

# How to Coach Your Phone Reps

*By Judith Filek—President,  
Impact Communications, Inc.*

Managers of phone reps all want to see their reps exceed customer expectations each day. But, today's worker isn't automatically committed to excellence. John Naisbitt in *Re-Inventing the Corporation* said:

- 88% of today's workers want to work hard and do their best on the job.
- 55% said they had an "inner need" to do their best regardless of pay,

BUT

- 50% said they worked just hard enough to avoid getting fired.
- 75% said they could be significantly more effective on the job.

When asked why they didn't work harder, employees said:

- Our bosses don't know how to make us work harder.
- We don't get paid to work harder.

Your guarantee for award winning performance is coaching. It insures that reps will not stagnate or become complacent. It shows that someone cares about their development and is paying attention to them. It helps them to eliminate any self-destructive behavior and improve results.

Ferdinand Fournies in his book, *Coaching for Improved Work Performance*, recommends that the manager should informally coach someone in the call center on a daily basis. It should be routine for reps to see the manager sitting with them and listening in on calls. In addition, the manager should make a note of who is coached on his or her calen-

dar to prevent any reps from being overlooked.

While it is easy for the manager to be buried in tasks behind a closed door, the person's visibility of the floor makes reps cognizant of the importance of improvement. Fournies recommends that as the manager is walking around, he or she should watch and listen for specific behaviors. A new focus skill might be selected and announced each week. For example one week, the manager might listen for tone of voice, the next week how the rep followed company procedures. By choosing one skill per week, all reps can concentrate on the same thing and work towards improvement.

When giving reps feedback, the manager should criticize in private and compliment in public. If there is a need for a more private conversation, attack the problem and not the person. Be as specific as possible and focus on changing the behavior. When people make mistakes, they do not typically do it on purpose. They do what they do because they do not know the reason they should be changing or what they should be doing differently. By avoiding placing blame and being very specific on how to change, the manager will protect the individual's self esteem and build the relationship.

When giving feedback, the manager should also consider the individual. It is a well-known fact that people process information differently. What you say and how you say things can cause the rep to become defensive, instead of cooperative. The manager's own tone of voice is very important. If it is sincere and empathetic, the feedback is more likely to be accepted.

Reps should know how their efforts affect the bottom line. For example, do your reps know what it costs to loose a customer or to keep a current customer happy? If they don't, they should be told. Reps should also understand how retaining customers affects them personally. For example, if a rep loses three or four customers a year, the ripple effect can exceed the amount of sales needed to maintain the rep's job.

Finally, the manager must be approachable and a good listener. Reps get a sense of how well the manager listens by whether the manager allows

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others to interrupt a conversation. If the manager is approachable and a good listener, people will not hide problems, but rather seek advice from a person they feel knows them and cares about them, both personally and professionally.

Phone reps are worth millions to a corporation. If they exceed customer expectations, profits soar and customers remain faithful. With so many choices available to customers today, it is important for managers to coach their reps so that they have the tools they need to be successful.

*Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. It is not what you know but how you communicate it that makes a difference. To reach us, phone (847) 438-4480 or contact our web site, [www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com](http://www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com).*