NO-WIN CUSTOMER CARE SITUATION: APPLY NEW INSIGHT FROM COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

You’ve tried everything, but nothing you’ve implemented seems to have a significant or lasting impact on your contact center’s customer satisfaction numbers. Tasked with improving customer-facing metrics, you intuitively know that there’s something more or different that your agents (we’ll call them engagement specialists) should be doing when it comes to interacting with your customers. But what is it?

The answer goes against popular wisdom in the customer care industry. Current programs, processes, and technologies focus on standardizing the human interaction between customers and engagement specialists. The theory is that by focusing on solving problems quickly and effectively using uniform, scripted communication, customer experience will improve and satisfaction will increase accordingly. While these approaches may help you meet your average handle time and first call resolution goals, they don’t help significantly improve customer satisfaction.

That’s because something we call the “no-win” situation in customer care is on the rise, and traditional approaches won’t help you address them. Instead, there’s a profoundly different approach based on human communication science that helps your brand win the no-win situation and create sustained improvement in customer satisfaction scores, as well as other customer-facing performance metrics.

we’re in a perfect storm

One of the reasons why it’s so difficult to improve customer satisfaction scores is that we’re now in a perfect storm: a collision of social and technological forces that are rendering our contact center scripts, learnings, and processes essentially useless:

• Complexity: Technology is growing more complex every day. Wearables, virtual reality, smart TVs, smart home, 3D printing—the list of new technologies goes on and on, with entirely new categories appearing in the blink of an eye. We’re doubling down on complexity as we connect all types of devices to each other, the Internet, and our friends, families, and colleagues.

• Importance: Modern life is increasingly dependent upon technology, with the result that people develop a strong emotional attachment to their technology. Research of smartphone users in the UK, Hong Kong, China, Canada, Australia, Peru, and the U.S. found that people grow emotionally attached to their smartphone, or at least the connectivity and the technology that the device facilitates1.
• **Access to information:** The Internet provides us with answers to many questions and problems, especially the simple ones. Forrester analyst Kate Leggett reports that “customers resolve straight-forward customer service interactions via self-service, leaving complex issues like account closure, booking a complex multi-city set of flights, or an explanation of smart metering billing policies for phone conversations.”

STARTEK customer satisfaction research shows that 78 percent of customers have diligently tried to solve their issues on their own before contacting an engagement specialist.

When you consider these three trends, you realize why engagement specialists are faced more frequently with no-win situations—ones where issues cannot be resolved during the conversation. People only call when they can’t resolve the issue on their own, leaving your engagement specialists to handle complex problems with no easy answers.

Relying on traditional contact center approaches becomes a recipe for failure and a leading cause of poor customer satisfaction.

### the hidden value of the no-win situation

**Imagine this:** a customer calls in because your Internet service is down. Your customer needs to have the service available within the next hour because performing his job depends on it. Your engagement specialist cannot solve the issue. It will take at least two hours for a service technician to attempt to fix the problem.

The customer is clearly unhappy, so the assumption is that satisfaction will be low. However, some engagement specialists can achieve a high satisfaction score—even in no-win situations like the example just described.

How is that possible? STARTEK research shows that customer satisfaction and willingness to recommend the brand are directly related to the customer’s perception of the engagement specialist’s communication skills. In fact, our research shows that communication skills actually mitigate the relationship between whether the issue was resolved on the call and the customer’s willingness to recommend the brand.

That’s why you need to help your engagement specialists win the no-win situation—and every interaction with customers—to truly move the needle on customer-facing performance metrics such as customer satisfaction and Net Promoter Score.
turning no-win contacts into higher customer satisfaction scores

Your engagement specialists must be able to connect uniquely as a human to your customers. As you can imagine, that's much easier said than done. In fact, creating a unique and authentic experience that is professional, personalized, and punctuated by moments of spontaneity isn't rocket science. It's much harder indeed.

That's because you can't script how to win the no-win situation. To gain trust and connect emotionally, your engagement specialists have to get away from the script. Because relying on a script does not create the ideal dialogue you need to connect emotionally with customers and improve their perception of the brand.

Through the use of dialogue communication skills, engagement specialists can win the no-win situation by learning how to frame adverse situations optimistically, educate customers in ways that reduce their anxieties, and anticipate customer needs to lessen effort.

For instance, a regional cable provider engaged STARTEK to help its engagement specialists:

• Respond to concerns optimistically and with emotional understanding
• Anticipate customer needs
• Create an engaging and effortless experience
• Serve as a customer advocate

The communications company deployed a solution that helped engagement specialists learn and adopt conversational habits that build emotional connection. By the end of the first year, the company had:

• Earned its first JD Powers award for customer service
• Increased its Net Promoter Score by 10 percent
• Increased unsolicited compliments by 18 percent
• Decreased escalations by 26 percent

It pays to connect with dialogue

The STARTEK Science Lab conducted a study of 140 recorded conversations that were tied to a subsequently completed satisfaction survey. Analysts determined 53 of the conversations to be “no-win” situations, where no immediate solution could be provided.

Analysis of the survey question, “How likely are you to continue your service?” showed that even though these 53 calls were not “winnable,” there was a distribution of results spanning “Definitely Not Continue” to “Definitely Continue.”

Closer examination showed that customers were 1.6 times more likely to indicate that they were not likely to continue the service when engagement specialists were transacting (i.e., focused on following a script and keeping the conversation as short as possible) rather than attempting to connect through dialogue.

conclusion

While no-win customer care situations are the new norm, they are also opportunities to deepen your engagement with customers and finally improve customer satisfaction and loyalty scores.

STARTEK can help your company achieve its customer-facing performance goals using engagement-driven solutions that are based on proven communication research and neuroscience advances. We’ll help you bridge the gap between science and practice to improve engagement specialist and customer conversations and win no-win situations.

REFERENCES