

Soft Skills An Essential Unit In Customer Service Industry

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Abstract:

Soft skills being an interpersonal skill is used as a describing mechanism of dealing with other individuals at work or in life. These skills are used effectively by individuals in communicating effectively, collaborating with others and managing conflicts through one's own behaviour, personal traits and social attitude. Soft skills is beneficial in work place as it helps an individual to adapt to changes in times of uncertainty through collaboration and effective communication. Soft skills have become one of the basic necessities to be evaluated in a candidate during interview process as it is being considered as a skill of utmost importance.

Introduction:

Once the candidate is selected the organisation expect the candidate to be aware about his behaviour on job. Moreover, they need them to be well equipped with some of the basic skills like effective communication, active listening and being proactive. While in organization we use soft skills in multiple task e.g. cracking a new deal with the client by being persuasive or by sharing new ideas with existing staff. Continuous refining of soft skills will reward a candidate not only by new leads but eventually open gate for getting promoted.

In todays situation a lack of this essential skill may lead to ruining of the business. Hence, by honing skills like team work, communication, leadership and delegation the results will be appealing to business ensuring smooth delivery of work.

Soft Skills and Customer Service:

In modern market where the consumer has n number of options through technology to approach a certain product a strong customer service will multiply the chances of business expansion through persuasion. Hence, effective communication, understanding their need and by being assertive one can contribute to organization success. A major chunk of the time in customer service is engaged in social interaction for which soft skills in an individual becomes imperative. Soft skills also play a vital role in career progression.

Every day in customer service is a new surprise as one is never aware about the type of customer they are going to interact with. Business today is all about customer satisfaction

as customers are looking for excellence rather than being acceptable. Hence, soft skills have become a prime need in taking the customer satisfaction to next level. Customer satisfaction is directly proportional to customer retention so keeping this in mind the soft skills becomes the need of the hour.

Soft skills being an essential component is being evaluated and trained in a candidate in every facet in the industry right from recruitment to actually going live in business. The below diagram gives a glimpse of soft skill in customer service industry.



Fig 1: The above cycle represents the importance of soft skills from entry to exit from an organisation.

Role of Soft Skills in Hiring:

During recruitment the technical skills are vital for the process understanding but making oneself acquaint with soft skills will give a candidate a competitive edge. It convinces the employers of the desired personality required for a particular role.

Employers hunt for candidates excelling in confidence, motivation, flexibility, passion and compassion. Recruitment in the industries is taken care by the expertise and the interviewer themselves are the certified trainer who assess the candidates on an assessment tool. In this assessment tool there are multiple parameters on which the candidate is graded on the basis of which he/she gets a score. Which process the candidate will be a part of is decided basis the score that a person achieve.

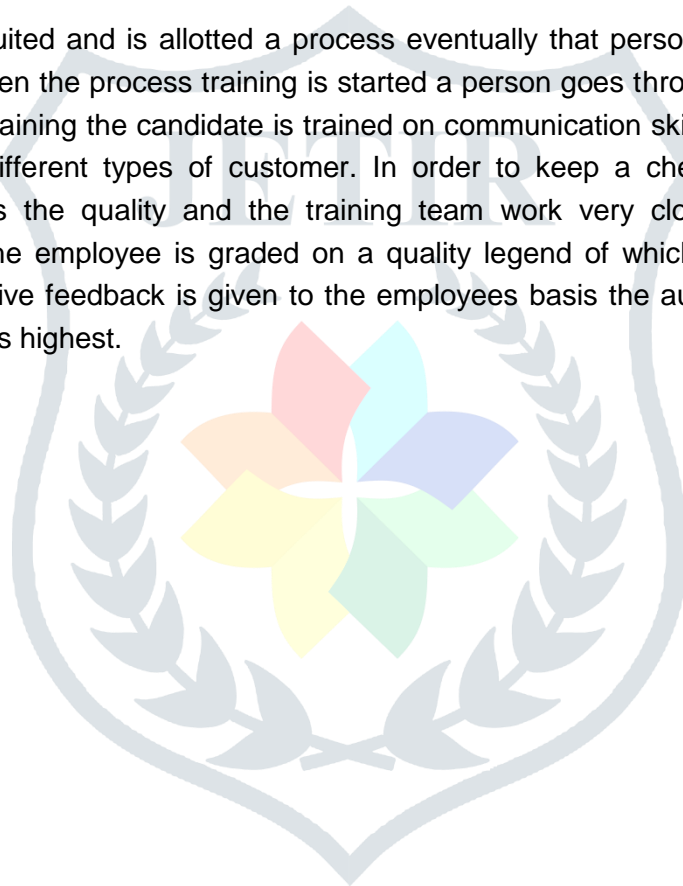
It has been observed that during recruitment of the candidate's soft skills carries a huge weightage. It is for this reason only a candidate goes through a series of situation-based questions to understand their dealing in process. Industries now a days is looking for the candidates who are good in dealing with people so that at no point they should be losing a customer. Acquiring a new customer and retaining an old customer go hand in hand and the only key to deal with people in customer service only if you have a desired set of skill called as soft skills.

Not everyone is a master of this skill it requires patience and understanding. It is for the same reason in recruitment the candidates are grilled strongly around customer centricity.

Winning a job in this world is going to be easy if you are a master of this skill. It's a future prediction that soft skill need is going to increase in the years to come as now a days consumer is not only paying for the product but dream about excellent service as well.

Measuring Soft Skills in workplace:

Once the candidate is recruited and is allotted a process eventually that person goes through a series of training. Before even the process training is started a person goes through the soft skills training first. In a soft skill training the candidate is trained on communication skills, listening skills and the ways to handle different types of customer. In order to keep a check on soft skills implementation in business the quality and the training team work very closely with all the employees. Every month the employee is graded on a quality legend of which soft skills is an important parameter. Effective feedback is given to the employees basis the audit to ensure the customer satisfaction is at its highest.



Sample Corp - Customer Service Phone Monitoring Form

Name:		Yes responses =		0
Call Date/ Time:		No responses =		0
Account #/ TN:		Automatic Fail =		0
Call Type:				
Call Number:		Monitor Percentage =		
Yes	No	N/ A		
Greeting			Comments:	
			Used correct greeting	
			Asked for customer's account number or TN#	
			Verified the authorized user (if applicable)	
Customer Name			Comments:	
			Used the customer's name at least once during the call	
Listening			Comments:	
			Used listening skills (doesn't interrupt, remembers info, etc)	
Courtesy			Comments:	
			Used "please" when appropriate	
			Used "thank you" when appropriate	
			Showed interest and willingness to assist the customer	
			Showed empathy when appropriate	
			Apologized when appropriate (Business mistakes)	
Equipment Use			Comments:	
			Noted account properly	
			Did not use mute button	
Soft Skills			Comments:	
			Voice reflected energy and enthusiasm	
			Avoided long silence (more than 1 minute)	
			Used polite/appropriate tone	
			Used proper grammar and business language	
			Refrained from using company terms and jargon	
			Used positive words (I know, I'm certain,)	
Using Hold			Comments:	
			Informed the Customer before placing them on hold	
			Kept in touch during long hold	
			Thanked the customer for holding	
Connecting Calls			Comments:	
			Connected to the correct department/Queue	
			Informed customer where & why they were connected	
Closing			Comments:	
			Used proper closing - "Thank you for calling Company Name"	
Automatic Fail			Comments:	
			Placed/Received Personal Topline Call	
			Disconnected call without sufficient reason	
			Failure to answer call	
			Failed to verify authorized user when required	
			Failed to access customer account	
			Failed to assist caller and transferred back into same Queue	
			Other	
Agent Signature:			For Customer Service Supervisor: Problem Solving Yes/No - Understood request or problem Yes/No - Probed for add'l information to provide the best solution Yes/No - Appropriate advice was given or action was taken	
Supervisor Signature:			Additional Comments:	
Monitored By:				

Fig 2: Represents a sample quality legend or a form used to evaluate an employee on soft skills.

Role of Soft Skills in performance evaluation:

In customer service industry while constructing the KRA (key responsibility area) for an employee the monthly parameter designed contain quality as an essential parameter in which soft skills is given utmost importance. On the basis of this performance of an employee is evaluated which in turn is linked to the variable component of the salary. To keep the standard of delivery and in order to meet client expectation reward and recognition is also rolled within the process to meet business expectation. An organisation may also practice behavioural interview to test an individual on soft skills for promoting him to next level.

In case if the candidate does not meet the expectation of the industry in aspect to soft skills the person goes through a series of performance improvement plans to upskill the desired need.

Role of soft skills in exit interview:

The increasing demand of soft skills in customer service industry has lead to high standards of evaluation keeping in mind the expectation of the clients. Hence, even if after continuous performance improvement if an employee is not improving that's shows an exit gate from the companies. There have been multiple incidences where if the representative gets rude to the customer is requested by the company to leave if found guilty.

It has been observed that lack of soft skills has been the biggest gap in terms of retaining a job as it leads to huge escalation of the customers which in turn might be an alarming signal for the business.

Future aspect of soft skills in industry:

It is expected that in coming 10 years soft skill need is going to increase in every sector.

Even while approaching for any job interpersonal skills including collaboration, effective communication, critical thinking that needs to be brought to spotlight in one's resume. It's true that technical skills can only be delivered through soft skills.

During an interview the competencies which are paid more attention by the employers now are communication, social skills, courtesy, empathy, team work, professionalism and integrity.

Hence, soft skills need is increasing rapidly among industries and it needs to be taken seriously.