



In Queue

The fun, informative and interesting newsletter for
the call center industry.

Volume 2, Number 20 - October 26, 2007

Our Contact Info:

David Butler
Executive Director

National Association of Call Centers
100 South 22nd Avenue
Hattiesburg MS 39401
Tel: 601.447.8300
Fax: 601.266.5087

David.Butler@nationalcallcenters.org
<http://www.nationalcallcenters.org>

Scoreboard

In Queue circulation 18,940
NACC members 3,583
Calendar of Events Listings 24
Job Board Listings 40
Real Estate Listings 4

In This Issue

[Cool Stuff](#)
[Rushed Routine, and Robotic
Learned Helplessness in the Call Center
Industry](#)
[Call Center Comics \(NEW!\)](#)

Share the Knowledge

Send this newsletter to colleagues
by clicking "Forward this email" at
the very bottom and end of this
newsletter.

Real Estate

If you are looking for a new call
center location you should check
out the [NACC Real Estate](#) page by
clicking on this link to see some of
the available existing sites.

Cool Stuff

A few changes to this issue of *In Queue*. Two new essays from people other than me below. A new section called "Cool Stuff" on the left where I talk about products and services that I use to make my life easier. Also because *In Queue* is growing so fast we moved the "What I am Reading" book review section to the left column. You can read Russ Reynolds' review of *Tournament of Shadows* there at the bottom left. I hope you enjoy this issue and the new items we are offering including the comics which everyone appears to enjoy. As always please email me with new ideas and essays. My email is just to the left.

Rushed, Routine, and Robotic Call Center Directors: Be Careful What You Ask For

Johanna Lubahn, Cohen Brown's Managing Director for Call Center Services. Johanna_Lubahn@cbmg.com

My family has an annual rite – a day-long harvest and freezing of beans from my parents' vegetable garden.

One year, while my mother was sealing the beans into little freezer bags, she noticed that some bags were marked "sandwich bags" and others were marked "freezer bags." My father was taking no chances with his precious harvest. He found an 800 number on the baggie box and started to call.

I was then a bank call center director and begged him not to. "It's a call center, Dad, not the factory. It's Saturday, they won't know, they don't care."

He ignored me, called, and reached someone to whom he worriedly explained the whole bean situation. I was cringing, imagining the person at the other end rolling her eyes, smothering her laughter, waving others to listen in. But Dad was listening carefully, nodding, agreeing. Apparently satisfied, he offered his thanks, hung up, and proudly explained how the call center lady had helped him decide that all the bags were suitable for his beans.

Quotes

"I used to think that the brain was the most wonderful organ in my body. Then I realized who was telling me this."

-Emo Phillips (Neuropsychologist)

Cool Stuff (NEW!)

This is a new section within In Queue that I am going to share with you some neat stuff that I have run across or use in the hope that you find something that you like or can use to improve your business or personal life.



Do you travel and have one of those blue- tooth wireless headsets or one of those that has a microphone dropped down the front of your shirt? Ever notice that when you are using those items they pick up background noises like trucks beeping while in reverse, road noise when you are driving, airport gate change announcements and any number of other unwanted noises? Most of these noises are not only problematic with having a good conversation, they can also be very unprofessional. So what can be done? Well about a year ago I found this little hands free device called "The Boom." This hands free unit was designed for use in factories where noises can be loud and by helicopter pilots where the rotor noise is similarly problematic at times. So I tried it out and love it. I travel much so I am on conference calls all around the country often in the most inconvenient and noisy places like airports. This headset has been a great asset wiping out the background noise. Additionally, I have a loud voice which allows others to hear my phone conversations, which I do not want and I am sure they do not either. With this "boom" I can talk quietly

This was little bags and beans – just a small customer with an odd question about a single box of bags. But that rep treated my Dad with respect and gave him thoughtful advice. She didn't let her expectations or scripting keep her from being authentic, personal, and helpful.

So, full disclosure: I am a call center idealist. But when my line of work comes up in a social setting, I steel myself against a bitter chorus: All they do is read from a script. You can tell they just want to get you off the phone fast. They don't care – I'm just a transaction to them.

Rushed, routine, and robotic. The unfortunate three Rs of too many call center interactions. "Press one to be patronized, marque dos to be ignored."

Most people tend to blame the reps. But I would ask their managers: are you creating obstacles for your reps? Are you asking for one thing (service) but really wanting another (cost savings)?

- Do you emphasize the personal? Do you talk about "calls" or callers? Do you talk about call "traffic" and "volumes" or customers with needs and problems to be solved? How many systems do your reps have to manage when they are trying to sound personal? Have you role-played "personal" with them?

- Do you talk about service but emphasize numbers that measure anything but? Callers call with an emotion and a need. Do you measure how well your reps handled the emotion and served the need? Those measures are harder to quantify, but they are the essence.

- Do you overscript? Callers complain about reps who do not use "real" language. Do you hand reps a script and basically tell them to learn it? Do they contribute to their scripts? Do you have them practice on one another before going live? That is where they gain confidence and energy.

- Do you measure satisfaction by how fast calls get answered? What other measures do you use for customer satisfaction? Are they the same measures your customers and reps would use?

If your call center poses these obstacles for your call center reps, only sustained culture change will help you exchange "rushed, routine, and robotic" for "personal, authentic, and helpful."

Learned Helplessness in the Call Center Industry

Dennis Adsit, dennis_adsit@comcast.net

In almost every Psychology 101 textbook ever written, you will

and the person on the other end of the phone can hear me just fine. One down side is that it is larger than a blue-tooth and looks a bit awkward compared to more sleek items, however, the performance to me makes up for all of that and more. The cost is about \$150 dollars, but it has paid for itself in professional sounding conference calls over the past year and half. If you are interested in checking out this device, you can click on the image above to go to their website and look into them. If you have one or buy one, email me and tell me what you think of it.

Picture of the Week



This is a view from the Schilthorn in Switzerland at a height of 2970 meters, which is above many of the clouds and most of the Alps peaks in this area of Switzerland. This is the location that part of the James Bond movie *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969) was filmed. Interestingly the site was being constructed by a local Swiss when the movie makers came to him and said that they wanted to shoot part of the film in this location. So the Hollywood folks put up a large amount of money to finish the site and they got their movie setting and the local Swiss owner was able to complete his top of the world many years earlier than he could have without such an outside cash infusion. Now if I can only convince a Hollywood film maker to shoot a movie scene in the addition to my home which has yet to begin.

What I am reading

Russ Reynolds, NACC Advisory Board Member and President, RB

always find several pictures associated with famous psychological experiments. There is the poor, perplexed looking student subject of the Solomon Asch experiment who is changing his answer about which line is longer because of the responses of peers (who are all in on the experiment). Another well-known picture shows a rhesus monkey hugging a wire "monkey" wrapped in terry cloth in the Harry Harlow experiments that demonstrated the importance of care-giving and companionship in the early stages of primate development.

Finally, there is the picture of the dog lying on the floor of a cage being shocked even though there is a simple way to escape because it had been "conditioned" earlier that nothing it did to escape mattered. The experimenter, Martin Seligman, called this behavior "learned helplessness."

Learned helplessness is pervasive in the call center industry as well. What does this mean? It means that there are many problem situations in the call center industry for which there is an easy, proven way out, but leaders seem to be content with the same old, tired solutions that are not working.

Though there are many examples, here are a few off the top.

Labor Shortages. Call centers around the world, especially in Asia, are facing severe labor shortages...they can't attract people into the industry. With billions of people around the world, clearly, the problem is not a shortage of labor, but a shortage of labor with the right skills...technical, problem solving, language.

At the turn of the 20th century, Henry Ford faced a similar problem. There was a lot of labor available, but the labor often did not speak English, was illiterate and lacked the technical skills to manufacture cars end-to-end. He solved it with a process change which broke down theretofore highly skilled work into smaller, well-defined, easy to teach and repeat pieces and moved everything along on an assembly line.

The call center industry is no different. By using technology to simplify the process and voice applications, the agent's job can be simplified so that the entry level skill requirements are reduced, thereby expanding the available labor pool.

Inadequate Training. Call center agents are often put on the phones like the Christians were put in the Coliseum... inadequately prepared for what they are about to face. This leads to mistakes, long handle times, call backs, escalations, frustration and terrible word-of-mouth (from the agents and the customers). Companies attempt to shore this up with the long dead horse of recording-(sample) monitoring-(occasional) coaching, but the efforts and results are laughable. Moreover, the damage has already been done.

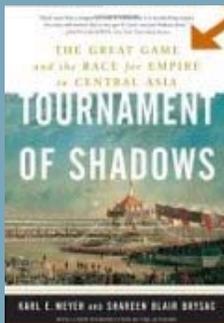
There are well-known training criteria that you can train to... trainee satisfaction, knowledge, behavior, and results. Most of the time, we are training agents for the first two, with

Reynolds Consulting LLC
mrruss2227@hotmail.com

Tournament of Shadows by Karl Ernest Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac

Actually I am re-reading this one. The subtitle is the "Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia." My main reason for suggesting this book and for reading it again is to get a better handle of the history and culture of a part of the world I know very little about, but that permeates the news today. It has been extremely enlightening to understand how many of these countries and regions evolved into what they are today, how the major empires over time saw these regions as critical buffers between the empires (primarily Russia and Great Britain) and how various explorers and adventurers played roles in forming the cooperative and adversarial relationships among the various countered and empires, over time. If one wants to better understand Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, and some of the surrounding countries (some of which are no longer) just to have a bit of background on that part of the world in light of today's events, this is a useful book and although long, a fairly easy read.

If you are interested in purchasing this book, you can click on the image below and it will take you to Amazon.com.



Do you have product or service you are interesting in sharing with the

smattering of the third in the form of a few in-class behavior assessments and a brief on-phone nesting period. Why are we putting agents on the phone that have not been trained to a results standard? Would you like airline pilots trained this way?

Speaking of pilots, that is the well-tested way out of this particular cage...simulation. Technology exists to simulate calls. This allows you to make sure the agents are not released to the phones until they perform to a certain level of quality and at a certain pace. It also allows you to throw curve balls at the agent to make sure they can handle situations off the beaten path.

Stratospheric Levels of Turnover. Turnover is perhaps one of the biggest problems in the industry. It averages in the mid-30% range in the US and is much higher outside the US. It is not uncommon to find centers around the world with greater than 100% annual turnover.

The effect of this turnover in the form of costs for recruiting, staffing, training, coaching and in the form of operational performance (adequately performing agents are replaced by lower performing agents) does not show up on the P&L, but it is scourging the industry and the parent companies.

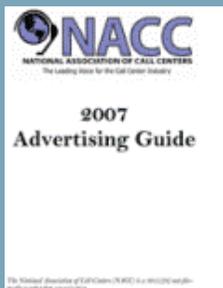
Let's face it. Call center jobs are some of the toughest white collar jobs there are. They are repetitive, tiring and stressful. You can spend lots of money fixing everything else about your environment, but until the repetitive, tiring and stressful aspects of the job are reduced, you will still have high turnover.

Maddingly, solutions to these problems exist...solutions to make the process simpler so the agents can relax, solutions to reduce the stress of escalations, solutions to reduce how often the agents have to repeat the same information over and over again, day after day.

It would be unconscionable to paint such a dismal view of the industry and leave it there. So I will end with this. Not all of the dogs in Seligman's experiments became helpless. Approximately 30% of the dogs did not become helpless, but instead somehow managed to find a way out of the unpleasant situation in spite of their past experience with it. Seligman said that in humans, those that avoid learned helplessness are found to have a high degree of optimism. Not rose-colored glasses optimism, but a world view that frames the situation as "other than personal, pervasive, or permanent."

Call Center Comics (NEW!)

readers of *In Queue*? If so, click on the NACC Advertising Guide below to find out more.



To advertise in *In Queue* or with the NACC, please contact the NACC

at:

Tel: 601.447.8300

Fax: 601.266.5087

E-mail:

David.Butler@nationalcallcenters.org

© 2006 By CallCenterComics.com



I DON'T HAVE A BAD ATTITUDE SIR. I ALREADY TOLD YOU THAT WE HAVE OUTSOURCED ALL NON-ESSENTIAL TASKS LIKE BEING EMPATHETIC AND COURTEOUS, SO WE CAN FOCUS ON WHAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT.

If you like this comic and would like to see more write Ozzie at callcentercomics@yahoo.com and visit his website at http://callcentercomics.com/cartoon_categories.htm or just click on the comic to take you to his page. The NACC appreciates Ozzie letting us use some of his comics in our newsletter.

To view past issues of *In Queue*, please [click here](#).

If you would like to contribute to *In Queue*, please reply to this email with "Contribute" in the subject line.

Copyright 2007 National Association of Call Centers

Click to [Unsubscribe](#)
[Forward](#) this Email

[Edit](#) my profile

