

It's The Process, Stupid

July 22, 2015 by [John Goodman & Scott M. Broetzmann](#)

Your customer service reps aren't the primary cause of customer dissatisfaction – reallocate your quality improvement resources to the real causes

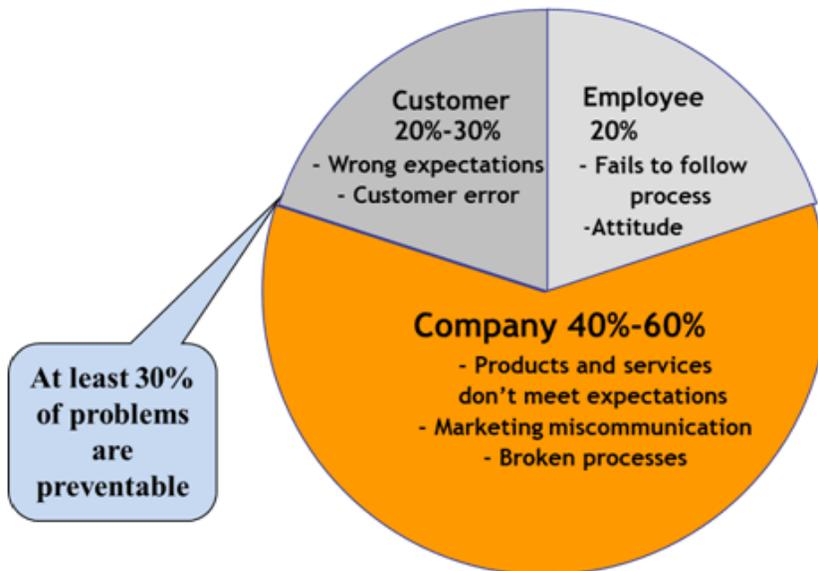
It's The Process, Stupid

Service executives and contact center directors spend much of their management time “coaching up” front-line customer service representatives (CSRs). While there's certainly something to be said for this investment in personnel development activities, these efforts are, in part, frequently motivated by the faulty assumption that the CSR is the primary cause of customer dissatisfaction. The logic is: “if we can just fix the mediocre skills of our front line and create a ‘nice’ experience, then we can be world class.”

In fact, our analysis of data from several hundred service operations over the past 40 years suggests that, at most, 20% of customer dissatisfaction is due to CSRs misbehaving (e.g., attitude, sloppiness, errors, failing to follow proscribed policy). Truth be told, a much greater percentage of customer discontent is caused by the CSR delivering service *exactly as mandated by management* – it's just that such service and policies, more often than not, leave customers wanting. This isn't the CSRs' fault; “it's the process, stupid.”

Overall Causes Of Customer Dissatisfaction

As shown in the diagram, there are four broad causes of customer dissatisfaction (that vary a bit by industry):



- 10-20% are due to employees with will or skill issues (e.g., poorly trained or motivated)
- 20-30% are attributable to marketing and sales failing to set proper customer expectations during the sales or onboarding process
- 20-50% result from product and process design issues, where problems are often engineered into the customer experience
- 20-30% stem from customer actions such as mistakes, not reading directions or unreasonable expectations

Allocate Your Scarce Listening Post Resources To Finding & Fixing Policies & Procedures

Companies typically allocate a bulk of their customer survey and internal monitoring resources to measuring the performance of every individual CSR. Usually, the customer survey consists of using a robust random sample of all contacts and a sample size that provides sufficient feedback for reporting down to the agent level. Moreover, contact quality monitoring – which takes considerable resources – is often predicated on the imperative of monitoring 5 to 10 contact, per agent, per month. Considerable resources are invested at the individual agent level.

The first problem with this approach – as noted above – is that the CSR is not the cause of most dissatisfaction. The second problem is that 70-80% of all contacts are so simple anyone could handle them. Said another way, nothing of significant value is learned from either surveying the customer on these types of calls or listening to these calls (while creating extra survey burden on the customer).

A better approach to the use of finite survey, monitoring and analytical resources consists of reallocating meaningful time and work to identifying the core policies and procedures that are giving rise to customer unhappiness. Figuratively speaking, the breakdown of evaluative resources might look something like this:

- Dedicate only 30% of the evaluation effort to the individual CSR and team evaluation. Even then, the focus should be on measuring more challenging contacts (and a “plug” score can be used for the 70% of simple calls). As important is the practice of encouraging real time positive feedback to agents and teams.
- Devote 30% of the effort to identifying those corporate policies/procedures, response rules and processes that systematically lead to customer dissatisfaction, escalations and repeat calls.
- Allocate the balance of the effort – 40% - to identifying and documenting strategic issues such as customer errors, marketing and onboarding that lead to incorrect expectations, unpleasant surprises and product and process design issues with inherent problems.

Getting Started

Taking a more rational approach to the allocation of finite resources to snuff out ineffective policies and procedures is simple (but may not always be “easy”). Here are a few steps to move in the right direction:

- **Analyze survey data by type of issue.** About 70% of all customer issues are consistently resolved by all CSRs. The trick is to identify the five+ issues where, regardless of the CSR, the customer is less than satisfied. These are issues where the response rule or process is not effective.
- **Ask your CSRs for the top five types of contacts that are preventable if marketing communicated more effectively and/or customers were better educated.** Those five issues are probably responsible for at least 10% of your workload! Identify how marketing and website resources could be modified to more properly set expectations and reduce those contacts.
- **As you modify response rules, processes and marketing/customer education processes, communicate to the front line so that they have hope and see that their input is being used.** Newsletters posted in bathrooms cut through filtering by supervisors. Two of our clients have named such newsletters, “Flush Facts” and “The Stall Street Journal.”
- **The company’s website must be reoriented to balance education and support with traditional marketing and sales activities.** Education, support, expectation setting and a new customer orientation portal should all be featured prominently on the home page – not three clicks inside.
- **Educate the marketing and sales departments** that proactive communication is a delighter and that setting proper customer expectations will create long term loyalty.

Achieving each of these prerequisites is an ongoing journey, not a quick action.

Click here to download the article entitled [Allocate Quality Resources to the Real Causes of Dissatisfaction](#) (PDF, 286Kb)