



SkillSharpener Web Extra

Get your CSRs into the habit of asking questions with this exercise

Asking the right questions will help CSRs build better customer relationships and make them better performers and better team members.

"I never learn anything by talking. I only learn when I ask questions," says Lou Holtz, former head coach of the Notre Dame football team. That's a valuable message for your customer service reps — to get to the pertinent data that you will need to help customers, complete assignments, work as part of a team, and in general, be a successful rep, you have to ask questions.

The need would seem obvious and the ability to ask questions should be part of every CSR's skill set, but what's obvious isn't always emphasized, and some organizations and managers might not be providing the reinforcement and training that reps need to become better questioners.

"Improved questioning skills help build bridges between reps and customers, particularly hostile customers and customers with problems," says Jim Dawson of ADI Performance, a training and consulting firm based in Marietta, GA.

Dawson recommends the following exercise when training on questioning skills.

"This is an improvisational exercise that you can do with two people," Dawson says. "One person starts by asking the other person a question.

It could be any question, but it might help to keep the questions work-related to begin with, or start

with a question that a customer might ask. Then the other person has to respond with a question that is built on or related to the first question. Continue asking questions of one another until one person or the other misses. Then start over again."

Dawson adds: "It's an excellent, fun exercise that will teach you very quickly how difficult it is to listen carefully and to ask questions."

The exercise can easily be adapted to become a group exercise.

"Instead of doing it with just two people and having them ask each other questions back and forth, try doing it with a larger group, with as many as six people," Dawson says.

"Have one person start by asking a question, and then the next person in the group has to respond to that question by asking another question. And so on around the group until someone misses.

Then that person sits out while the remaining members of the group ask questions until the next person misses. The last person standing is the winner."

Says Dawson: "You'll see your reps having fun, cracking up, and learning how difficult it is to ask questions. But it will keep questioning in the forefront of their minds." ■

