

Developing Excellence through Customer Service Prince William County Service Authority

Background: The Prince William County Service Authority (Service Authority) is chartered by the State Corporation Commission and is an independent public body responsible for providing a comprehensive county-wide drinking water and water reclamation system in the state's second-largest county and one of the top 10 fastest-growing counties in the country.



The Service Authority is a well managed, forward-thinking organization and a valued member of the business community.

Challenge: The Service Authority shared that a decrease in customer satisfaction, an increase in call escalations, and a general overall decrease in customer service skills (as determined through call monitoring) resulted in a need for training for the Customer Service Representatives (CSRs).

The impact of these issues had resulted in the following challenges:

- Unclear job expectations.
- Too many unnecessary call escalations to team leaders and managers.
- Inconsistent – and sometimes incorrect – responses to customer questions and scenarios.
- Lack of understanding how employee roles and tasks fit into Service Authority's vision and values.
- Less-than-stellar communication skills and proper use of the English language.
- Less-than-stellar listening, writing, and speaking skills.
- Less-than-desirable customer satisfaction and more-than-desirable customer complaints.

Solution: Entelechy partnered with the Service Authority to create an impactful five-module Customer Service program. The goal was to be more than just a training program, and instead, a cultural shift aligning with the Service Authority's strategic goal of providing excellent customer service.

The solution recommended by Entelechy included three specific phases:

Phase 1: Performance Assessment

Conducting a thorough performance assessment spells the difference between a successful initiative and one that fails. A well-conducted performance assessment yields more than a reaffirmation of what the client already knows. It can generate buy-in, uncover hidden obstacles, and identify paths to success.

Entelechy met with the management team to establish the focus areas of our performance assessment.

Working with the Service Authority management team, Entelechy conducted the following activities as part of the performance assessment:

- **Management Meeting:** Entelechy met with the management team to establish the initial goals of the training initiative. Included in this discussion were training goals and expectations, skill focus areas, current challenges, and project logistics.
- **Training, Policies and Procedures Documentation Review:** Entelechy conducted a comprehensive review of the departmental policies and procedures, and the current training curriculum to identify gaps and areas for focus.
- **Performance Observations (Call Monitoring):** Observations are important for gathering real-life challenges and context for the training. Entelechy monitored calls, listening for those skill areas that were most in need of development and current best practices.
- **Identify Performance Metrics and Competencies:** Entelechy reviewed job descriptions for clarity and consistency along with existing performance metrics (call volume, customer satisfaction, escalation statistics, etc.), call monitoring forms, and competencies to identify variables that could be used to determine ROI for the training initiative.
- **Conduct Focus Groups:** Entelechy conducted front-line and management focus groups to gather insights and create buy-in.

The result of the performance assessment was a *Training Recommendations and Design Document*. This document laid out both training and non-training recommendations along with a design plan of the customized Customer Service Curriculum.

Phase 2: Customized Training Design and Development

One of the most critical goals of this phase is to intertwine the technical elements of the job with the skill-related elements of the job, AND embed the Service Authority's culture, goals, policies, procedures, actions, and customers into a training program that would result in significant and lasting change – and increased customer (and employee!) satisfaction.



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The Service Authority program, *Pipeline to Customer Excellence*, included the following customized modules:

Module #1: Customer Focus

This module sets the foundation for the importance of having a customer-focused mindset in all of our customer transactions. As a foundation for the entire program, participants will step into the shoes of the customer and look at the customer's experience of an interaction with the Service Authority.

Module #2: Enhancing Customer Courtesy Skills

Some skills help elevate your customer relationship to the next level; others are prerequisites – they're simply tickets into the big game! Acting in a professional, predictable, and respectful manner is not just good sense, it's a business requirement.

Module #3: Communicating Effectively

How do you make sure that the customers are receptive to us? Approach each interaction with the right mindset AND with a strong set of communication skills – presence, listening, questioning, relating, and checkbacks. Customers expect to be heard. Customers expect to be dealing with a competent, knowledgeable rep.

Module #4: Handling Challenging Situations

When dealing with customers, we are often faced with challenging situations, conversations, and decisions. This module provides powerful tools and communication models for participants to address some of the challenges they face in trying to balance company policies and procedures while resolving customer issues and providing a positive customer experience.

Module #5: Integrating the Skills

This module provides an opportunity for every CSR to use all the skills covered in the previous four modules in some typical Service Authority scenarios. These scenarios are designed to include peer coaching and instructor feedback as well as a collection of the best techniques used by all during the real play activities.

Customer Service Management Reinforcement Training

The Management Reinforcement Training was developed for managers and supervisors of the Customer Service Representatives to equip them with the knowledge and the skills they need to support and reinforce the skills their CSRs learned in training. Management Reinforcement Training includes a summary of the key models and skills of the Customer Service training, simulated coaching



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scenarios, and detailed management action plans outlining specifically how each manager will support and reinforce the training.

Phase 3: Implementation

Train-the-Trainer

As part of the training transition, Entelechy conducted a Train-the-Trainer to provide the Service Authority with the ability to conduct future trainings as new employees join the team.

Results: As a part of *The Pipeline to Customer Excellence* initiative, The Service Authority Customer Service management team established a quality goal for customer calls. The goal was for the Customer Service department to achieve an average quality rating of 4.0 out of a scale of 5.0 over the year ahead. Quality scores had hovered in the 3.3 range early on in the initiative. With the combination of the *Pipeline to Customer Excellence* training, Skill Spotlights (reinforcement workshops), call monitoring, and coaching (using a comprehensive coaching form reflecting the competencies and models from the training), an average of 4.1 has been achieved as of March 2010.

The next step for improving call quality includes the expansive use of “screen recording technology” as part of the call monitoring system. This will enable the Service Authority to reduce average talk time while improving call quality and handling time which is expected to lead to a decreased customer abandonment rate. All of this will positively impact the reputation of the Service Authority in the eyes of its customers.