



The Customer Communicator Web Extra



Keep these five points in mind when coaching a new or inexperienced rep

Whether you are the official team leader of your group or not, if you have worked in customer service for any length of time you probably have developed a lot of service skills and have a lot of experience. One of the traits of effective leadership is the ability to share those skills and that experience through coaching or mentoring.

A coach or mentor is the person a new rep can turn to when things aren't going right or when difficult situations or problem customers crop up. A new or first-year customer service rep probably has had training in the basics and knows the fundamentals of the job, but a more experienced rep acting as a coach or mentor can provide knowledge of difficult situations and customers and resources to call upon to deal with them. According to Lonnie Pacelli, a leadership consultant and author of *The Project Management Advisor* (Prentice Hall), "With a coach or mentor, the new rep doesn't have to learn wholly through his or her own mistakes."

If your organization has a formal mentoring program or you'd like to mentor a new rep on your own there are five things you have to be ready to do, says Pacelli:

- **Be available.** Define how much time you are able to spend in a coaching or mentoring relationship and commit the time to do it. If you're too busy, don't do it.
- **Make listening a priority.** "You need to listen to understand the thoughts and struggles

that a new rep experiences to be better able to help her with a solution," says Pacelli. "Listening also builds trust."

- **Keep confidences.** Any particulars that come up in a coaching or mentoring relationship should stay between the two parties involved. That's why it's better if there's no direct reporting relationship.

- **Tell it straight.** "Telling it straight means that discussions are constructive, respectful, and specific," says Pacelli. "Just remember to build trust in the relationship first by being a good listener and keeping confidences."

- **Have the courage to end it if it isn't working.** There are a lot of reasons that a coaching or mentoring relationship might not work — a failure to connect on common interests, a feeling of obligation rather than commitment and interest, or simply a lack of interest or response on the part of the new rep. If any of these symptoms arise, it may be time to call it quits and move on.

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