

Customer service supervisors should be coaching reps on specific performance-related behaviors, says Kimberly King of InterWeave in an article in the March 2006 issue of *Customer Service Newsletter*. Here King offers four strategies for putting on-the-floor performance coaching into effect.

**Editor**

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## Customer service supervisors should be on the floor — coaching!

The number one job of the frontline customer service supervisor is coaching and mentoring customer service reps to better performance — being on the floor to offer advice, encouragement, reinforcement, and immediate feedback on how reps are doing and how they can do better.

What are some of the ways in which they can do that? Kimberly King, president of InterWeave, a performance management consulting firm, and author of *Is Your Call Center Really WOW?*, suggests that there are a number of on-the-floor coaching strategies that customer service supervisors can put to use.

**Relationship building.** This is the foundation for all of a supervisor's work on the floor and involves a supervisor's building a personal relationship with every one of his or her reps. "Relationship building is accomplished by greeting everyone in the morning, checking in with everyone during the day, and ensuring that supervisors smile and present themselves in an open manner that is conducive to positive relationships," says King. "This is important because it builds trust and keeps the lines of communication open. And with an open and trusting relationship, reps are more likely to follow the example and advice of their leaders and change their behaviors."

Relationship building should not fall over into excessive socializing with reps, King warns, because this might actually detract from the level of trust and fairness that you want to achieve with your service staff.

**Visibility.** This is a matter of a supervisor's letting reps know that he or she is available to them and responsive to what is going on in the customer service center. "Being visible does not mean just walking around the floor," says King. "Being visible means walking with a purpose while keeping your eyes and ears open to performance-improvement opportunities." Supervisors should be on the floor proactively looking and listening for "trigger" phrases or events that could prompt a performance-improvement opportunity — signs of a rep getting frustrated with a customer, or a rep using a phrase like "I can't answer that for you" or "We don't handle that; you'll have to talk to another department."

According to King, statements or events like these "could create escalated calls, callbacks, extended call times, and dissatisfied customers." If they are on the floor to see and hear these "triggers," however, supervisors can "proactively change the course of conversations, raise productivity, and create better customer relationships."

**Scouting.** This form of coaching focuses on specific

behaviors — something that reps have committed to work on at their last team meeting, for instance. "During the scouting session, supervisors are focused on coaching that specific behavior to ensure that change occurs," says King. "By sitting next to each rep, listening to both sides of the conversation with customers, and taking detailed notes about the interactions, supervisors can provide assertive and passionate feedback to assist in driving change." After working with one rep, the supervisor can then "scoot" over to the next rep to work on the same behavior. "By sitting side-by-side with reps, supervisors can provide immediate feedback and encouragement to change their behavior habits," she says.

**Informal reviews.** While "scouting" focuses on specific behaviors and involves listening to both sides of the customer interaction and taking detailed notes, informal reviews are based on what supervisors can hear of the rep's side of the conversation, don't usually involve notetaking, and aren't tied to specific behaviors. It does involve immediate feedback and reinforcement of positive rep behavior of all types. For instance:

"I just heard you ask the customer several questions related to his needs. Those probes are exactly what we want to hear."

"I loved hearing you acknowledge the customer with 'Certainly,' 'We can definitely do that for you,' and 'We would be happy to.' Those are all ways that we can demonstrate our passion for customers and keep them coming back."

"I didn't hear you acknowledge the customer at all during that call. Please remember that we need to let the customer know that we hear them with statements like, 'I see,' 'I understand,' and 'I definitely agree with you.' Please review your list of acknowledging statements."

"I didn't hear you ask questions about the types of problems that were occurring. Before you offer solutions, be sure to ask questions. Let's talk in more detail about that call to make sure that we're on the same page with regard to probing questions."

If supervisors are using on-the-floor tools like these to coach their reps, King says, they will be driving change and improving overall rep performance. And that's better than simply sitting with reps to review their scores on customer service center performance metrics.

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