

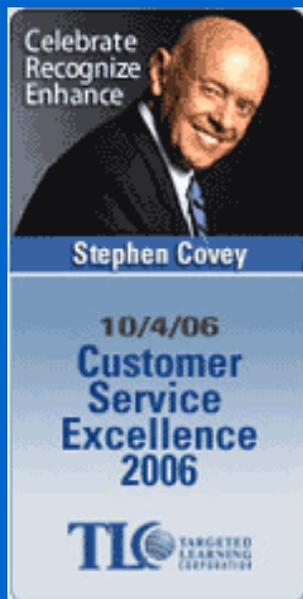
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Quotes

“Always acknowledge a fault. This will throw those in authority off their guard and give you an opportunity to commit more.”

- Mark Twain



Fun Facts

What's in a Name?

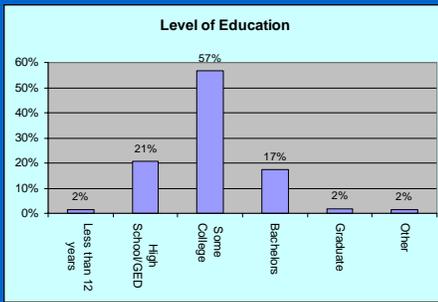
Do you use the term “call center?” What about “contact center?” Maybe you prefer “customer interaction center?” Or maybe, like me, you are confused by all of the terms and in the end you just want to throw up your hands in exasperation?

Words have meanings and meanings are attached to beliefs, presumptions and perceptions. Therefore, when someone hears the term “call center” they may imagine the industry we work in, they might imagine a telemarketer interrupting their dinner, or possibly visualize one of the many new commercials that show call centers as a surrogate for customer service people waiting for them to call. Whichever the case, the industry has moved in two directions with regards to naming conventions. Direction one was to create new terms that were less loaded than the term “call center.” Thus the proliferation of the customer center, customer interaction center, contact center, and various other synonyms for telephone business operations. These word options can be seen in the various conferences, trade publications, and other professional offerings of the industry.

Direction two is to educate the general population on what call centers do and what they offer the national and local economy and the type of work and jobs associated with this industry. This is the path the NACC took when it was named in late 2004. Additionally, in meeting with the advisory board this year in Chicago, I tossed out the idea of changing the name to the National Association of *Contact* Centers. There was a good debate that followed. In the end it was decided that instead of changing the name of the organization, we should do more to promote the “call center” industry as a big umbrella group that represents everyone within the industry, no matter their name, because in the end the industry is a moving target. In short, what was suggested was that we need a stronger educational campaign is needed about the industry, not a name change. I concurred with the advisory board’s recommendations, so for the foreseeable future we will continue to be the National Association of *Call* Centers.

3%-6%

In the past two weeks a whirlwind of interviews with reporters on the industry has occurred. I conducted no less than 5 interviews this past 14 days; with 3 interviews in one day (I was beginning to think there was a conspiracy out there). One interview reporter made me think. He asked me about call



This graphic is from a national survey of CSRs. The question asks about highest education completed. Note that most reps have a high school diploma and some college, but not a 4-year college degree.

Source: *NACC State of the Industry Report #3 2005: A Labor Survey of the Industry*

Picture of the Week



This is a picture from the online article on airline reservation centers. The full article can be found at the following URL. I like the agent on the vertical stabilizer look.

http://www.denverpost.com/business/ci_4351216

center jobs and where there is too many in a town or city. He cited a leading site selection firm's threshold number of between 3%-6% of the overall workforce. According to this firm, any labor market above this percentage is saturated from a call center point of view—in short, there are too many call centers. Though I understand the concept of a tight labor market and the idea that with many centers near each other they can start to cannibalize each other's labor force, and many do not like that. But something about the idea of a percentage bothered me.

I then decided to look at other industries, in short, turn the idea on its head. I asked the following questions: "Can there be too many Fortune 500 headquarters"? Does New York City say, "We are at 10% of Fortune 500 company headquarters, we are saturated, we cannot handle any more?" Maybe so, I don't know. Does Silicon Valley say, "Whoa, we have too many high tech firms, 28%, we are saturated, we need to back off? Once again, I don't know the answer to this question. But as you can see, I am a bit skeptical.

There is term called agglomeration economies, I know fancy word, which has been re-branded in the past 20 years as the term "industry clusters." In essence, both of these terms mean the same thing, that companies of similar fashions locate near each other, even though they may compete with one another, because the benefits of having so many people, companies and ideas in the same place cross fertilizing provides more benefits than are lost due to the competition for labor. This begs the question, "Can there be call center clusters?" Can a market, and the call center industry, benefit from having many call centers in or near one another, or is it a net loss, and call centers do not behave like high tech companies?

Please share your thoughts with me.

A Note on Surveys

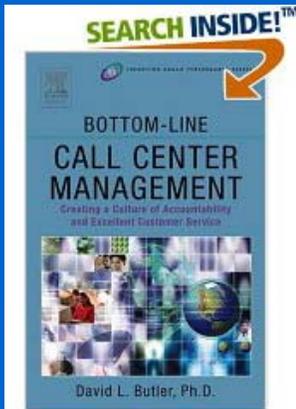
On a recent evening I was visiting my local Wal-Mart Supercenter to purchase some groceries for the week. Upon checkout, the credit card machine directly in front of me had the following message in the display. "Did your cashier offer you a friendly greeting?" The options below on the liquid crystal screen were the following:

- Yes
- No
- Español

Because I am curious person I pushed the Español button. What appeared next were the following options.

- Sí
- No
- English

However, the original question, in English, failed to change to Spanish. The statement to slide you credit card changed, the options to answer the questions changed, but not the question.



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I just shook my head in wonder.

This event reminded me of some signage that I have seen in public places such as airports and on airlines. The signs read in essence "If you are unable to read, please inform the local person in charge."

Full disclosure: David Butler owns 19,7114 shares of Wal-Mart stock. He may own more shares in his mutual fund retirement portfolio, but heck, who knows what's in those things anyway?

Full Circle-Tequila and Books

Thanks to each of you, and you know who you are, for your feedback. I was amazed at the number of people out there who drink tequila and read *In Queue* (see September 15, 2006, issue).

Additionally, thanks to all of you who mentioned great books you are reading. Please continue to share the titles and summaries with me. Please write a short book review and share it with the readers of *In Queue* as well.