













reading from a script, leading to reduced satisfaction and increased frustration for both the agent and the customer. Because Amazon has on-site service agents and service agents who work remotely, the company must use several types of training to ensure each group is adequately prepared to use the new scripts. For on-site employees, role-play sessions are an excellent way to become familiar with the new scripts; remote employees should be given the opportunity to train on-site or to watch a webinar that contains information about the new scripts. Employees who participate in web-based training should also be required to complete a post-training assessment to demonstrate that they have mastered the content of the training program.

Creating new scripts has several potential benefits for Amazon, one of which is that standardizing service interactions makes it easier to deliver excellent customer service. Scripts also help to ensure that service agents treat every customer with the same level of respect, represent Amazon in a positive light, and reflect Amazon's values as a company. Once Amazon switches from the old scripts to the new scripts, managers should test the effectiveness of the new scripts by listening in on customer calls or observing chat agents as they attempt to assist customers. To ensure the new scripts are a success, managers should also keep track of several key metrics; comparing performance with the old scripts to performance with the new scripts is a good way to determine if the new scripts are helpful or harmful to the company.

### **Make Employees Part of the Solution**

Prewitt (2009, p. 52) claims that employers have a bad habit of calling employees "part of the problem" when it comes to bad customer service. She states that customer-service training programs are usually built on the premise that trainers have to convince employees that excellent customer service is important; however, most employees already know about the importance of providing good service. Prewitt suggests that managers and trainers should be asking a different

question: “Why don’t employees consistently deliver excellent service?” Her work raises some interesting questions, especially with regard to why employees are not willing to go the extra mile for customers even when they know customer service is essential for staying in business. After defining the problem, Prewitt decided to investigate why employees are not as concerned about customer service as they should be.

Prewitt spoke with employees from several organizations, many of whom stated that they felt they did not have enough time to do their jobs and offer excellent service at the same time (Ibid.). Employees consistently expressed a desire to provide excellent service, and Prewitt found that their definitions of customer service were well-aligned with employer expectations. The problem, she found, is that employees often feel pressured to reduce the amount of time they spend addressing customer needs. Some employees also identified another problem: they did not have the authority to address customer concerns in a meaningful way, resulting in a high level of frustration for service agents and customers alike. A few employees even broke the rules by answering questions they were not supposed to answer; as a result, they provided incorrect information, angering customers and subjecting their colleagues to angry telephone calls at a later date. Prewitt determined that it is possible to avoid these problems, but only if businesses make their employees part of the solution (Ibid.).

Amazon has several opportunities to engage service agents as part of the solution, but the company must provide adequate training before allowing new agents to deal directly with customers. Prewitt (2009, p. 52) found that misperceptions, misplaced priorities, and misunderstandings are some of the most common barriers to service excellence; fortunately, Amazon has the opportunity to address all three of these barriers by tweaking its existing training program. To follow the best practices identified by Prewitt, training and development staff



members must identify some of the most common misperceptions held by Amazon service agents. Employees may be hesitant to provide honest feedback if they are questioned directly, so the training department should create an anonymous survey. If trainers use a pen-and paper survey, they should use questions that employees can answer by circling a response or filling in a bubble; this way, employees do not have to be concerned that they will be identified by their handwriting. If the training department decides to use a web-based survey, trainers should reassure employees that the company is not tracking login information for each person who takes the survey. Once employees understand that the survey is completely anonymous, they will be more likely to give honest answers that will help Amazon develop a better training program.

After identifying some of the most common misperceptions of customer-service agents, Amazon's training department should address the misperceptions in three ways: meetings with on-site employees, webinars for remote service agents, and updates to the existing training manual. When meeting with employees, trainers should introduce each misconception, explain why it is a misconception, and provide the correct information. For example, if one of the common misconceptions is that service agents can never deviate from their scripts, the trainer can explain that there are some exceptions, explain those exceptions in detail, and give service agents guidance for applying these exceptions to everyday service encounters. The webinar should contain the same information, but because remote employees will not be able to ask questions in real time, Amazon's training and development department should write down all of the questions asked by on-site employees and use them to create an FAQ. Remote workers will have the opportunity to read the FAQ at the end of the webinar, eliminating confusion for service agents, supervisors, and customers.

Because misplaced priorities are such a concern, Amazon's trainers should also teach employees how to prioritize service-related tasks. The company should provide several types of training to ensure that employees of all learning styles are able to master the material. For visual learners, a flowchart may be helpful for indicating which tasks are high-priority and which tasks are low-priority; verbal learners may prefer a written guide to task prioritization (Berry & Settle, 2011, p. 1). During on-site training sessions, trainers should make use of lecture, role playing, and other forms of training to help employees understand that different tasks have different priority levels. For employees who feel that they are obligated to cut service interactions short, trainers should consider explaining that average call time is an important metric, but it is not as important as an agent's customer-satisfaction scores. If trainers give service agents permission to prioritize satisfaction over short call times, employees may do a better job of prioritizing their responsibilities.

Amazon has many opportunities to improve customer service, but three of the most important are integrating customer focus in all departments, improving customer-service scripts, and getting employees involved in the process of improving customer service throughout the organization. Integrating customer focus in all departments has the potential to improve Amazon's ability to meet customer needs, attract new customers, and inspire loyalty among existing customers; improving customer-service scripts gives Amazon an opportunity to standardize service interactions; and getting employees involved creates the potential for Amazon to identify some of the most common misperceptions in the customer-service department. Although implementing these solutions is likely to cost a significant amount of money, the potential benefits greatly outweigh the costs. By improving the company training

program, Amazon stands to increase customer satisfaction, reduce customer-acquisition costs, build loyal relationships with customers, and improve profitability.



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