

Good Customer Relationships – A Matter of Emotional Intelligence?

Customer facing staff, their supervisors and managers are much more likely to be productive and successful if they are aware of and more in control of their emotions (**intra-personal intelligence**) and have the ability to notice and discern the moods, temperaments, motivations and intentions of others (**inter-personal intelligence**). That is the tenet behind a cross European study based in contact centres.

Emotional intelligence is a broad subject that encompasses many things, including the ability to really know and understand oneself and others. But what does this have to do with customer relationships? Goleman identified the five 'domains' of Emotional Intelligence as:

- 1. Knowing your emotions.**
- 2. Managing your own emotions.**
- 3. Motivating yourself.**
- 4. Recognising and understanding other people's emotions.**
- 5. Managing relationships, i.e. managing the emotions of others.**

Or as the much quoted ancient strategist, Sun Tzu (The Art of War) puts it:

“Knowing others and knowing oneself, in one hundred battles no danger. Not knowing the other and knowing oneself, one victory for one loss. Not knowing the other and not knowing oneself, in every battle certain defeat.”

At ICD it is our contention that most training courses and our education system aim to equip people with technical skills and abilities – the “know-how”, designed to ensure they understand how to for example, use a software system. So they know how to get into this screen, they know they have to select from that drop down and that they can't move on until they complete this field. It is all quite mechanical and rarely develops the wider understanding of why what they are doing with the data, may be so important in a wider sense.

From the extensive research into emotional intelligence, we can see that understanding EI may support better business and customer management in a number of respects. For starters...

1. Better, more productive managers
2. More engaged staff

Significance for Managers

A study of managers at a previous employer of mine, Johnson and Johnson, provided some interesting data. Analysis of their 360 degree feedback system demonstrated that the highest performing managers had significantly more "emotional competence" than other managers, i.e. more Self-Confidence, Achievement Orientation, Initiative, Leadership, Influence and capacity to create change, was what differentiated superior performers.

Engaging Staff in the Customer Experience

In a previous article, I made the connection between our emotions and an experience ("*Wow or Whoa - Customer Experiences That Touch Customers*", October 2008). An experience is an event that affects you – "affect" is concerned with our moods, emotions and feelings. So how might we use this to really get more from our customer facing staff?

Well, maybe by understanding more about the brain and how we think we might come up with some tests that help us to determine the suitability of staff for some jobs. There are some that purport to do that. Or maybe more realistically we'd be better training people in techniques that help those already in the job to handle heated exchanges or irate customers, better. For example did you know that there may actually be biological evidence for suggesting that you "count to 10" before you respond? It's all to do with biochemical reactions that occur around emotional responses and so by waiting for 3-6 seconds, the impact of these chemicals is significantly diminished. Not a lot of people know that!

Research from the UK and the USA has supported the positive impact of emotional intelligence on sales and business performance. For instance, US insurance agents with high EI sold more than twice that of colleagues lacking in EI! We think there is something in that and so at ICD Partnership we have developed a behavioural model that helps our clients to explore the behaviours required to develop and manage better



relationships with customers for any given role or job family. In addition, we are exploring the kind of thinking, content and learning experiences that bring emotional intelligence into training for customer facing roles to really support a better customer experience. To find out more or talk to someone about putting together a programme for your sales, service or marketing staff then please contact info@icd-partnership.co.uk and we'll get back to you within 48 hours to assess your needs.

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