

Leadership Perspective: People

Ask a good leader about their best teams and what their secret is to help them achieve. And be ready to listen. If this doesn't end up in a discussion of their sincere admiration for their staff (who after all do so much of the work) you might be wiser looking for another candidate.

For a contact centre leader, although 60-65% of your costs are devoted to staff, it's both hard and easy to value the people who manage the customer contacts:

- Easy because they are so "measurable"
- Difficult because the world they manage is invisible"

Because customer service, telesales and support staff work with these invisibles customers, their work is easily undervalued. One exciting and significant development in business today is seeing the contact centre move clearly into becoming the "hub of the business wheel". This is great news, but it is also dangerous because there are few skilled leaders out there to fill the expectations required.

With regard to people skills, good leader or leader-in-training have excellent people management and organisational skills, but they've also personally spent time working or observing staff on the phone and not just for 20 minutes once in their career.

If you've not yet done this, I urge you to go and sit with some of your staff and double jack (meaning you will use a second headset to hear everything happening in the call) for a day or two so you have a more accurate picture. Why? For two good reasons:

It helps to keep the leader aware of what's really going on with customers and staff and Staff appreciate your attempt to empathise with their work - which is too often considered trivial and "low level" to be significant

Helpful hint: if you're considering taking leadership in a new centre, be sure you take time to listen to the calls first hand and discuss the calls with the staff.

Most importantly, the emphasis on people is not about "warm fuzzies" - it's about cold hard profits. By now we would all know the direct correlation between loyal staff, customers and increased profits! A leader who has not experienced this unique invisible world first hand remains blind to many/most of the issues that affect the bottom line.

Read about the author, Darlene D. Richard, at www.CallCentreINTEGRITY.com/articles.htm