**Training Course 2 - Effective Questioning**

So much time is lost in contact centres through ineffective questioning and poor listening. If we get it right we achieve first time fix and a sensible call length. If we get it wrong the call quickly loses structure and if we fail to get to the root of the problem the customer is very likely to call back

This module will help you to-

Use a variety of question types

Add more structure to your questions

Listen properly

Summarise customer issues and avoid call backs

**The Funnel**

The funnel is an easy way to plan your questions. Quite simply at the top of the funnel you ask the questions that will get you the most information – Open questions. As the funnel narrows so your questions become more specific to focus on the details.

**Open Questions**

The key to an open question is that it demands more than a **yes** or **no** answer. Typically these begin with *How, who, why, what, when,* or *where*.

Avoid using too many “why” questions as these create a defensive or waffley answer from the customer. “What” is a softer approach, but can be used to get similar information.

E.g.- *Why did you not take it back in the trial period?* – WRONG

*What made you decide to keep it beyond the trial period?* - BETTER

**TED**

**Other words also encourage the customer to give broader explanations and these are-**

**T**ell me…**E**xplain to me…or **D**escribe for me…

These encourage the customer to tell their story and can certainly help an upset customer to explain what has happened in a calm way.

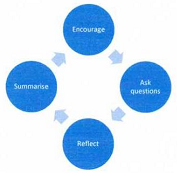
**Chunk up-** These are simple yes or no’s. They are great for clearing up a single point. E.g.-Has this happened before? If we over use them we’ll be there all day

**Chunk down-** To get to the detail we simply add a word to an open question. Detail words include- *exactly*, and *specifically*. E.g.-*What exactly does the error message say?* These happen lower down the funnel to fine-tune our information.

**Summarise-** We use this to present a summary to the customer to ensure we have captured the important points. It is a perfect way to end a funnel. E.g.-*You bought the item in May, because of a house move it wasn’t used until July and that’s when you noticed it had no instruction manual, or connector lead. Is that right?*

**Active Listening** - **Hearing is not enough we need to listen hard and show the customer we are. The E.A.R.S model is a great way of achieving this-**

**Encourage** – Verbal nods such as “uh huhh”…, “go on”… and “I see” are good for showing the customer we are engaging with them, but allowing them to speak freely.

**Ask questions** – Use your repertoire of questions to get the detail you need, and to build on the information the customer has given you.

**Reflect** – Build rapport and show you understand by using the customer’s language in your explanations.

**Summarise** – The final evidence that you have been paying close attention will be given in an accurate summary of what they have said. This also helps you to control the conversation as if the customer agrees that it’s all been covered we can move on.

**Useful questions**

There are no right and wrong questions as both open and closed questions serve a purpose, but the timing is essential.

Open questions get you loads of information

Closed questions allow you to get to specifics, confirmation and agreement

Below is a use set of questions and their purpose. You may want to add your own....

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| **Question** | **Examples** | **Useful for...** |
| **T.E.D.** | *Tell me what has happened...*  *Explain how the problem first appeared...*  *Can you describe what you saw* | Staring the funnel and allowing the customer to communicate their version of events. |
| **Chunk down** | *What exactly did it say...?*  *How specifically did it sound?* | Getting the detail and building on previous information |
| **Magic wand** | *What can we do to put this right?*  *What would you like to happen now?* | Moving towards a resolution  (tone is vital here) |
| **Closed questions** | *Does it feel hot to the touch?*  *Does it happen every time?* | Closing/ opening a specific avenue |
| **Summarising question** | *Let me check that I have this right. It has been happening for 7 days now, and the buzzing starts as soon as you connect the printer. B black and white printing is fine, but the colour cartridge doesn’t appear to work at all. Have I missed anything in that explanation?* | Great for summarising the issue and really demonstrating that you have listened thoroughly. |

Any question is pointless unless it is supported by good listening and note taking not only helps, but also validates the customer, so you could make them aware that you are doing it.

E.g-*“I’m sorry if I’m a bit slow I’m just making a note of the details”*

**Use their language**

The quality of your listening will be further demonstrated if you use their language in your summary.

E.g-“*So let me get this right it’s only been “playing up” since your “face book marathon” on Sunday?”*

**Planning your questions**

Customers do not respond well to diagnostic flow charts as they are rigid and can be delivered in a robotic manner. There is however a great deal to be gained by using a structure to map your questions.

We can’t categorically say how many questions you need to get to the root cause, but we know it will be more than one.

Your starting point will always be a T.E.D style question and your end for each phase will likely be a summarising question. Only when the customer has agreed with your summary are you ready to move on.

It is essential you have flexibility in the middle, but if you have an end in mind your questions will have a natural flow and logic to them.

The summarising question provides a useful safety net to ensure nothing was missed and allow you to move on.

**Key Learnings**

* Imagine your funnel
* Start with the big T.E.D questions
* Ensure you get clarity on the relevant specifics
* Use closed questions when you need confirmation or agreement
* Listen and take notes when necessary
* Summarise and check understanding

This has kindly been supplied by Rob Wilkinson

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