|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **2017** |
|  | National Certificate:  Contact Centre Support  NQF 2 – 71490 LP 73269    Helen Hadfield |



**[10358 & 13883]**

**Contents**

[**Module 8: The Contact Centre Environment** **3**](#_Toc57695)

[Section One: Handling Customers of a Contact Centre 5](#_Toc57696)

[1.1 The Contact Centre Environment 5](#_Toc57697)

[1.2 Inbound and Outbound Contact Centres 6](#_Toc57698)

[1.3 How Do We Manage Customer Perceptions 7](#_Toc57699)

[1.4 Moments of Truth in Customer Service 8](#_Toc57700)

[1.5 Placing and Retrieving Calls To and From Customers 9](#_Toc57701)

[1.6 Inputting Subject Information from Customers in line with Contact Centre Requirements 10](#_Toc57702)

[1.7 Responding to Customer Queries 11](#_Toc57703)

[1.8 Mental Scripting 14](#_Toc57704)

[1.9 Following Up On Customer Queries and Requests 14](#_Toc57705)

[**Go to your assessment pack and complete all activities for this Section** **15**](#_Toc57706)

[**Article of Interest** **16**](#_Toc57707)

[**South Africa continues to see big jobs potential in call-centre sector** **16**](#_Toc57708)

[Section Two: Outbound Sales Skills 19](#_Toc57709)

[2.1 Defining Sales 19](#_Toc57710)

[2.2 Is Sales the Same as Customer Service? 19](#_Toc57711)

[2.3 The Sales Cycle 20](#_Toc57712)

[2.4 Recognising Customer Triggers 23](#_Toc57713)

[2.5 How Customers Buy 24](#_Toc57714)

[2.6 The Six Steps to Selling 25](#_Toc57715)

[2.7 The Seven Best Ways to Deal Effectively with Customers’ Objections 27](#_Toc57716)

[**Go to your assessment pack and complete all activities for this section** **32**](#_Toc57717)

[Section Three: Articles of Interest 33](#_Toc57718)

[Top tips for selling over the phone 34](#_Toc57719)

[What's it's really like to work in a call centre 36](#_Toc57720)

[**Glossary of Contact Centre Terms** **39**](#_Toc57721)

# **Module 8: The Contact Centre Environment**



On completion of this module you will be covering the following Specific Outcomes which will enable you to:

* Retrieve calls from customers
* Input subject information from customers in accordance with specific Contact Centre requirements
* Respond to queries from customers
* Provide follow up to customers’ requests
* Place calls to customers
* Record information from customers
* Responding to queries from customers
* Handle a sales telephone call
* Provide follow up to customers' requests

By now you should have a thorough understanding of your tasks, measures as a

Contact Centre agent as well as how to effectively communicate with customers. Although we have covered many aspects in this module before, we aim to give you the opportunity to demonstrate them all in the activities within inbound and outbound Contact Centre working environments. It is important that you remind yourself and revise all other modules (especially Dealing with Customers and Communication Skills) we have covered as it will help you in successfully proving your competence in these unit standards.

Before we start this Module – **write down** what your personal thoughts and objectives are when it comes to working with people and working in a team.



**Personal Objectives**

**What is the secret, in your opinion, to keeping customers happy?**

**Why is it important to have good communication skills in your job?**

**What’s in it for me?**

# **Section One: Handling Customers of a Contact Centre**

## 1.1 The Contact Centre Environment

A Contact Centre is a centralized office that is used for the purpose of receiving and transmitting a large volume of requests by telephone. A Contact Centre is operated by a Company to administer incoming product support or information enquiries from customers. Outgoing calls for telemarketing, product service, and debt collection are also made.

In addition to the incoming and outgoing calls a Contact Centre can also handle letters, faxes and emails.

A Contact Centre is often operated through an extensive open workspace for Contact Centre agents with work stations that include a computer for each agent, a telephone headset connected to a telecom switch and one or more supervisor stations. These stations can be independently operated or networked with additional centers often linked to a corporate computer network, including mainframes, microcomputers and LANs. The voice and data pathway into the centre are linked through a set of new technologies called computer telephony integration CTI.

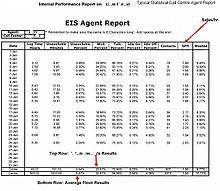
Most major businesses today make use of Contact Centres to interact with their customers, for example, customer support, emergency centres, technical help lines, telesales, insurance. Some Contact Centres even service the internal function through a Contact Centre – for example account queries, product knowledge, help desks, financial and sales support.



##### Picture 1: A typical Contact Centre worker’s workstation



##### Picture 2: Contact Centre floor during shift



**Picture 3: A report on the performance of an outbound Contact Centre agent**

## 1.2 Inbound and Outbound Contact Centres

As you have learnt in previous modules the **definition** of a Contact Centre which is a technologically set up infrastructure with ten or more agents, the **definition** of an inbound Contact Centre is where **telephone agents only take incoming phone**

**calls** for a company or organization.

Contact Centres communicate with their customer in a number of ways, but it depends on whether the Contact Centre in inbound or outbound Contact Centre.

Inbound and Outbound Contact Centre agents can provide the following services:

Customer Service

Help desk

Technical Assistance

Sell products

Sell services

Make appointments

Debt collection

Buy products such as airline tickets

An inbound or outbound Contact Centre can be **traditional** or a **virtual Contact Centre**. Traditional Contact Centre’s are where the Contact Centre staff works within a traditional office situation and a virtual Contact Centre is where a Contact Centre agent works within his/her own home environment.

The telephone is probably the most used tool in modern business, it is estimated that in excess some 25 million business calls are made and taken each day. Not everybody is confident or proficient in their use of the phone, so it is important as a Contact Centre agent that training is given on the basic skills of making and taking phone calls as they are vital for effective business communication

An agent is the front line person of the Company, and it is your voice that the customer hears first, the Contact Centre must find ways to compensate for what is missing on that face to face conversation and make the interaction with the customer a pleasant one through proper scripting.

An agent must bear in mind that the customer cannot:

see your facial expression, manners and reaction cannot see what you are doing and vice versa cannot lip-read what you are saying cannot see what hand gestures you are using

All of the above is what we do normally when we talk to a person face to face, and now that you are talking in effect to a telephone, it is more difficult to get your point across without the person being able to see your gestures and facial expression, thus the **tone of your voice and your attitude** plays a big role in communicating with your customer.

## 1.3 How Do We Manage Customer Perceptions

It is not always ‘**what we say’** but **‘how we say it’** that creates a good or bad customer perception. We need to be aware of what we say, remembering tone and attitude we must also not use **throw away** statements like the examples below. The statement means little to us but **will affect** the way the customer perceives the Company.

All of the statements below can produce a poor customer perception. Imagine you are a customer hearing them during a call. Test them out on your colleagues; you’ll be surprised how many will consider some of these as perfectly acceptable.

"The shipping date on your order should be next Friday."

"I'm sorry I didn't call you back. My boss had us in another meeting that lasted all morning.”

“I hope this will solve your problem.”

“'I don't understand why customer service didn't help you."

“The order processing department has had a lot of problems lately. I'll call them and get this straightened out for you."

"Mr. King is in a meeting. Why don't you call back in an hour?"

"I'm sorry it took so long. Now what do you want?"

“I’m sorry you had to wait. Our telephone operators are very slow.”

“Can you call back because Mrs Jones is not here at the moment? I think she’s gone to the loo.

All the above statements are **throw away** statements, as they give no real meaning to the problem – they are casual and frivolous statements. It is better to be honest with your client, if you forgot to phone the client back rather say so, honesty is the best policy. A client appreciates honesty.

## 1.4 Moments of Truth in Customer Service

“Great customer experiences start with ‘**moments of truth’**. These moments of truth occur at the key touch points in a customer's journey

with his product or service environment. Starwood Hotels (HOT), owner of the "W" and Westin chains, was the first hospitality company to focus on the quality of its in-room customer experience.

For Starwood customers, the moment of truth comes when they first walk through the door of their hotel room and see the bed. Following through on a hunch and willing to experiment with new ideas, Starwood believed that

clean and sumptuous linens would strike an emotional chord with their customers.

Many people had that "yuck" feeling upon seeing a dark-coloured bedspread they perceived as dirty, covering the place they were expected to relax and sleep.

It probably didn't make a lot of operational or financial sense to go with all white bed linens, but the loyalty and buzz factors paid for it tenfold. Although other hotel

companies are copying the idea today, Starwood had a seven-year exclusive run with its Heavenly Bed to help drive loyalty.”

**(Jeneanne Rae, Business Week Online, July 2006).**

The ‘Moment of Truth’ therefore, is that first moment when your company’s product, service or personnel, come into contact with the customer. First impressions are lasting impressions and you only have a very short time to make an impact. Think about the impact you make and what you would like your customer’s “Moment of Truth” experience to be.

## 1.5 Placing and Retrieving Calls To and From Customers

Following the most basic rules for making or taking a call are simple and need to continually reviewed and practiced. Follow the most basic ruled:

**Answer the phone professionally**

Greet the caller

State your organization

Introduce yourself

Offer your help/or give a brief description as to why you are calling

**Show enthusiasm when you phone a customer or answer a call**.

Help make your customer feel welcome. A tired voice that lacks enthusiasm is very unappealing and reflects on the professionalism of your organization. Use friendly phrases as part of your greeting.

“Thanks for calling.”

“May I help you?”

**Remember to smile as you make or take a call**

Put that smile in your voice, it does make a difference and the customer can hear it. It may help if you have a mirror on your desk, this way you will be able to see how you sound on the telephone.

**Closing the conversation**

When you finish your telephone conversation there are some appropriate and courteous statements that should always be made. You should:

Thank the caller.

Let the caller know you appreciate his/her business.

Paraphrase what has been discussed so that the customer understands that you understand what is required or being discussed. Provide assurance that any promises will be fulfilled.

Leave the caller with a positive feeling

**Some courteous closing statement examples**:

*"*Thank you for calling. We appreciate your business "

"Thanks for your order."

"Feel free to call us anytime."

"I'm glad we were able to help."

"Goodbye and thanks for calling."

"I enjoyed talking with you."

"If you have any additional questions please call me."

**Let the caller hang up first**

Always allow the customer to put the phone down first, this is simple courtesy, plus it gives the caller a final chance to add something should he need to.



## 1.6 Inputting Subject Information from Customers in line with Contact Centre Requirements

Information is inputted into the Customer Relationship Management system (CRM) according to company specific requirements.

When a Company obtains a mandate from a client to run a specific campaign, management will design a **script** according to the client’s requirements. From this script which will be the screen page, the agent will capture information directly onto the system as per the script. A script will always start with the basics:

**Greeting –** (some Contact Centres do not show these steps, but it is Company policy and each call must start with the following):

* Introduce the company o Introduce yourself
* Explain the purpose of the call

**Clients Details – this is captured directly onto the system – the system might have the details already, so as an agent you will be asking the client to confirm the details.** o Name of customer o Surname of customer o Identity number

* Address – both physical and postal address o Contact details – landline and cell phone number o Email address

**Questions relating to the campaign will then follow:**

* Questions can be related to a product o Questions can be related to debt collection o Questions can be related to the sales of a product o Questions can be related to a research project

**Paraphrase**

* Before closing the call – paraphrase what has been captured this confirms with the client that you have the correct details and have understood the client.

**Closing the call**

* Thank you customer o Ask if there anything else you can assist with o Wait for the customer to put the phone down before you do.

## 1.7 Responding to Customer Queries



The key to good customer responses is for the Company to provide at the agent’s fingertips everything they will need to perform their job to the optimum.

The Contact Centre world is full of packaged workstations, tools and applications, many of which have been specially built for the industry, others are classic customer billing and information systems that exist inside and outside the Contact Centre.

Some examples of Contact Centre applications include:

Contact management software – this tracts customer contacts, reasons, resolutions and follow-up

Help-desk software – those records, tracks and allows for the analysis of support request within a company.

Knowledge management software – this provides Contact Centre agents with a path of questioning and diagnosis that leads to a solution for the customer request – e.g. 911 help line

Sales and marketing software – helps the agent to maximize their sales and marketing efforts by providing product information details, pricing, cross-sell and up-sell opportunities as well as scheduling follow up activities for agents.

The workstation of an agent should always be kept neat. It should be relatively spacious; the computer is a normal operating standard computer that can be navigated with a mouse and keyboard.

Remember the workstation might be yours whilst you are on shift, but leave it neat and clean for the next person’s shift.

**Responses** come in various formats and can be related to:

Order Fulfillment

Query resolution

Product enquiries

Order taking

Response to enquiries or feedback Subscription services

Pre-sale and post-sale

Order fulfillment

Documentation and payment queries

Before an agent is able to respond to any customer query, an agent will have to be trained in the specifics of the product.

**Product knowledge** is the key to training of new agents, together with follow-up training after a period to refresh the knowledge on a specific

product or service.

It is important that agents are aware of what they can say and how to advise a customer especially with the new Consumer Act the agents have to be trained and be proficient in all aspects of responding to Customer

queries.

The main advantages of having well trained agents to respond to customers through an inbound Contact Centre are:

There is better satisfaction, customer retention and loyalty by responding to all customers’ queries promptly and effectively.

The scope to communicate positive messages become easy and allows the agent to resolve any matter with the help of delivering scripted messages to satisfy the customer’s needs.

It is convenient for understanding the customer’s needs and their intentions which in turn can transform the basic customer response into important matters for product development or research methodologies. In addition, it is also useful to compile customer information to point main issues that ensures business success.

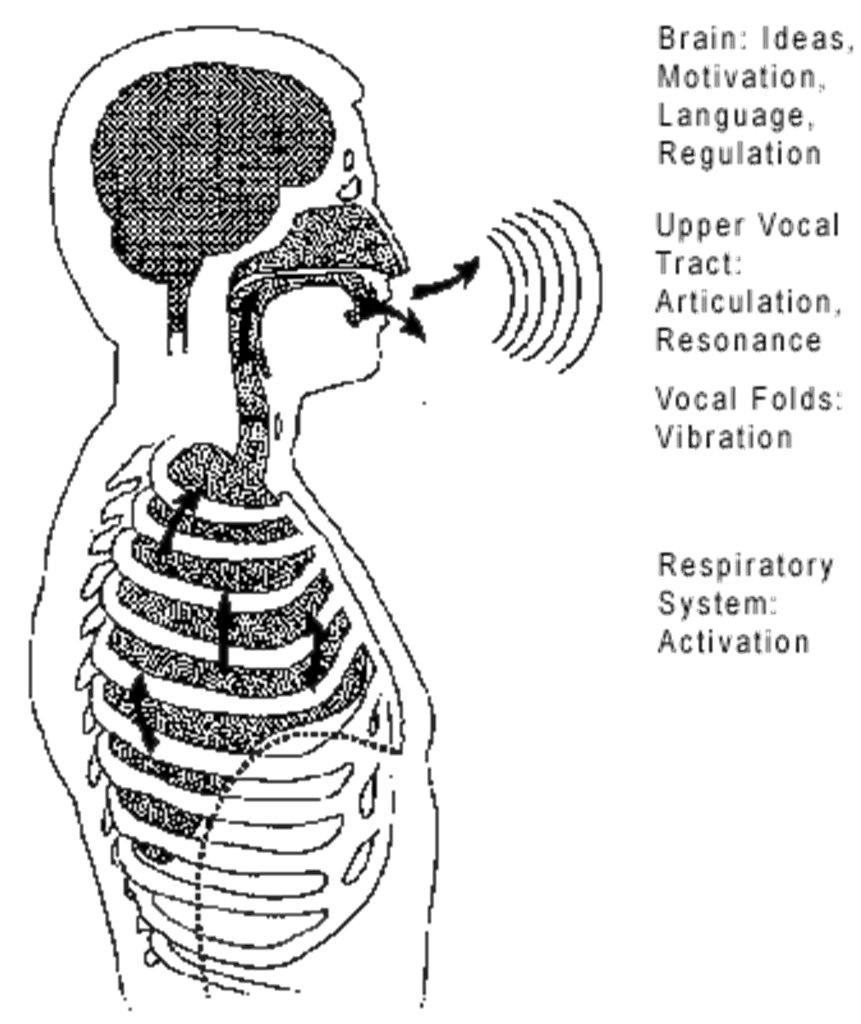
**Keyboard skills** are also of vital importance and play a role in responding to a customer. A company will put emphasis on this during an agent’s interview. Should an agent not be capable of capturing whilst he/she is responding to a client the call will take longer than anticipated, the customer will become frustrated or the agent will close the call before finishing his/her capturing and in many cases a true reflection of the conversation will not have been captured.

**All calls are quality checked** at random by the Team Leader/Supervisor and they will soon pick up on the agent that is unable to complete all capturing or by the agent asking the customer to repeat information so that the agent can capture the information.

All companies do have a training department where customized keyboard skill packages are loaded and an agent can practice and improve their skills by spending short amount of time on improving their keyboard skills. The customized package will test speed and accuracy. Agents should make use of this to improve their keyboard skills.

**Listening is another key skill in responding to customer’s needs**. Often we hear instead of listen to our clients – meaning we are not concentrating on what the client is saying and listening objectively, this could be due to background noise, other matters on our mind or client is talking too much. An agent has to learn the art of bringing the conversation back to the purpose of the call and make sure that the call is completed in the shortest possible time with the best result for both Company and customer.

It is important to also practice good **breathing skills**, especially when communicating over the telephone. This will improve the quality of your voice when communicating with customers. A summary of voice techniques can be diagrammatically represented as follows:



## 1.8 Mental Scripting

In a Contact Centre environment, agents and team leaders form part of a very demanding workplace. Customers expect their needs to be promptly met and resolved in one call, while another queue of customers are waiting on the line. This stressful environment expects the team to think on the feet as well as follow strict rules and procedures.

Different customers may phone in the Contact Centre and ask the same questions. By analyzing the common questions, a script can be compiled for agents to prepare and practice and memorise the scripted response. This is known as **mental scripting**.

By having Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), a list of responses and explanations, assists the Contact Centre in achieving the level of quality and standardizing responses. This is a useful aid for agents to refer to as well as being well informed and professional in their interactions with customers.

## 1.9 Following Up On Customer Queries and Requests

A follow-up call to a customer after you has completed a sale or query is important part of good customer service and product improvement.

**Customer follow-up** is the most important part of customer service especially once a sale has been made. After you made a sale, your customers’ needs a telephone call or another type of contact to help develop a good relationship which can be used as a way to keep customers happy as well as introduce new products or services to your customer base... A customer follow-up service helps you keep in direct contact with your customers.

Follow-up telephone calls are one of the most effective means of customer service and customer retention available.

**Follow-up Service can include a series of telephone calls to one customer:**

Thank you for purchase/enquiry

Provides customer with necessary information to make any process of querying easier for the customer

Welcome phone call – welcome to new product e.g. Sony

Two or three weeks later a product call to find out if the customer is still satisfied.

Survey – marketing tool

**Follow-up calls to customers leads to:**

Customer satisfaction

Less incoming calls on product queries

Develops a good relationship with your customer/client

Opens the lines for good communication between customer and business

Word of mouth advertising

In today’s world it is vital that a Contact Centre responds to customers’ needs correctly as all it takes is one customer to start blogging and sharing an unpleasant experience with others and this will account for an immediate drop in sales – remember blogging is not isolated to one country it is linked globally – so if Sony for instance has produced a HD TV that is giving untold problems and the client is not getting the service satisfaction, it will go out globally and eventually the word spreads that the product is not stable, thus a drop in sales will occur.

No matter how you use a **customer follow-up service**, it adds a personal touch to your product or service and keeps your customers happy. By following up with your customers, you are creating a lifelong relationship with people who will recommend your product or service and purchase more in the future.

Remember you are the face of the Company and bad customer service will not only reflect on you but your Company.

**Go to your assessment pack and complete all activities for this Section**

# **Article of Interest**

# **South Africa continues to see big jobs potential in call-centre sector[[1]](#footnote-1)**

17TH APRIL 2015

BY: ANINE KILIAN

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR ONLINE South Africa is fast becoming the new call centre destination of choice for large international firms, instead of countries like India and the Philippines, where the industry is well developed and thriving. Workforce solutions provider Manpower South Africa MD **Lyndy van den Barselaar** says this is because South Africais regarded as a port of entry into the African continent, which is becoming more attractive to foreign investors and multinationals.

“The presence of larger brand names that have call centres in South Africa is helping other international organisations take note of South Africa’s call centre landscape.”

Van den Barselaar adds that while government support has assisted in attracting foreign investment to the industry through the Department of Trade and Industry’s (DTI) Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) incentives, it is important to increase this support and involvement.

“A stronger relationship needs to be developed between government, the private sector and investors. The Philippinesis doing exceptionally well in the BPO space, and South Africaaspires to adopt the model implemented in the Philippines,” she says.

### NATURAL ADVANTAGES

There is also the time zone advantage that South Africa has with regard to Europe, as well as a neutral accent, which gives the country preference over some other destinations in the Asia

Pacific region, Orange Business Services director and chief technology officer **Mark McCallum** tells *EngineeringNews*.

He adds that the cost of labour is favourable in the country and government also offers incentives that make it attractive for companies to establish businesses in the local market.

“South Africa is fairly advanced with respect to technology, and infrastructure and is well deregulated, compared with some other low-cost destinations.”

McCallum notes that the industry is growing rapidly, especially in the BPO space: “BPO hubs are forming and growing in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg and there is merger and acquisition activity in this space, with some large multinational BPOs partnering or acquiring local players,” he says. Trade and Industry Minister Dr **Rob Davies** launched the revised Business Process Services (BPS) incentive at the South African High Commission, in London, last year.

Davies said the previous BPO and BPS programme, which had been laucnhed in 2011, was hugely successful in terms of meeting the objectives of the DTI.

"More than 9 000 jobs have been created and BPS is a key sector for attracting investment and creating new jobs, especially for the 18 to 35 age group, where job creation is most needed,” he said. He added that 75% of foreign investment in the call centre sector originated from the UK, with voice services accounting for 80% of all BPO work conducted in South Africa.

### NEW SUPPORT PACKAGE

Davies also stated that the reviewed incentive had taken South Africa's increasing maturity, in terms of the servicesoffered, into account.

"We have noticed that South Africa is increasingly being asked to provide more complex back-office process services. Legal Process Outsourcing (LPO) and shared-servicessubsectors are beginning to expand as South Africa proves its capability and capacity to provide such services."

A key difference of the updated BPS incentive is its division into Tier 1, which deals with non-complex work, and the Tier 2, which involves complex work. This distinction was made to attract more complex work, such as LPO, by offering a higher incentive for using and employing a higher skilled workforce. Investors and South African companies running BPS operations had requested that the duration of the reviewed incentive be reconsidered. The previous incentive, which ended in September last year, was offered over three years to companies creating more than 50 offshore jobs.

“The companies presented a compelling argument that, as many of the [call centre] industry's contracts ran for five years, it would, therefore, provide a level of comfort for investors if the incentive was to also run for five years.”

Davies added that the review by global services advisory and research company Everest Global took note of this and that the new BPS incentive would, therefore, also run for five years until March 2019. South Africa's value proposition, which included a large skills pool of English-language speakers, the depth of skills available, the cultural affinity with the UK and time zone compatibility, had continued to attract new investors, with existing investors also expanding.

Davies further pointed out that the BPS incentive played a critical role in reducing the cost gap between South Africaand its competitors, arguing that the South African value proposition was now even more compelling, as it enabled local companies bidding for UK contracts to offer a more cost- competitive proposal when compared with other offshore destinations.

### TECHNOLOGY & JOBS

McCallum says that the integration of cloud-based services, which enable call centres to be more flexible, is also becoming a prominent trend in the industry. For example, agents can use any personal computer, home or mobile phone to access technology using a platform situated anywhere in the world.

Making the workforce a more global and location-independent element dramatically expands the labour base available to a company, potentially decreasing costs while increasing the quality of staff. Additionally, analytics will be further expanded to enhance customer engagement and experience, McCallum adds, highlighting that big data and analytics related technologies will also become more critical in building customer intimacy.

Van den Barselaar notes that South Africa’s economy is plagued by high unemployment figures, which present a challenge to the thousands of job-seeking school leavers every year. The importance of the South African call centre industry could be a possible solution to this problem, she adds.

Most call centres offer training and upscaling programmes, rather than indicating a preference for experienced candidates – unlike many industries in South Africa, she points out.

“The industry contributes to creating employment for school leavers who have little work experience and who might not be unable to afford a tertiary education.”

Van den Barselaar adds that the call centre industry requires candidates to have good communication, interpersonal and basic computer skills, as well as the ability to speak more than one European language.

The South African call centre industry has shown an 18% year-on-year growth from 2010 to 2012, aiming to create an additional 30 000 additional jobs by 2015, she comments, adding that the largest province for call centres is the Western Cape, followed by Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal

She explains that the call centre environment offers various positions for candidates aside from being an agent, including team leader, supervisor and call centre manager, as well as trainers and quality assessors.

“Call centres are necessary in many different sectors and industries in South Africa, including insurance, automotive, sales, business, financial, retail, information technology and basic services. Each industry has different requirements and opportunities for job seekers, based on their skills and experience.”

“The growth in the South African call centre industry is expected to continue, as more local and international organisations become aware of the country’s capabilities in this space,” she concludes.

# **Section Two: Outbound Sales Skills**

Sales is a recognised and rewarding profession and spans across many industries. The sales consultant holds a key responsibility in maintaining client relationships in order to sell their products and service. Without sales; how would most companies survive?

**Selling in a contact centre involves turning all conversations into value!**

## 2.1 Defining Sales

Selling is providing needed goods and services to others for a fee. Please note the word needed! This means that you are truly filling the prospect’s needs, not merely dumping a product on any person and moving on to the next.

A prospect is a potential customer. Once the sale is completed the prospect customer moves to being a customer!

Did you know = All products or services received or used comes through the efforts of a “salesperson”.

### *product & service + customer need = sales (purchase)*

## 2.2 Is Sales the Same as Customer Service?

#### Sales is also service is about bringing value to your customers

Service oriented selling aims to achieve one or more of the following three objectives:

Fulfill a customer’s desire

Meet a customer’s need Solve a customer’s problem.

The difference between service-orientated selling is that its main aim is to be of service.

Your job is to uncover each customer’s desire, need or problem and match it to a product or service in your company and persuade the customer to make the purchase. In this way, you serve by selling!

In the context of selling your job as a team leader is to focus on internal and external customers. Ultimately everything you do as a team leader would involve selling skills!

“**Sales is equal to service**” is essential to reach the success in the sales and services we provide to our customers. It is turning conversations into value.

There are many approaches to selling that are effective, however after many decades of telephone selling it has emerged that the art of selling is linked to service!

## 2.3 The Sales Cycle

When selling to customers you need to remember that there is a cycle involved. The sales cycle can be diagrammatically shown as follows:



**1.**

**Prospectin**

**g**



**2.**

**Sow**

**ing**



**3.**

**Reap**

**ing**

Let’s discuss each in more detail:

1. Prospecting involves finding new customers and creating selling opportunities with existing customers. This step involves planning and recognising the customer’s needs

Prospecting is often said to be the most important activity of the sales process. Successful sales executives look for new leads daily as prospecting is the ultimate source of present and future business.

There is a misconception that prospecting is no more than sitting next to a phone making cold calls to total strangers. Although cold calls form an important part of prospecting it is only one option in the prospecting arena.

As a sales executive you should be following up leads in order to move on to cold calls. A cold call is simply part of an overall set of prospecting tools.

1. Sowing involves presenting and providing information to customers so that you can meet their needs.

1. Reaping is closing the deal!

##### Existing Customers First

It is often tempting to start searching for new prospects. We tend to forget that the easiest place to look for new sales is with your present clients. They know you, trust you, feel positive about your service and your product and they are easy to access.

You can meet up with your current customers to see if the present levels of your product are meeting their needs. Remember businesses are dynamic and as a result the need for your offering is likely to change (and hopefully grow) over time.

As you learn more about the changing needs of a customer you will be setting the stage for additional sales. Your contacts within an organisation can also be a vital source of referral business.

In meeting with your contact person, you are able to discuss other divisions of a business that may need your product. You are now able to ask your contact for an introduction which comes with instant credibility, trust and a proven companyspecific endorsement.

In addition your clients will also be able to refer you to prospects in other companies which are far more likely to yield productive results than going in ‘cold’.

##### Building and using a Network

A network is made up of all the people you currently know, all the people you have known in the past and all the people you are going to meet and get to know in the future. Out of all these people, surely there are dozens who can provide you with excellent referrals to potential customers.

As a sales executive you should genuinely enjoy meeting and communicating with people in any context, and these meetings can be a source of potential referrals. You don’t have to be a backslapping outgoing person to meet people and start talking shop. You should demonstrate some confidence and you should be able to use your communication and selling skills to start identifying your prospects needs.

Remember that your team members and managers are internal customers and can be seen as prospects. You may have to work at building a professional relationship with these individuals to sell solutions, new procedures, motivation quality etc in the future. Knowing who to target is part of your battle won!

##### Prospecting Sources

No matter how successful you are, you can’t afford to relax. Sales prospecting needs to be an ongoing activity. You have to make sure that you have enough potential customers to achieve your sales goals.

Sales people give different reasons for not having enough customers. Some say they don’t have time, and others say that they don’t have any prospects or prospecting sources. Some believe they don’t have to prospect.

If you believe that you don’t have any sales prospects, you may not be looking in the right places. They can be identified in a variety of ways. You can:

* Consider existing customers o Identify customers’ competitors o Remember previously interested prospects
* Find prospects through contacts in your industry who don’t compete with you

So there are many prospecting sources available to you. They may not all be applicable to you, depending on the business you are in, but some at least will apply.

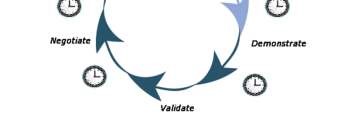
#### 2.3.1 INCORPORATING THE SALES CYCLE INTO THE CONTACT CENTRE

The sales cycle is easily incorporated into the contact centre environment through different elements.

Prospecting happens through pre-call planning and call tracking.

Sowing happens during the call to customers by providing product information or exceptional service. Remember this part of the cycle is about presenting, and if you present the right information at the right time you can go directly to the last part of the cycle = Closing – making the sale!

Part of what we have discussed can be summarised as follows:



In terms of selling to customers, remember we have covered **key communication skills** (active listening skills, asking questions, eliciting and offering information, establishing rapport) and **customer service techniques** in other modules of learning. It is important that you know that these will also apply in how you operate your systems and programmes as this, along with how you communicate with others will always be measured in your performance of your daily work tasks.

## 2.4 Recognising Customer Triggers

One of the most powerful motivators of customer loyalty is the customer knowing that their needs both immediate and long- term will be satisfied. This only really happens when sales people see a person and not merely a **transaction** in front of

them. (A transaction is a one – off, product –or-service-for-

money-exchange.)

The customer will rely on the advice, ideas, suggestions and help they receive from the person serving them. The advice,

ideas and so on will only be appropriate if the sales consultant

knows how to read and interpret issues, conditions and changes in the customer’s life. They become ‘triggers’ for purchase.

Some of these are obvious and are typical of a particular segment of the population. These can be used and applied all the time. Others are specific to individuals and either rely on the observations of the sales consultant or customer conversation.

For example an engagement ring on a customer’s finger is a trigger as is a customer in conversation referring to their recent engagement or upcoming wedding. Depending on the organisation they are visiting ( a bank, travel agent, hardware store, car showroom, department store) the ‘trigger ‘ (if recognised) would enable the sales consultant to suggest additional offerings or at least suggest that the customer discuss possible future needs, thus giving the organisation a head start over competitors.

Increased sales often come from knowing what a customer considers important. These are often things that have nothing to do with the reason for contacting the organisation on a particular occasion. Knowing these things sometimes leads to an instant, additional sale and sometimes become part of a long-running conversation – over several visits to the shop, office, branch etc by a regular customer. The conversation eventually leads to increased purchases.

Triggers: create an immediate need

the need could vary according to the customer

triggers spark ideas in customers’ minds which need developing in

professional sales conversations.

## 2.5 How Customers Buy

There are five stages that customers go through in their own minds in order to make a decision to buy something. Successful sales consultants are able to work with their customers to help them progress through each step and use their sales skills to fit perfectly in with the five buying stages.

In order to analyse sales conversations with customers and know how to sell effectively and efficiently you need to recognise the five buying stages. The buying structure (summarised by the acronym **AIDDA)** is as follows:

###### A : Attention

You must get a customer’s attention before you try and sell. You might say : “ Mr Ndlovu have you got a minute?” The customer has to give you his attention otherwise he would not be able to answer the question.

###### I: interest and Involvement

This is where you raise the customer’s interest. Using effective questions will involve a customer and will also heighten their interest. Using power words like “welcome”, “tremendous” and “enjoyment” also have the effect of increasing their curiosity. A customer who is not part of the conversation will never get to the decision making part of the process.

###### D: Desire

Use the customer’s interest that you have gained to ask questions and describe the advantages and benefits of the product or service. This will build desire in the customer not just for the product or service but also for the effect the product will have.

###### D: Decision

Customers must make decisions if we are to sell. Customers are more likely to decide ‘yes’ if their desire for the product has been raised.

###### A: Action

Once the customer has made a decision it must be acted on. This is when the sales consultant arranges to have the service/product delivered, installed etc. All relevant documentation to confirm the deal must be completed and authorised according to company specific procedures and requirements. This is the stage where processes are put into place to provide follow-up for customers in order to monitor customer satisfaction and fulfillment of the deal.

## 2.6 The Six Steps to Selling

Effective sales conversations follow a basic process that is simple and logical. The process is also efficient so that these conversations can take place in no more than one or two minutes. Neither sales consultants nor customers want to spend time in a long-winded sales process that might lead nowhere. The sales conversation should be perceived by the consultant and customer alike as being a natural, normal conversation.

The process is easy to learn, simple to use and effective. By using this approach sales consultants’ jobs will be easier, the customer will be served better and more products will be sold.

There are six steps involved in the sales process:

###### Step 1: Preparation

This involves knowing products and procedures. It also includes getting into the right frame of mind. Imagine dealing with a difficult customer followed almost immediately by having to serve a new customer. That new customer deserves a positive sales / service oriented conversation, not a carry – over from the previous one. Preparation can therefore be a split decision on your part and sometimes a smile is all it takes.

###### Step 2: Meet and Greet

This includes basic customer care behaviour – smile, eye contact, greeting, handshake, use of customer name etc.

**Step 3: Identify Customer Needs and Wants.**

This step should include general questions such as:

How may I help you? Or What can I do for you today?

As well as more specific questions to do with how the customer will use the product, what specific aspect of the job/service the customer is interested in etc

###### Step 4: Match Product to Needs and Wants

This step should use statements that relate products (including alternatives) to what the customer said in step 3.

###### Step 5: Confirm and Close

This step should include:

A recommendation by the sales person that the customer takes a particular product or

A request by the sales consultant for the customer to agree to take a particular product or to choose one of the product options offered.

###### Step 6: Follow-Up

Follow-up procedures might include:

Logging the sale on the customer data base

Passing order copies to the accounts department

A personal review of why the customer took that particular product (this helps with building confidence to identify ‘triggers‘ ready for other similar customers

###### Example & Exercise

The following conversation is a typical telephone sales call from a TV rental company to a customer. Please complete the following in your work groups:

1. In your groups read through the conversation and decide which statements and questions helped the customer to become:
   1. interested in the idea put forward by the sales person
   2. involved in the conversation
   3. eager to move forward to a buying decision

1. Once you have done this, fill in the five steps of AIDDA as they occur in the conversation using **A, I, D, D, A**

1. Identify where in the conversation the six steps of the sales process are evident (as used by the sales consultant)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Sales Consultant** | **Customer (Mr Chaane)** |
| Hello Mr Chaane? | Yes? |
| Hello Mr Chaane I’m Kim Jones from TV Renters and Co. Have you got a minute please? | Yes. What’s the problem?  (sounding concerned) |
| Oh no problem Mr Chaane. Quite the  opposite in fact. I’ve got some good news. You remember the letter we sent you about the new Digicom TV? | No I can’t say I do.  (sounding disinterested) |
| May I just take a minute to tell you it said? | OK (sounding neutral) |
| We want to offer customers like yourself a special Christmas bonus. | Oh yes (taking notice) |
| Yes it’s our way of saying thank you. We thought you might welcome having an extra TV. | Maybe. What’s the catch. I’ve already got two (interested but wary) |
| No catch Mr Chaane. We normally rent this for R100 per month. TV Renters wants to offer it to you for R15 per week. That’s less than half price!    It’s a remote control portable, so you or a family member can watch their choice of programme wherever they want without | Well I don’t like! That would make three television sets in the house. |
| wondering what the rest of the family wants to watch. It’s a tremendous offer. We could just add it to your present direct debit if you like. |  |
| That’s right. You now have two and satellite – You must get a lot of enjoyment from TV. | Yes we do. The kids especially |
| Do they have one in their bedroom now? | No we do. One in the lounge and one in the bedroom. Why? |
| Well it could be a great Christmas present for the kids then couldn’t it? R15 is next to nothing. | Yes I suppose so. |
| I can have it brought round on Friday – how about Friday morning? | Friday morning? (thinking) Ja, ok, Friday morning. |
| Excellent. Your children will be so pleased.    I’ll organise it now. The technical rep will install it and sort out the paperwork at the same time. Thank you Mr Chaane.  Oh and enjoy the Christmas holidays! |  |

## 2.7 The Seven Best Ways to Deal Effectively with Customers’ Objections

A sales person who handles objections in a skilful, positive and friendly way will sell more and be better respected by customers. In this section you will learn how to: See objections for what they are

Deal with objections in such a way that:

the issue is dealt with effectively the sale stays on track

the customer/seller relationship remains positive

Customers have reasons, real or imagined or mistaken, for raising objections. Objections can be serious or just excuses but all successful sales people need to remember the following points:

Objections can be comments or questions

They can be a natural part of the conversation or they can seem to be out of context (out of the blue, unexpected)

If they are out of context, the sales person should always check why the customer raised them before attempting to deal with them.

If a sales person knows the customer (or has analysed what personality type they are) it’s easier to know how to react to an objection.

If the sales conversation has progressed far enough for the decision to be made it is sensible to attempt to capitalise on it. If not, the sales person should note that the customer is happy with the way the objection was handled and us it in the summary of the conversation the sales person will give before asking for the customer to make a decision.

There is no hard and fast rule for the last point but a good rule of thumb is to think

‘If I were the customer would I be ready to buy at this point?’

###### 1.Bypass it

This technique is simply a request to deal with the objection later. e.g. ‘May I make a note of that and come back to it later?’ or ’ I’ve noted that . May I come back to it?

I’ll need to check it with my manager.’

This proves to the customer that you have registered the objection and you are serious about returning to it. Seek permission to return to the point. If the customer says no use one of the other techniques to address it. If the customer says yes you know that the customer/seller relationship is ok and that the sales conversation can stay on track. You must however always return to the topic later.

This technique can be used when:

You feel you have a good relationship with the customer The customer is open about their thoughts, concerns and issues.

The conversation is flowing and you don’t want to go off on a tangent.

###### 2.Answer it and Confirm

Most sales people give a straight forward response to a straight forward question and are part of a normal two-way conversation. But, to be effective you must always confirm that the answer you give is all the customer needs. E.g. ‘Is there anything else you would like me to add or did I cover everything for you?’ This is essential because:

1. You could give the wrong answer
2. You might respond to what the customer said but that might not have been what the customer meant (people don’t always say what they mean)
3. You might only give part of the answer and the customer might want to follow with an additional point

###### 3.Accept and Balance

This technique can be used when an objection is valid and cannot easily be dealt with. For example when:

The customer wants a version of the product that is not readily available

The customer does not particularly want the version that is available

Delivery schedule is not convenient

The competitive offering has a feature that your product doesn’t have

It’s real value is that it stops a mountain from becoming a mole-hill.

The following are ways to deal with such an objection and the sales person should:

Acknowledge the objection e.g. ‘I see; or ‘That’s a good point’

Check its validity e.g. ‘May I ask how important that is?’ or ‘What makes you say that?’

Accept it e.g. ‘I see’

Provide a benefit that more than counters the missing feature in terms of what the customer wants to get from having the product or service. E.g. A car might not be in the preferred colour but it’s overall safety rating might be better 0important to a buyer with children) or its acceleration might be greater than the competitor vehicle (important to a buyer who does a lot of driving on busy roads where overtaking is important)

Balance the benefit (safety, arriving on time) against the missing feature (colour) e.g. ‘So while I can’t give you that colour, I can get you and your family home safely’.

###### 4.Offer Extra Information

This technique should be used when the customer’s objection is based on a misconception or only part of the truth. To be used effectively it requires comprehensive company and product/service knowledge on the part of the sales consultant. In order to overcome this objection effectively, apply the following steps:

Acknowledge the objection

Check its validity

Accept the customer sees it as a big enough problem.

Seek permission to explain the true situation or signal that you are going to explain e.g. ‘May I explain something to you?’ or ‘ A lot of our customers

thought that (prevents the customer from feeling stupid) and what I always tell them is …’

Give the customer the information they need.

Confirm that the objection has been dealt with.

###### 5.Reduce it to zero

This is usually associated with price objections. With regards to price there are two types of customer:

Those who want to buy but are put off by the price, and

Those who know the sales person will offer a discount rather than lose an order.

This technique handles both types of customer.

With objections such as ‘It’s more than I’ve got in my budget’ or ‘I can’t afford it’ or ‘ It’s too expensive’ the sales person should:

Determine how much is too expensive

Focus on the difference only between the asking price and the price the customer is prepared to pay

Confirm that that is the only problem, and that apart from the price problem, the customer would proceed. (If there is another problem then tackle that first because until it is dealt with the price is immaterial)

Help the customer to calculate ownership life (how many years or how many times the item will be used). This depends on the product/service in question.

Re-confirm the agreement so far and the benefits the customer said s/he wanted.

Then go back to the price difference problem

Now divide the difference by years/months of ownership or by the number of times the product will be used. Come up with a small amount of money per unit of time or use. E.g. A car that’s R30 000 too expensive, kept for 3 years, driven 12 000 km a year is equivalent to 83c per kilometre. (R30 000 divided by 36 000 km = R0.833/Km.) If the customer drives 20 km/day that equals R16,60.

Now compare the benefits of the total product with the example of R16.60 a day.

Now compare the small amount of money to which the customer objects, with something that costs about the same that the customer wouldn’t think twice about spending ( e.g. a Big Mac Meal)

Ask the customer that, since they have that money to spend. Doesn’t it make more sense to spend it on the product I question rather than on the other item? And then repeat all the benefits of the product ownership.

###### 6.Pre-empt it

Sales people might want to typically pre-empt an objection when:

Selling a product with a known shortcoming

The competition continually refers to a particular company or product weakness

Preparing to launch a new product (untested and untried in the field)

Preparing a sales campaign (increased sales activity will generate increased objections)

It is a simple technique and it steals the thunder from any criticism of company, product or service.

To pre-empt an objection the sales consultant must:

Consider any shortcoming to be a feature and not an obstacle Know the advantages and benefits e.g.

Feature: High price

Advantage: Quality product

Benefit: Product lasts longer/ has better features and serves customer better

Build the benefit into the ‘find needs and wants’ stage of the sale

Refer back to the previously agreed benefit should the ‘feature’ be raised as an objection.

###### 7.Question it through

This technique is an alternative to ‘answer and confirm’. This alternative is most useful:

In order to keep the sales conversation natural

When the conversation should be extended to discuss the objection in detail

When a customer raises a major objection

This technique is useful for advancing the sale and reinforcing the customer relationship because:

Questions and answers fully involve customers in the objection handling process- they aren’t just being talked at.

Full involvement helps build the relationship

A customer who answers questions will eventually answer their own objection

A customer who answers their own objection themselves will more fully accept the answer.

This technique involves four steps:

1. Listen to the objection. Let the customer finish speaking before you respond.
2. Either: check the objection’s validity e.g. ‘How important is that to you?’ or ‘When do you see that applying?’

Or Check your understanding of what the customer has just said. E.g. ‘Let me check I’ve got that ‘ and then repeat the objection. Sometimes the customer will

give you the real objection, extend what they’ve just said and so give you more information to work with or they will realise their own solution and cancel the objection.

1. Ask questions to help the customer to become clearer about the objection and alternatives, and lead the customer to a solution to the problem. Questions keep the sales consultant in control of the conversation and ensure that the customer and sales person continue to communicate effectively with each other.
2. Confirm with the customer that the solution is satisfactory. If it isn’t: keep on asking questions

give the customer new information to change their base of thinking provide the answer yourself and ask the customer to confirm the objection is

dealt with.

Accept there is still part of the objection not fully dealt with and offer a benefit to balance.

# **Go to your assessment pack and complete all activities for this section**

# **Section Three: Articles of Interest**

Tips for delivering great customer service2

Paul Clark believes that the essence of delivering great customer service can be distilled into ten key areas.

### 1. Effective customer intelligence

One of the issues we come back to time and time again with our blue-chip clients is not working out how best to interact with customers – but how to figure out who those customers actually are in the first place! Developments like loyalty cards and the internet have certainly made it easier to track customers and their buying habits – but it is still a huge challenge for companies. Effective customer intelligence is based on three essential questions: Who are our chosen customers? What do they need and expect from us as a service provider? How are we doing in meeting their needs?

### 2. Have faith in your front-line customer service staff

It is people that deliver great service, not companies. Some of the best customer service is delivered by companies which empower their customer service agents to think for themselves, act independently and be flexible. Nothing annoys customers more than a centre agent who is completely unable to deviate from an obviously pre-prepared script.

### 3. Understand how customers think

Few firms have begun to consider how they can test for the emotional elements of the customer experience. This is where Enterprise Feedback Management comes in – proactively surveying customers when they are likely to have experienced a service issue (i.e. a water company surveying a group of customers where a leak has occurred in their area would be a classic example) enables companies to plug into their customers’ experiences and resolve issues before the relationship breaks down.

### 4. Work for and with people who believe in service excellence

If the people at the top of an organisation don’t believe in service excellence, it won’t happen. Customer service has to be an issue that the board takes seriously. If it’s not, all the money in the world won’t give you a decent customer service operation.

### 5. Master the art of organisation design

Service excellence is a function of how the organisation is designed. Its key elements are what the leaders do and how effective the management processes are in facilitating the desired outcome. This is particularly obvious in the area of customer complaints. How are complaints handled? Are they treated as a priority and sorted according to urgency? Or are they chucked in a pile, to be dealt with as and when possible?

### 6. Make the link to the bottom line

2 Written By: Paul Clark is the CEO of Charter UK (www.charter-uk.com) Source:

www.contactcentrehelper.com

Masters of service excellence understand that customers who have a great experience are more likely to continue to buy from their companies and more likely to recommend them to others. They also understand that even customers that complain can become brand advocates – if their complaint is resolved quickly and satisfactorily. **7. Make everything a little better every day**

Leaders in service excellence train their people to drive continuous improvement. Companies which settle for a set level of service – even if it’s good – will inevitably fall behind the competition over time.

### 8. Understand that the future will be different

Technology is changing the way service is delivered all the time. Failing to grasp the opportunities and threats presented will mean failure. In customer service, webchat, email, SMS, and Enterprise Feedback Management are just a few of the technologies changing the landscape significantly.

### 9. Learn from your mistakes

Everybody makes mistakes, but winners learn from them, giving their front-line people as much freedom as possible to fix problems. When individuals or teams make mistakes, use them as opportunities to learn. A customer service charter is a great idea – but a willingness to change and develop your customer service strategy based on feedback from your customers and changing market conditions is even better. **10. Make things easier for customers**

Too many firms still make buying and dealing with the customer service department unnecessarily difficult – for both retail and business customers – with unclear pricing, long delivery times, insufficient information and poor support and service. Customer patience is limited – and is only likely to become more constrained in our cash-rich, time-poor society. But for those companies that get it right, the prizes are immense.

# 

# Top tips for selling over the phone3

Here are some ‘top tips’ on how call centre agents can increase their effectiveness in selling over the phone …

### Be Confident

Confidence is vital when making an outbound call. For anyone to buy from you or take the action you want, they have to see you as someone who knows what they’re doing! Far too many people make outbound calls with fear or hesitation in their voice – resulting in a poor impression of themselves, their company and their product/service. In order to be confident you need to ensure that you understand the basics of the product or service you’re selling, be composed at the start of the call and make sure you deliver your script with a strong voice tone! One of the biggest mistakes I hear people make on the phone is to sound too ‘weak and wimpy’ – meaning that the people on the other end of the phone don’t take them seriously.

3 Author: Andy Preston (Source: www.contactcentrehelper.co.uk)

### Be Natural

I’ve lost count of how many calls I’ve heard made where the person making it sounds ‘false’. They’re either reading a script given to them by someone else that they don’t believe in, or they don’t take the time to learn what they need to say well enough (so it doesn’t sound like them).

If you’re working on a new product/service or a new area, you’ve got to take the time to learn what you’re saying. Most people don’t bother to do this well enough, but if you do, you’ll find that it starts to sound more natural as once you’ve mastered the words you naturally start to put your own voice inflections and tonality onto the script, so it sounds more like you – therefore more natural! Customers want people who sound ‘natural’ and able to have a conversation – can you do that, or do you sound more ‘robotic’?

### Listen More

This is something that should come naturally to everybody, yet most people fail to do it anywhere near well enough! I’m always saying that there is a difference between ‘hearing’ and ‘listening’. True listening involves things like ‘verbal nods’ like ‘uh-huh’, and ‘I see’, paraphrasing back what someone has just said to you and asking further questions about a piece of information the customer has just given to you.

This is very common in everyday social situations, yet I’m often amazed how many people can’t do it when it comes to a sales situation! In order to be able to do this more effectively you have to take a genuine interest in the person you’re speaking to – again, something that most people don’t bother to do.

The key here is to get the person on the other end of the phone into a conversation, not an interrogation!

### Don’t Assume

Yes, I know. You’ve heard this before. But if people did anything about it then people like me wouldn’t need to keep saying it! I’ve lost count of the number of calls I’ve heard where the person making the call thinks they know what the customer is about to say, therefore they ‘switch off’! One of the most common examples of this is when the person making the call starts finishing off the sentences of the other person! What’s that about? This only serves to irritate the customer and sometimes results in them putting the phone down – not the sort of result the caller was looking for! In most cases, whenever the caller finishes off the customer’s sentence, they get it wrong – leading to the other person having to correct them and a loss of rapport. Again, not the result we were looking for! **Make It Interesting!**

This is something that has affected every person who has made an outbound call at some point in their career – and it affects some people every day! If you’re the sort of person that has to make a large number of outbound calls in which you’re saying the same or similar things on each call, this is probably affecting you right now!

Think about it… you’ve delivered your script probably 70 times today already. You get through to the next person and, guess what - you sound like it’s the 70th time you’ve delivered it today! The problem is, it’s the first time this particular person has heard it! Don’t they deserve your best effort, rather than the tired, bored, ‘I’d rather be at home than making this call’ way in which you’ve just delivered it?!!

Let’s be selfish here and look at your commission and your targets – fixing the ‘interesting’ issue will go a long way towards hitting those – isn’t it worth it?

UPDATED 23 JANUARY 2014

# What's it's really like to work in a call centre[[2]](#footnote-2)

***Calls to and from a call centre can drive you crazy - but here's what it's really like for people who work in one of these environments.***

*When the call centre person makes your blood boil, count to 10 before you let them have it. They could be one of the 20% of call centre staff who aren't coping with one of the world's more stressful jobs.*

Up to a fifth of call centre staff become over-sensitised to the environment, says Annemarie Lombard, CEO of Sensory Intelligence Consulting, who did her doctoral research study on South African call centres.

“Call centre workers are exposed to high amounts of sensory bombardment from the office environment – lighted call-boards showing queued calls, ringing phones and computer screens. Their DNA and brain circuits have an over-intake of sensory information,” she explains.

According to Lombard, some find their tolerance levels wear out within a short period of time. The result? "Reckless absenteeism" and excessive use of sick leave.

Lombard says that agents may only realise that they can't handle the environment when they have already been recruited, trained and placed in the job. And after thousands of rands and hours of training have been expended, it's hard to say: ‘I hate my job! ‘

**Sleep disruption**

Part of the problem is shift-work and the consequent disruption of sleep patterns. "Sleep is essential for living; it has a lot to do with repair and recuperation," says Dr Kevin Rosman, Health24’s sleep expert. "If this is denied, the body and, more importantly, the brain stop functioning. Mood is especially affected, as is memory. Our ability then to cope with stress is severely reduced, to such an extent that we rapidly reach the stage where we are functioning in about the same way as if we were drunk.” In call centres, productivity depends on quick and accurate problem solving, and ensuring that problems are properly resolved to prevent call-backs. So sleep deprivation means many agents simply aren't very good at their jobs.

Studies have found that 30% of shift workers will be boarded out for ill-health within 3 years of starting the job, Rosman adds, largely due to the sleep disruption.

**The stress factor**

The stress of the job is compounded by the responsibility to give proper customer service, and by the fact that call centre staff are responsible for maintaining the company's image - often, without working anywhere in the company besides the call centre itself. Research finds that high stress levels result in an increased or decreased desire for food, increase in caffeine intake, increase smoking and/or alcohol use, procrastination, quickness to argue and changes in relationships.

A report from Uni Global Union, an organisation that represents 900 trade unions and 20 million workers worldwide, confirms high levels of stress and fatigue, with many agents complaining of constant tension headaches, shortness of breath, muscle aches (usually in the shoulder and neck), mood swings, depression and frequent illness, with staff being susceptible to colds and flu.

It also shows that highly sensitive agents spend longer time in outbound-call and after-call work mode, and their customer-hold times are extremely long – which means that they end up with lower quality assurance ratings.

**A tough training ground**

On the other hand, call centres are great training grounds, says Health24’s stress reduction expert and former call centre agent, Dr Justin Kennedy. **“**Those who survive, tend to go on to thrive in corporate management roles.”

“The main reason such candidates thrive in a toxic work context is because they've learned to be resilient to the hectic demands placed upon them. Some have this innate ability and others just fail.”

"Clients do not stay loyal if they get poor service and if the agent is stressed they cannot offer top shelf service and the clients runs away”, Kennedy continues.

The industry is known for high training and operational costs, with agent attrition and absenteeism the most common problems. While this affects morale, it also depletes corporate wellness for the agent. “Part of the problem is that most employers do not give their employees any help with coping with shift work,” says Dr Rosman. Lombard agrees. “In order to ensure workforce optimisation,” she says, “call centres should try to provide a properly set up environment with enough space, proper air conditioning, massage therapy and nurses on duty.”

It's not only the call centre agents who would be grateful.

(Zaakirah Rossier, Health24, October 2010)

**Sources:** *Annemarie Lombard. (2008). The effect of sensory processing on the work performance of South African call centre agents, Doctorate research study; Kennedy, J., & Pretorius, M. (2008). Integrating a portable biofeedback device into call centre environments to reduce employee stress: Results from two pilot studies. Journal of Workplace Behavioral Health, 23, 295–307; Alison M Dean & Al Rainnie,Monash University, Business and Economics: Absenteeism from the frontline: Explaining employee stress and withdrawal in a call centre. December 2004 (Department of management working paper series –ISSN 1327 - 5216); uniglobalunion.org/ Stress – stop the boss – global union. Work-related stress is a health and safety issue (Study on Call centre work) -National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), USA; Health & Safety Executive, UK; Linköping University, Sweden; uniglobalunion.org/ Dimitra Makri, President of the Union of Cosmote Employees. Stress in call centres.*

# **Glossary of Contact Centre Terms**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Word** | **Explanation** |
| Abandoned call | Where a caller has hung up before an agent has been free to answer the call. Also called lost call. |
| ACD: Automatic Call Distributor | A telephone system handling large call volumes which automatically offers the next call to the agent waiting for the longest period. Nowadays these switches are very sophisticated and you can configure them with a variety of parameters in order to give priorities to different callers and send certain types of calls to specific groups or individuals. ACDs also provide a wealth of reports on calls, agents and trunks. |
| AgentlD | The individual code used by agents to log into the ACD system. This 10 enables the system to track their performance. |
| Agent Group | In order for the ACD to route calls appropriately. Agents are placed into agent groups. These determine which type or types of call they will be offered. |
| AHT: Average Handling Time | The average time spent per call and any work required following the call. It equates to the sum of Talk Time and Wrap Up Time averaged out. |
| All trunks busy: **ATB** | When all telephone lines in any group are occupied during which time all further callers receive a busy tone. |
| Answer **Detect** | Where the telephone system automatically makes outbound calls and on answer identifies network tones such as ringing, engaged, unobtainable, fax phones and answer phones and filters these out, only sending live calls through to an agent. |
| API: Application Programme Interface | This is the translator which enables a telephone system and a computer or computer system to talk with each other and give each other commands. |
| Application | Software that carries out a specific task, such as word processing or spreadsheets. |
| ASA: Average speed of answer | The average length of time calls have spent in the Queue waiting for an agent. |
| ATT: Average Talk Time | The average length of time an agent speaks with a caller, from answering the call to hanging up. |
| Automatic number identification: ANI | Sometimes called CLI - Calling Line Identity. A feature which enables the caller's own telephone number to be forwarded at the same time as their call, enabling identification. |
| Available | Agent status when the agent is logged into the ACD and is ready and waiting for an inbound call. Also called Idle or Ready. |
| Calling Line  Identification: **CLID** | The caller's own telephone number when forwarded at the same time as their call. |
| Call routing | The flow of calls from the AGO as set by predetermined parameters in the configuration. |
| Computer telephony integration: **CTI** | Where the computer and the telephone are given the ability to speak with each other and give each other commands. |
| Cost per Call: CPC | This is calculated by dividing the number of calls handled into the full cost of the entire call centre operation. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Word** | **Explanation** |
| Delay Announcements | Recorded messages given to callers whilst in queue. |
| DN IS: Dialled number identification Service. | This facility enables the AGO to identify the number dialed and therefore route or prioritise the call according to whatever parameters have been predetermined. |
| Exchange lines | Another name for telephone lines. |
| Gate | A group of agents handling the same type or types of call. |
| Hunt Group | Used with ordinary PBX systems to distribute calls. There are two systems, the first where calls are distributed in the same order each time so that the first extension will always receive the next call unless busy when it will hunt to the second extension. The second system is called Round Robin where the next call will automatically hunt to the second extension, and the third call will hunt to the third extension, etc. offering a more even distribution of calls. |
| Hypertext link | Used in the world wide web to create a link to another page (anywhere in the world) which enables people to view these by a simple double click of the mouse. |
| Inbound | All calls received by the call centre. |
| Integrated Services Digital Network:  ISDN | All digital network, which may carry both voice and data and usually leased in bundles of 30 trunks. |
| Interactive voice response: **IVA** | Where an inbound call is answered by a recording which asks the customer to interact by speaking or pressing buttons on the keypad in response to a menu of options. This response instructs the system to search for specific information in the host database which is then converted into the spoken word by voice synthesis. |
| Management Information Services:  **MIS** | Reports from the ACD showing data on agents and agent groups, inbound and outbound calls, and exchange lines. |
| Messaging & Music on Hold | Where calls in the queuing process are played messages and music in order to tempt callers into holding longer, and also when callers are placed on hold during the handling of their call. |
| Nightservice | Used when the call centre is closed, this might be a message given to callers, a diversion to another centre or to voice mailboxes. |
| Occupancy | The percentage of time an individual agent, or all agents (average) are actively occupied during talk time and wrap up time. Occupancy does not include ready time. |
| Outbound | All calls that are made by the call centre. |
| **PBX** (also PABX): Privated automated branch exchange | A generic term for a switch, a telephone system, that is found inside a company's premises (as opposed to an exchange belonging to a network provider which serves the general public). |
| PC based ACDs | Software programme which enables automatic call distribution. Also called Adjunct Processors and Soft  ACDs |
| **Word** | **Explanation** |
| Preview dialling | Uses screens of data downloaded from a central database. The agent then initiates the call usually by using a pre-programmed button on the keyboard, or screen. |
| Protocol | The language used by a software programme. |
| Queue | The 'holding pen' for calls whilst waiting for an agent to become free. Also called splits and patterns. |
| Queue Time | The number of seconds a call waits in queue before handling. |
| RAN | Recorded announcement. |
| Ring Time | The time from dialling to being answered either by a live agent or the AGD Delay announcement. |
| Screen popping | Where integration between the computer and the telephone (CTI) enables the system to attempt identification of each call and look into the database for a match. If that match exists, the data attached to it will then be displayed on the agent screen just prior to the call arriving at the agent's ear. |
| Speed of answer | The time from a call arriving at the AGD to being answered by an agent. |
| Stand Alone ACD | A telephone system designed specifically for automatic call distribution. |
| Talk time | The time in seconds an agent is talking, from answering a call to the caller hanging up. |
| Trunks | Exchange lines, or telephone lines. |
| Wrap Up | The time spent completing work associated with a call, after the caller has hung up. |

Source: Call Centre Management- A Practical Guide

1. Source: http://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/south-africa-continues-to-see-big-jobs-potential-in-callcentre-sector-2015-04-17 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Source: http://www.health24.com/Lifestyle/Healthy-workplace/Work-and-stress/Call-centre-blues-20120721 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)