the least where it may matter most – with their leadership.

The responsibilities supervisors and managers have in fostering a work environment built upon rapport, trust and credibility cannot be overemphasised or underestimated. The quality of employees' immediate supervisory and managerial talent, as well as by the quality, depth and effectiveness of communication by HR and senior call centre leaders establish an engaged call centre workforce. Call centre agents must perceive that they are coached and developed (i.e., "can do"), as well as challenged and unleashed (i.e., "will do"), to

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execute the work that enables the organisation to thrive and succeed (i.e., "must do"). Inherent in any call centre's quest to become a great talent leadership organisation should be their unwavering commitment to measurement – the "checks and balances" orientation implicit in great coaching and performance management, so that agents understand and respect that they will be held accountable for the knowledge, skills and capabilities that do, in fact, lead to superior performance.

When call centres use objective assessment to benchmark and certify knowledge and skill levels, not only are they building opportunities for "course correction", but they are also reinforcing the importance of accountability and continuous improvement for individuals and teams.

Following steps can be taken by a call centre organisation to strengthen their leadership capability as a foundation for creating an engaged workforce:

Objectively assessing supervisory and managerial skills
Leveraging assessment results (i.e., Development Planning)
Skill-based training programmes that truly "raise the talent bar":

- I. Analysis & Problem Solving
- II. Initiative
- III. Influence
- IV. Team Building
- V. Situational Style of Interaction
- VI. Change Management
- VII. Talent Leadership

Formalise mentoring relationships for newer supervisors and create structured opportunities for newer leaders to "process" their growth as leaders with more tenured and mature leaders.

While all of these help "raise the talent bar", the single most important and immediate need is providing all call centre leaders with talent leadership training opportunities where leaders begin to shape a more positive mindset, come to a greater appreciation of the full scope of their talent management responsibilities, and begin to take action for being outstanding talent leaders.

With respect to Talent Development, Engagement and Benchmarking, the best practices to be followed could be: Managers and supervisors need to be held accountable for talent leadership

Retention goals should exist for every manager and supervisor

Training for each individual is based on accurate diagnostic information

Learning sessions are brief, engaging, and experiential
Managers and supervisors empower call centre agents to take charge of their own development

The process of building employee engagement is ongoing and is best fostered through meaningful and enriching work experience. Effective employee engagement, a mixture of tangible and intangible factors, is the result of an environment of stimulation, development, learning, support and contribution. This will require, at a minimum, strong leadership, a sense of shared destiny, autonomy, accountability and the kinds of opportunities for development and advancement addressed in this paper.

-- By Dr Cabot Jaffee

G.S. ...

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The author is chairman, Global Talent Metrics, a talent technology company and an HR thought leader.

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