

These results from a Customer Service Group survey provide a look at the trends and common practices in CSR training.

— **Editor**

***Customer Service Newsletter***

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# Customer Service

## NEWSLETTER

## Veteran CSRs often get short shrift on training

CSR training is a hot issue these days. Yet while almost all CS managers seem to agree that training is important, they are divided on what are the best training practices, especially when it comes to training their veteran CSRs.

For example, it is surprising that some companies provide no veteran CSR training on basic people skills while other companies spend 50 percent of their training time in that area. Here's another example: Some companies spend 95 percent of their training time on company products and services while other companies devote just 10 percent of their training time to that topic.

What all this means is that when it comes to training veteran CSRs, there is no best mix of training areas. Yet when we crunched all the numbers, some interesting trends began to appear. For this report, because of the wide range of responses received, we are listing the highest value reported as well as the lowest value.

### Questions asked

**1. Please indicate the type of training you provide and the percentage of total training time this represents.**

Respondents focused their training on five key areas: company products and services, people skills, call center technologies, training newly hired CSRs, and company policy issues. The time devoted to each area as a percentage of total training time is:

- Company products and services: 25 percent  
Highest value reported: 95 percent  
Lowest value reported: 10 percent
- People skills: 23 percent  
Highest value reported: 50 percent  
Lowest value reported: Zero percent
- Call center technologies: 18 percent

Highest value reported: 60 percent

Lowest value reported: Zero percent

- Training newly hired CSRs: 18 percent  
Highest value reported: 25 percent  
Lowest value reported: Zero percent
- Company policy issues: 16 percent  
Highest value reported: 30 percent  
Lowest value reported: Zero percent.

Survey respondents also reported that they do veteran CSR training in a variety of other areas, as well.

Some of those areas include:

- Training on finance and how the center impacts the bottom line
- Training on teambuilding
- Training on coaching skills
- Training on continuous improvement.

*Implication:* Understandably, there is only so much time available for veteran CSR training and only so many areas that can be thoroughly covered. Yet it appears that many companies may be spending an extraordinary amount of time on company product and service issues and neglecting other equally critical areas, such as training on people skills and how to train newly hired CSRs.

*Suggestion:* Take a critical look at your veteran CSR training program and calculate the percentage of time you spend on each training area. Compare your training objectives with veteran CSR performance. If your CSRs are falling down on basic people skills, perhaps it is because you are neglecting training in that area. Certainly your company's objectives and methods differ from those of other companies. Yet excessive training in one area to the exclusion of others often leads to substandard performance. We strongly recommend devoting training time to each area mentioned and monitoring progress.

## 2. What is the approximate cost of training for each veteran CSR per year?

While our respondents again provided a wide range of responses, the average amount spent on veteran CSR training per year is \$1,400. Some companies spent significantly more. One company in our sample says they spend \$5,000 per year training their veteran CSRs.

And some companies spent significantly less than our average figure; one company reported they spend only \$200 per year on veteran CSR training.

*Implication:* The wide variety of amounts of money spent on CSR training is not surprising: Some companies have greater financial resources than others and can spend accordingly. But it is disturbing that some companies spend so little on this critically important activity.

Spending \$200 a year on veteran CSR training amounts to about 55 cents a day, an insignificant investment in one of your most valuable resources.


*Suggestion:* In most companies, the only way to increase the training budget is to get approval of top management. The mistake many CS managers make is requesting more money without presenting a clear plan for how that money will be spent. Before asking for more money, develop a comprehensive plan that will show management how an increase in the training budget will improve the bottom line. While it is difficult to show a return on investment for money spent on training, you have an advantage in your department that other departments don't have: You already measure productivity and efficiency in your center. The plan you present to management should detail the specific training activities you plan to undertake. Suggest that you will compare efficiency and productivity levels as they now stand with the levels you have reached following your proposed training. Then be prepared to deliver increased ratings at the end of the test period,

typically 90 days. If you can demonstrate a significant improvement, your chances of receiving additional budget increases will be improved immeasurably.

## 3. What percentage of CSR training is delivered by the customer service manager, company intranet, formal (classroom) training, and/or off-site conferences/seminars?

- Customer service manager: 40 percent  
Highest value reported: 100 percent  
Lowest value reported: Zero percent
- Company intranet: 5 percent  
Highest value reported: 50 percent  
Lowest value reported: Zero percent
- Formal (classroom) training: 50 percent  
Highest value reported: 100 percent  
Lowest value reported: Zero percent
- Off-site conferences/seminars: 5 percent  
Highest value reported: 40 percent  
Lowest value reported: Zero percent.

*Implication:* Formal (classroom) training and training delivered by the customer service manager are the training delivery methods used most often. This makes sense, since off-site seminars are expensive and require extensive time off the job. Also, while online training is available, the majority of companies have yet to adopt it. Based on our data, most companies believe that it is the customer service manager who has the best idea of what type of training is needed. And most of these companies believe that the classroom environment has the greatest chance of getting the message across.

*Suggestion:* Continuously monitor the effect your training is having on behavior and performance, and change tactics accordingly. Don't be afraid to experiment with new training innovations and delivery methods. Many companies have found that an integrated training approach—using a variety of methods—works best. 

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