BEST PRACTICE GUIDE for Customer Service Professionals
Stephanie Edwards (Customer 1st International, 2004) ISBN 095487440 – 4

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Consider that:

- It is now widely acknowledged that call centres are major contributors to the provision of fast, effective service, to the building of sound relationships and trust between organisation and client, and the prime factor in building the service element of the brand and executing the customer value proposition
- Sixty percent of all customer contact is now through call centres
- The growth of call centres world-wide has been phenomenal (700 percent between 1983 and 1997) - whether measured by number of calls, number of call centres, number of call centre agents or seats, or revenue – and the outlook is for continued double-digit growth per annum over the next several years

The future of call centres is secure because:

- More and more applications beyond the established banking, catalogue sales, airline reservations, technology help desks, order placement, billing inquiries, maintenance requests and subscription renewals, are becoming doable and profitable.

- Technology is facilitating connectivity and the dissemination of information between different parts of the organization (sales, service and marketing) and also its customers - via new data management systems and communication channel possibilities in addition to the telephone (email, sms, web). Interconnectivity examples are web click to email, web click to phone call back or call-through.

- Customers are increasingly exposed to new, improved services and more call centres in both the public and private sectors, and this raises their expectations

Technology is more and more available at affordable prices and the lead time before new technology becomes replicated, copied or bettered, is rapidly decreasing. The need for good business process design and implementation is increasingly understood and practiced. Hence, service excellence and a competitive edge clearly rests with the quality of the contact centre agent.

Stephanie Edwards' book addresses this need superbly. Mapped to the UK National Occupational Standards for Customer Service Level 2, the learning content and learning assignments and activities and self-assessments facilitate the development of knowledge and skill to the level of best practice as defined by extensive international research. It should also be noted that the UK unit standards are closely compatible with those in Australia, South Africa, NZ and elsewhere.

The Best Practice Guide thoroughly covers the basic concepts of customer service, offers sound and passionate sections on communicating effectively, matching features

and benefits to customer needs developing relationships with customers, harnessing teamwork, covers systems for delivering service excellence and the laws and codes of practice affecting customer service, explores customer service in different types of organisation, and gives a solid learning guide to those using the book.

For the new call centre agent or the old hand wishing to improve their competence level, the Best Practice Guide is easy to use, written in simple and clear language, comprehensive, challenging and fun.

Whatever the nature and stage of development of your call centre, I most highly recommend the Best Practice Guide. It is a must read, use and place in the library book.