



The Following Is A Sample From
The Call Center Agent

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Have you ever stopped to think about who the person on the other end of the phone is? What is he or she like? Why did they choose to be a call center agent? Well, let's take a few moments to look at what it takes to be a call center

agent and how you can develop the skills and mannerisms that will make you a world-class agent!

The Call Center Agent – A Multi-Tasking Wonder!

When you think of becoming a call center agent, what do you envision your daily job to be? Do you think you will sit down and handle call after call routinely doing the same thing over and over again until your shift ends?

Sometimes, that is indeed the case if your particular job is primarily re-routing phone calls that come in from your customers. However, it is far more likely that you will be called upon to fulfill several roles at any time during the day.

Call center agents are expected to not only handle calls but sooth upset customers, provide technical and non-technical information, provide guidance to customers to resolve their problems, handle computer related data entry tasks, research problem situations and make informed decisions as to the best way to proceed and also act in a financially responsible manner when suggesting possible resolutions and settlements.

Whew! That makes me tired just reading that!!!

The fact is a great call center agent has to have a wide variety of skills and abilities to properly fulfill the requirements of their jobs. The most common or minimum skills and traits required are:

Common Sense - It is my personal opinion that common sense is the single most important skill a call center agent can possess. If you can look at a situation and identify the right way to proceed based on common sense, you will be able to save a lot of time and energy.

Most of the day-to-day routine problems you will encounter are likely to be variations of the same basic issues. You will either be required to provide information, resolve a problem, or create a settlement. Common sense plays a powerful role in identifying which was to proceed when talking to a caller. By knowing which is the best way to proceed, you cut down on wasted time allowing you to handle calls faster and become more productive.

Empathy - I cannot stress enough the importance of having empathy for your callers. If you are not interested in helping your callers then you are in the wrong business. People who wish to become call center agents, or wish to become BETTER agents need to have a basic desire to support and help people.

This is something that is not very easy to “fake.” If you don’t care about your callers, it will become evident in the way you do your job. If you don’t care

about your callers you will not have the patience to deal with angry callers or “go the extra mile” when most people would think there was nowhere else to turn.

Something happens to people who care about others. They tend to think about possible solutions more and don't stop after thinking of one solution. They explore options. They place themselves in the place of the caller and try to decide what they would want in a similar situation. They do these things because they WANT to, not because they HAVE to. There is a big difference.

People place more effort in things they want to do and less effort in things they have to do. This is not considered a character flaw or anything, just human nature. We all prefer to do things we like and it is natural that we will dedicate more time and effort on those tasks. With this in mind, think about your motivation. Think about your attitude towards those who call you? Do you REALLY want to help them?

If you do, that's great! If not, then perhaps a career change wouldn't be such a bad idea...

Concentration - How well do you function when you are trying to do one thing when there are many things going at the same time. If you have to stop one task and start another, can you remember what you need to do?

It is very common for an agent to have to go from system to system or resource to resource to get answers or data needed to make a decision. This kind of activity makes it important for the agent to be able to remember basic information over the course of the call.

One thing people really dislike is having to repeat things over and over again. This is for two basic reasons. First it is annoying to have to be asked the same question over and over again. The most important reason, though, is that having to ask again and again makes the callers feel that you really don't care about their problem or situation very much. In the customers' mind, they think “If he can't remember my information he really must not care very much about this situation.” Whether that is true or not makes little difference. It is the perception in the mind of the caller that matters most.

Computer skills - Today's business environment means one word: computers. The average call center agent will work with a computerized phone system to handle calls, another computer system to enter and process requests and records, and possibly a third system to gather data, look up information, and provide technical guidance to callers, dealers, and contractors.

No matter whether you use one of 10 systems in your job, you need to know how to use computers and execute commonly asked for tasks. For new agents, it often is not coming up with a resolution that takes the most time but

rather navigating through the computer system to complete the data entry process or to actually find the information the caller needs.

Based computer or system terminology is important to learn so that you can pick up the software instructions more easily. If you do not have basic skills like these, it might be a good idea to enroll in an adult education class, read a couple of books on computers, or, best yet, actually get some hands on experience so you will not be intimidated your first day on the job.

Product Knowledge - A call center agent is often called upon to provide information on product or products sold or serviced by the company. While most agents are not expected to be season technical professionals (unless that is your specific call center function), an agent needs to have basic understanding of the product and its functions in order to communicate intelligently with the caller.

What do you think a caller would think if the agent said to them "Uh, I have no idea."? Why don't you unplug it and plug it back in and see if it works? That's what I do with my toaster and it works great!" I assume the thoughts would not be very positive!

In order to be effective, and also to complete the call in an acceptable time frame, an agent needs to understand the basics of the product line or at least know how to operate a computer system that will guide them through the troubleshooting process. Even when there is a system that helps the agent, it is still important to understand the basics so that you can appear to be knowledgeable in the eyes of the caller. Remember, perception is everything!

Systems Knowledge - We have talked about computer knowledge but another aspect is system knowledge. This refers to being able to understand which system does what and when to use each system.

For example, you may have one computer screen that can switch back and forth between several software programs. Each of these programs fills a special needs and every agent must know which program to use in which situation. Without this knowledge, you will not be able to find the data or information you need in a timely and cost effective manner.

Customer Service Knowledge - Of course this is important, after all, this is what we are learning in this course, right???

Whenever we deal with callers or customers, we have two aspects of the situation. We have the reason for the call (trouble, information, purchase, etc) and we have the relationship between the company and the customer. Both are equally important.

If we only concentrate on the purchase or the request at hand and neglect the relationship aspect, we run the risk of treating the customer poorly and losing their future business. Because of this we want to create an experience where both the needs of the caller and the relationship with the caller are both given the attention they deserve.

Rational Thought Process – This is a variation of common sense but still very important. There are all kinds of people in this world and all of them are not rational individuals. You WILL get callers who will make demands that are beyond rational and expect them to be considered and granted.

A good call center agent has to be able to think rationally. You have to be able to analyze a situation and decide what is rational for that set of circumstances. For example, if someone calls you and has a portable CD player that has been repaired 3 times already, it might be rational to give the caller a new one if he demands it. Even if company policy states a repair is the option covered under warranty, it would be a rational thought to get approval for a replacement unit.

Now if that same customer with the same broken CD player insisted on a new unit upgraded to the top of line model with a free 5 year extended warranty, two free tickets to Hawaii, and a deluxe Oceanfront room for his inconvenience, those are clearly irrational demands that the agent must be able to identify as such and refuse.

Granted this example is an extreme but some people will make outrageous demands just to “set the bar high” and then negotiate down to what they really want. Being able to see this and act rationally is an important skill for a call center agent to possess.

Self-Assurance – Make no mistake about it, a call center job is no place for an insecure person! The nature of any job in customer service is that you will deal with a wide range of people who will make a wide range of demands. Sometimes the answer will be “yes” in which case your job will be easy. It is when you have to say “no!” that you encounter trouble.

To be successful an agent must believe in their response or resolution and be firm yet gentle in “holding the line” when the caller insists for more or something different. A successful agent will not be easily swayed by the caller or any comments or threats that they might make. A good agent will have a good understanding of the market, product, or industry and know what is fair and just in any situation and feel comfortable offering that to the caller.

Fair - Conversations or communication between two parties is not a win-lose situation. The goal in every conversation with a caller should be a win-win situation where you get to give the customer the most of what they want while

also protecting the interests of the company or manufacturer. Very often this is a balancing act.

A good call center agent will learn from experience how to listen to the caller and figure out what the caller is really looking for. It is up to the agent to arrive at a resolution or conclusion that allows the customer to feel satisfied while not “giving away the store” in the process.

An agent must represent two different parties at the same time. They must represent the manufacturer or company’s interest while at the same time representing the customer’s interests to the company. The ideal situation is when everyone gets the most of what they need.

One crucial concept that most customers do not understand is that companies cannot afford to give away everything to their customer when problems arise. They also cannot give their products away or fail to make a reasonable profit.