

Customer First

The Journal of the National Customer Service Association

New York City Transit Metro Mobile Sales

Outstanding customer service
with a personal touch



A New Chapter for the NCSA

Customer Service and Stress Management

One of NYC's Transit buses
"open" for business

In this issue...

The first word...



Welcome to Issue 3, 2014 of *Customer First!*

It is our privilege to once again offer you excellent articles and information that assist you in putting the customer first. The articles in this publication are written exclusively for NCSA and include some of the best-of-the-best practices and philosophies in the country for the provision of superior customer service. We encourage you to share this publication with your employees, co-workers and colleagues so that all may benefit from this valuable information.

The fall season is upon us, the trees are displaying beautiful colors of red, orange and yellow and many are already thinking about the approaching holiday season. It is a great time to focus on family and friends and, yes, our customers. Without highly satisfied customers, the purpose of our various businesses ceases to exist. And sometimes we can get caught up in the day-to-day hustle and bustle and lose some of that focus.

Let's use this season to remind ourselves that while the colors of the leaves on the trees may change, our commitment to our customers cannot. Customers are not ours for a lifetime, often only during the next interaction. The service we deliver and the relationships we build determine whether they return. Living a genuine attitude of service is how we can best ensure they do.

We wish you all a wonderful fall and hope you connect with those that are important in your lives.

Best wishes,

C. William Crutcher, President
National Customer Service Association

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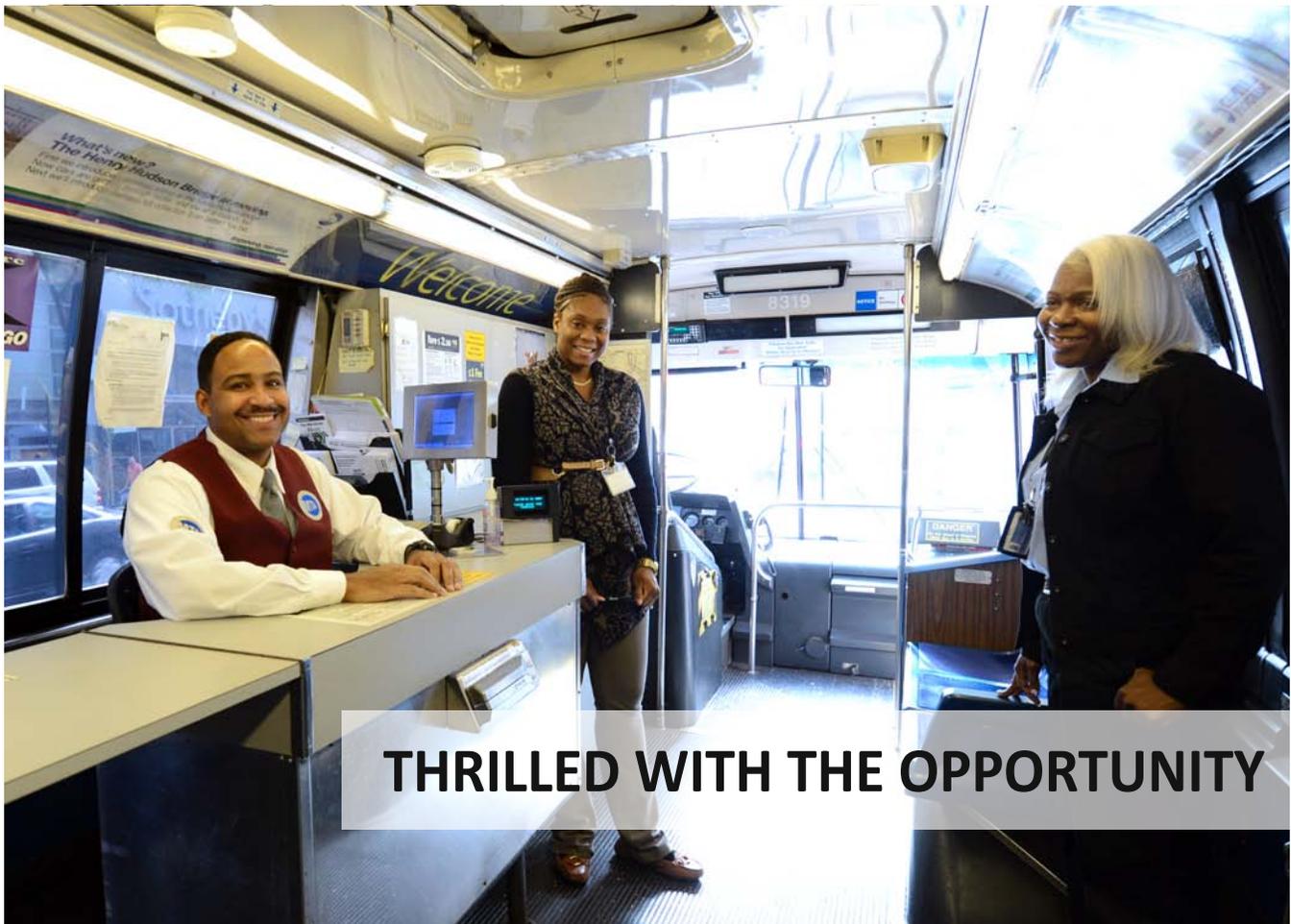
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Editor: Nivi Nagiel
Design and Graphics: Pam Germer

NCSA
NATIONAL CUSTOMER
SERVICE ASSOCIATION

editor@NationalCSA.com
www.NationalCSA.com
866.315.NCSA (6272)



THRILLED WITH THE OPPORTUNITY

BY REGINALD BARON, DIRECTOR OF METROCARD
MOBILE SALES FOR NYC TRANSIT
AND NIVI NAGIEL, NCSA

When we think of transportation within New York City, whether from personal experience or as portrayed on television or movies, “hectic” and “impersonal” are probably two words that come to mind. With 2013 daily subway ridership at 5.5 million and an annual ridership of approximately 1.7 billion, MTA New York City Transit is the largest public transportation agency in North America and among the largest in the world.

Operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, NYC Transit subways make 8,033 weekday trips across Brooklyn, the Bronx, Manhattan and Queens. More than 6,300 subway cars travel some 345 million miles over 660 miles of track. The 100 percent accessible bus fleet, which serves all five boroughs, including Staten Island, consists of about 5,700 vehicles—making it the largest in North America.

Throughout the City, average bus ridership is 2.6 million a day, and 803 million annually.

NYC Transit’s mission is to provide a safe, reliable trip to all of its customers. Since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), NYC Transit, along with the MTA’s Metro-North and Long Island railroads, have worked diligently to make the MTA network accessible to customers with disabilities. Of NYC Transit’s 468 subway stations, 103 are accessible via elevators and ramps. In the City’s fifth borough, Staten Island, MTA Staten Island Railway operates a commuter rail with four ADA-accessible stations. And so, to that end, our story begins.

Within this massive transportation network, there exists a very small unit of 11 employees, who travel around the City and its neighboring counties each day, going above and beyond to reach out and assist customers. This unit is known as the MetroCard Mobile Sales (MMS) team.

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The MMS sales team was first conceived as a pilot program in 1996 to assist seniors and the disabled with enrolling in the MetroCard Reduced Fare Program. Customers applying for and receiving a Reduced Fare MetroCard, were transitioning from the older paper-based fare card system to the new electronic system, introduced in 1994. Not only were the card and technology different, but customers had to adjust to a system including new bus fareboxes that captured and returned their card, and subway turnstiles that required learning how to “swipe” the card for entry. Today, some 20 years later, the Mobile Sales team continues that effort and has become a presence at street fairs and community events, lending a sincere and caring hand to customers going through the reduced-fare MetroCard application process.

Reginald Baron, director of MetroCard Mobile Sales for NYC Transit, is proud to have been involved with MMS since the program’s inception. Baron started as

a field analyst in 1994. “I started as a planner. I had always wanted to be in the transportation industry because it is a vital part of everyday life. Our job is to help people, and the benefit is the immediate satisfaction we receive daily in our efforts,” says Baron.

The pilot program began in 1996 with one bus and eventually expanded to five vehicles in 2004. These vehicles travel to New York City’s five boroughs and its surrounding counties, educating the public about the transit network and the benefits of obtaining a reduced fare MetroCard. Using this service, customers fill out an application on the spot and receive a temporary card that allows them to immediately use the reduced fare benefit on New York City subways and buses immediately. Each vehicle is also equipped with fare terminals which allow customers to refill their reduced fare MetroCards.

Baron says that the unit provides any kind of assis-

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The MetroCard sales bus emphasizes its desire to serve with the friendly notice on the front of the vehicle—“Say hello to the MetroCard Bus! Step inside for MetroCard sales and assistance.”

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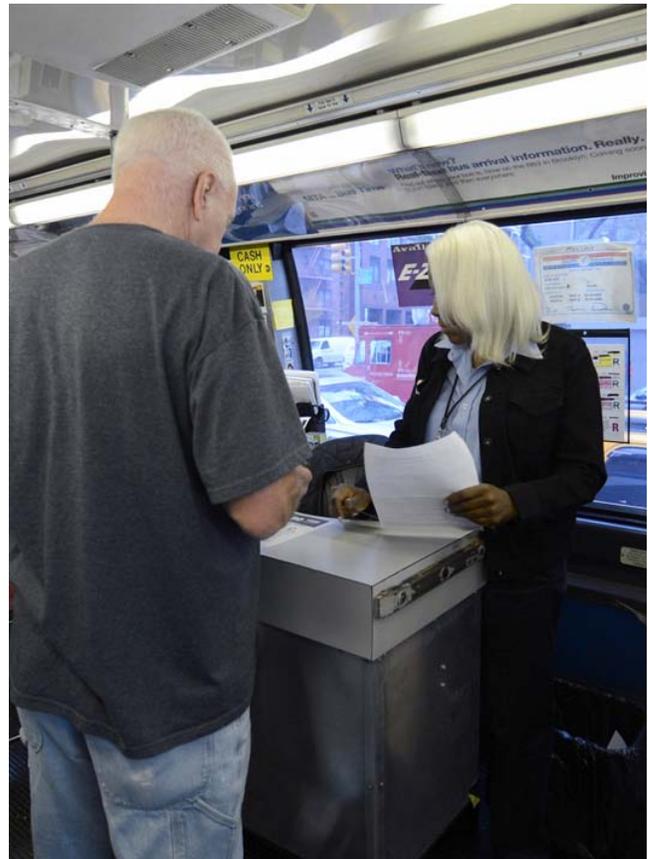
tance a person might need to obtain their MetroCard, including personally completing the application for the customer. "We're proud to provide quality customer service and serve as ambassadors for the NYC Transit system."

"While our office is typically closed on holidays and weekends, our unit has the flexibility to work on occasional weekends or holidays at public events when we know there will be a lot of senior citizens or disabled persons in attendance. We're committed to providing education and assistance in getting them signed up."

Having developed a list of over 90 senior citizen centers throughout the city, MMS visits each center periodically to educate new residents about these facilities and allow cardholders to easily refill their MetroCards.

Baron is proud of the strategic partnerships the unit has formed with healthcare groups and other community-based organizations that can help spread the word about this transit benefit. "Since many of the 90 senior citizen organizations we work with are located on healthcare campuses, we've created a 'one-stop shopping' model that gives the residents the opportunity to explore and sign up for reduced-fare transit while also going to their doctor's appointment," says Baron.

Beyond the vans that travel throughout the boroughs, customers may also apply online at www.mta.info. "In addition to our mobile sales fleet, we continually seek out opportunities to talk about the Reduced Fare MetroCard program and our Mobile Sales services at community organizations. We've developed a 'train-the-trainer' program, where we educate other service providers who work with the senior or disabled communities and provide them with our application materials. In a way, we're increasing our 'sales staff' since these individuals now tell their clientele about our services." Baron is proud of the fact that approximately a half million New York City residents have signed up for the reduced-fare program, allowing them to go about their daily activities using the nation's largest transit network.



A MetroCard salesperson assists a customer in signing up for a reduced-fare option with the New York City Transit system.

Mobile Sales advertises its services on the internet, with brochures on NYC buses and subways, and by partnering with community groups. The strongest referral is, however, word-of-mouth from satisfied customers.

"We have an outstanding team at MMS," says Baron. "We're like a family. We acknowledge one another, share praise, motivate each other and do whatever it takes to get the job done. Because we're such a small group, we must be efficient—everyone is cross-trained for each function." The team includes two field managers whose job is to "keep a thumb on the pulse." The average tenure of the 11 employees is more than nine years.

"We find out what our customers need or want, and we always discuss how we can make that happen," says Baron. Typically those discussions are held at

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The smaller vans offer walk-up options for customers to inquire about and sign up for reduced fare options.

quarterly staff meetings that encourage open dialogue and feedback. The MMS effort is so successful because they are continuously striving to get better, and those efforts are driven by customer feedback. "We are committed to delivering excellent customer service," says Baron. "And we aren't satisfied with just serving the current group of customers—we are always trying to find ways to reach new customer groups."

What sets NYC Transit and its MetroCard Mobile Sales effort apart from other city transportation systems around the country? They seek customers through a team-based, personal touch philosophy. "We don't try to be a well-kept secret," says Baron. "Our goal is to get the word out by attending community meetings and conferences like those held by AARP." The unit is also more than happy to share their successes and challenges at transit conferences as well. "We want to promote this hands-on, quality customer service concept across the country."

A relatively recent outreach effort also has begun with senior citizen groups visiting New York City. "We are proud to provide support for these tourists as well," says Baron, noting that they are reaching out to tour

operators to promote their services. True to their word of expanding their service-provision network, MMS is always reaching out—the epitome of customer service excellence in action!

The MMS team has been recognized for its innovation, high standards and phenomenal customer enrollment numbers in the NYC Transit's internal newsletter publication, "At Your Service," and has been a feature on the agency's public affairs cable-access TV program. Baron reports, "We are the proud recipi-

ents of a 'Unit Citation' from the New York City Police Department, which recognized our service working at



Metro Mobile Sales is very proud of the award received from the New York City Police Department.

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community events as well as our dedication to the seniors and disabled groups in New York City. We're always happy to work with city agencies and community groups to ensure customers learn of the benefits of our Reduced Fare MetroCard program."

Mobile Sales' motto is we "C.A.R.E." about our customers, translating into CUSTOMER ASSISTANCE and RESOLUTIONS through EFFICIENCY. Our goal is to provide outstanding customer service with the personal touch.

"The success and longevity of the MetroCard Mobile Sales program speaks for itself." Baron feels privileged to work for a transit system that identifies and acts on opportunities to serve all of its customers as fully as possible. "People can always take taxis or walk," says Baron. "Our goal is to have them use our transit system, which is the most convenient way to get around our great city." Per Baron, "Mobile Sales' motto is we 'C.A.R.E.' about our customers which translates into Customer Assistance and Resolutions through Efficiency. Our goal is to provide outstanding customer service with the personal touch."

Clearly the fact that MetroCard Mobile Sales continues to expand its services speaks to the level at which they achieve their outstanding customer service goal on a daily basis! ■

Reginald Baron is the director of MetroCard Mobile Sales for NYC Transit, New York, NY.

Nivi Nagiel is an NCSA Editor.

ARTICLE PHOTO ON PAGE 2: Metro Mobile Sales staff await the opportunity to serve customers in their traveling office.



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Service Builder

Fairness In The Workplace

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed employment discrimination based on race, sex, color, religion and national origin, and, without a doubt, changed the way Americans think about the concept of fairness in the workplace. Congress has since amended Title VII to protect additional groups, including age, disability, handicap, sexual orientation, veteran status, marital status and ancestry. The law established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) as the enforcement arm for Title VII. Recent statistics from the EEOC reflect how the American workforce is applying the law based on charges filed against employers and associated work colleagues:

CHARGE FOCUS	PERCENT OF CHARGES*
Retaliation	41%
Race	35%
Sex	30%
Disability	28%
Age	23%

*Total exceeds 100% because many cases involve claims of multiple types of discrimination.
Source: US EEOC.

The EEOC's Performance and Accountability Report reflects other interesting statistics about the agency's efforts during fiscal year 2013, covering the months between October 1, 2012 and September 30, 2013:

- Charges filed: The agency received a total of 93,727 private sector discrimination charges, a decrease of roughly 6,000 charges over the previous three fiscal years.
- Charges resolved: A total of 97,252 charges were resolved, also a decrease over the year before, which the EEOC attributed to "the decline in staffing and resources...including the impact from furloughs." Resolution through conciliation occurred 1,437 times.
- Average time: In FY 2012, the average time to investigate and bring charges to resolution was 288 days. The enforcement staff reduced that timeline by 21 days in FY 2013, to 267 days.
- Monetary recovery: Charging parties recovered \$372.1 million, a new record for the agency (up \$6.7 million from the year prior).
- Lawsuits filed: The EEOC filed 131 "merits lawsuits," with 89 individual suits, 21 non-systemic class suits, and 21 systemic suits. Title VII formed the basis of the majority of the cases (78), followed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (51), the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (7), the Equal Pay Act (5), and the Genetic Information Nondisclosure Act (3).
- Litigation results: Merits lawsuits in federal district courts yielded a total of \$39 million in monetary relief for charging parties. A total of 209 merits lawsuits were resolved through litigation. In order of the most claims, the suits were based on: violations of Title VII (135), the Americans with Disabilities Act (59), the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (16), the Equal Pay Act (4), and the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (1).

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- Trials: Of the 13 cases the EEOC went to trial on in FY 2013 (11 heard by a jury and two bench trials), the agency won nine, resolved one case by a consent decree, and lost one.

So what is the bottom line with all of this data?

- ✓ That we shouldn't need a law to drive fairness in the workplace.
- ✓ That, as employers and work colleagues devoted to excellent customer service, we will strive to treat all of our customers—internal and external—with the utmost respect and "equal opportunity."
- ✓ That we control how our business is run, from our marketing strategies to hiring and employment practices through product/service delivery, including the daily interactions and culture within our workplace.
- ✓ That the onus is on each of us as employers and work colleagues to behave consistently with the values we hold for ourselves personally, in our home, and in our workplace.
- ✓ That, if you find a mismatch between your value system and that of your workplace, work to change it by role-modeling the best approach to customer service.
- ✓ That, if using your influence to change the work culture does not bear fruit, move on to a workplace where the culture better matches your value system.
- ✓ That we absolutely cannot enable a discriminatory workplace by silence, which is tacit approval for a way of

We control so much more than we realize, and Title VII reminds us that when we choose to abdicate that responsibility and accountability, the EEOC will be there to drive our behaviors in the right direction. Don't wait for that "reminder"—just do the right thing every day in every interaction. Your workplace will be sought after as the "best-of-the-best" employers, and your financial success will reflect that.



The purpose of a business is to create a mutually beneficial relationship between itself and those that it serves. When it does that well, it will be around tomorrow to do it some more.

- John Woods

The Zen of Customer Service

BY AMIE EIPERS, LCSW, CH

The customer is always right, or so the saying goes, and the path to ensuring our customers feel well served is filled with stressors. Regardless of our intention in any given interaction with a customer, the stressors in our lives, both professional and personal, are likely to have an impact on that interaction. Typically, we move through our lives managing the stressors we are aware of, putting out each small fire as it erupts and hoping it doesn't turn into an inferno. The challenge is to increase our awareness and become more proactive at addressing our stressors, so we avoid needing the water by never striking the match to begin with.

We all experience stress in different ways, and what is very stressful to one person might be much less so to another. The key is to be aware about what you find stressful and difficult to handle versus what you do not, and then to work within your team and delegate tasks in a way that fits your stress management strengths. A very negative and demanding customer is unappealing to many of us, but some people are able to maintain a calm demeanor and do not feel an increased level of stress in these situations. Others can be overwhelmed by a needy, yet pleasant, customer simply due to feeling unable to meet the customer's needs. Understanding what you perceive as particularly stressful and how you work best in those situations is crucial to lowering your stress level.

The impact of professional stressors is particularly difficult to manage because we often lack control over these situations. Customers are going to present challenges, there will be layoffs and management changes, and we cannot always know when these issues will arise. Having an understanding that these situations will happen is the first step in managing

the accompanying stress. Beyond that, learning to react calmly and allowing yourself time to process the situation before attempting to resolve it will reduce the level of stress you feel. "Life is 10 percent what happens and 90 percent how you react" is an important idea to remember when facing professional stressors. Focusing on the content of the situation, rather than the emotion you feel related to it, will assist you tremendously in reacting in a positive and productive manner.

Our personal lives are most often the source of the bulk of the stress we feel on a daily basis. Finances, medical concerns, and even just the logistics of taking care of your family and running a household can cause stress that weighs on our minds and impacts our ability to deliver good customer service. Yet, in this area of our lives, we can be more proactive in handling our stressors because we can take control and plan accordingly. Use a schedule to manage activities and appointments, follow a budget and keep track of bills and expenditures, and, perhaps most importantly, develop and use a support system to help when the unexpected arises. When we feel that our personal lives are well tended to, we automatically feel calmer and are capable of responding to stress in a more effective manner.



It is important to remember that the effect of stress can be cumulative if we are not actively working to manage and reduce it. We often fail to realize that our stress levels are increasing until we suddenly feel overwhelmed and practically incapacitated at the thought of having to address it. This is where daily self-care becomes critical to "evening out" the stress we face each day. Getting seven to eight hours of sleep each night, exercising three to four times per week for

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at least 30 minutes, and eating well are relatively easy and inexpensive ways to keep your stress level in check. Additionally, finding time to relax and engage in hobbies can help by shifting your attention to something positive, and will improve your focus when you are back in a difficult customer service situation.

There is no way to avoid stress in our lives, and some amount of stress is actually good for us. Recognizing the areas of our lives that cause us the most stress and taking action to manage them are the keys to remaining calm under pressure. The customer may, or may not, always be right, but with the ability to manage our stress, we can ensure the delivery of good customer service in any situation. ■



Amie Eipers is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in private practice in Naperville, IL.

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Service Statistics

Customer Satisfaction with Hotels Is Down

A recent study by J.D. Power and Associates indicates that hotel guest satisfaction is deteriorating to new lows since its 2006 study.

The study focused on seven key measures:

1. Reservations
2. Check-in/Check-out
3. Guest rooms
4. Food and beverage
5. Hotel service
6. Hotel facilities
7. Cost and fees



Some Key Findings

- Overall guest satisfaction declined to 757 on a 1,000-point scale.
- Satisfaction with check-in/check-out, food and beverage, hotel services and hotel facilities are at new lows.
- Guest opinion of staff rated 56% high, 34% average and 10% low.
- 55% of guests use internet, and fees for internet drag down satisfaction levels.
- There is a direct correlation between high guest satisfaction and loyalty.
- Loyal guests are more likely to use other hotel services including restaurants.
- Friendly, service-oriented staff drive top and bottom line financial performance.
- Guests who book through the hotel's website have higher satisfaction ratings than guests who book through an independent website or online travel agency, due to higher price sensitivity and lack of brand loyalty.



We Support Our Veterans

We at NCSA, extend our sincere "Thank You" to the wonderful men and women of the U.S. armed forces. You are the epitome of Service and represent the best of this nation.

LAND OF THE FREE BECAUSE OF THE BRAVE.

NCSA Evolves into the Next “Chapter”

BY WES TINDAL, UNIVERSAL ORLANDO AND ASHLEY RUGGLES, NCSA

In the past couple of years, the National Customer Service Association has received many inquiries from its members and followers regarding the availability of a local customer service chapter in their area. Until recently, the answer was, “Not at this time, but we are developing the tools to do so.”

In early 2014, the NCSA took a more focused approach to the creation of local chapter organizations. Web content was developed that provided those interested in forming a chapter with information they would need to begin the process. This initial information included chapter formation steps, the benefits of forming or being a part of a local chapter and supporting questions and answers providing more detail.

Around the time this information was developed, the NCSA was contacted by Wes Tindal of Orlando, Florida, president of the Central Florida Chapter. At the start of 2014, the officers and board of the Central Florida Chapter were faced with determining a new direction, as the national organization that they had become affiliated with was merging with another. They felt that it was not in their chapter’s best interest to continue with the merger process at that time and actively began looking for another national service-

based organization to which their ideals would better fit.

The concept for the Central Florida Chapter was crafted back in 2002, when members of the call center and staffing industries came together to focus on customer service excellence. As their chapter grew and flourished, other industries began to join, including those representing banking, hospitality, travel and leisure, pharmaceuticals, energy and utilities. Today the chapter has grown to more than 50 registered members, both associate and corporate. In addition, they have hosted well over 100 service industry employees at monthly chapter meetings.

The Central Florida Chapter operates with four elected officials: president, vice president/membership, secretary and treasurer. These positions are voted upon by the active membership. The board of directors is appointed, and is comprised of publicity, web design, programming, education and the Circle of Excellence. As of this year, a newly created board position was approved to coordinate their annual summit conference. Since the Central Florida Chapter’s inception, they have added yearly events,

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Past Presidents of the Central Florida Chapter celebrate their 10 year anniversary.

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such as the Circle of Excellence recognizing Central Florida's top call center specialists in the fields of customer service, sales, help desk and collections. Since 2003, this event has been held every October during the national Customer Service Appreciation Week.

In the second quarter of 2014, The Central Florida Chapter began reaching out to NCSA, and initiated discussions with their president, Bill Crutcher. After multiple phone conversations and learning of the direction Crutcher was taking NCSA, the Central Florida Chapter felt it was the perfect opportunity for their chapter to begin working with this national organization. The Central Florida Chapter was excited to help NCSA build their chapters from the ground up, knowing that their chapter could become a model for others.

In April, the first NCSA chapter development conference call was held. Invitations to join the call were sent to individuals who in the past year had shown interest in either forming or joining a local chapter organization. Everyone on the call agreed how valuable the call was for them. It provided networking opportunities in the development of local chapters. It was then decided to hold a chapter development call on a monthly basis, and they have been held every month since. Some of the individuals on the call, such as Tindal, had previous experience with developing or being a member of a local organization. This proved and continues to prove invaluable to everyone on the monthly calls. People at every stage of chapter development are welcome to join the conference call, which provides an opportunity for those with more experience to share what they have learned. Tindal has been involved in many conference calls to date, sharing the experiences of his chapter and how they have evolved over the course of 12 years. "It gives me great pleasure to know that some of our greatest successes as an organization can now be shared and, perhaps, replicated for others hoping to organize a chapter across the U.S.," says Tindal.

Based on feedback from call participants, an "NCSA Chapter Development" website was created. The site contains useful information for those exploring or actively engaged in the chapter development process.

It is a dynamic site, in that information is added on a regular basis. As an example, when individuals find a strategy or approach that was effective for them, it is added to the site so all can share and use as appropriate in their development efforts. Any information that is helpful for developing and maintaining an NCSA local chapter organization is provided on this website and updated according to the needs of the site users.

The NCSA and the Central Florida Chapter engaged in several exchanges relative to their becoming an official chapter of the NCSA. Tindal was instrumental in his leadership role in this effort. He ensured that both his local chapter and the NCSA would mutually benefit from the relationship. Crutcher acknowledges the dedication and perseverance displayed by Tindal during this multi-month process.

All of this hard work paid off. On Friday, October 10, 2014, both Tindal and Crutcher signed the Affiliate Chapter Agreement that made the Central Florida Chapter of the National Customer Service Association the first chapter of the NCSA.

Going Forward

Currently, there are four to five individuals or groups across the United States that are in the process of forming local NCSA chapter organizations or affiliating their existing organization with the NCSA. Many of those beginning to form a local NCSA chapter organization have already held their first meeting. Additionally, there are approximately a dozen other individuals that participate on calls to gather information to determine if the timing is correct for them to initiate a local chapter.

To receive information on an upcoming call please email Ashley Ruggles, Chapter Relations Manager at ashley.ruggles@nationalcsa.com. There is no obligation for participating on a call. Visit the chapter development website at:

{www.nationalcsa.com/chaptersupport} ■

Wes Tindal is the Manager of Training at Universal Orlando's Guest Contact Center, and President of the Central Florida Chapter—NCSA.

Ashley Ruggles is the Manager of Chapter Relations, NCSA.

Service Reminder

Make a Service Guarantee



When excellent service fails,
it is as simple as 1, 2, 3 . . .

- ① Be *genuine* with an *apology*
- ② Guarantee the *failure will be addressed immediately*
- ③ Handle the service recovery effectively by *offering an incentive to return*



...the last word

*Customer service is not a department,
it's everyone's job.*

~ Anonymous

Every employee in every business has customers—internal, external or both. Most of us understand the value in serving the external customer, but fall short when it comes to serving a co-worker, another department or division.

Collectively, you ARE the company—only as strong as your ability to work in concert with one another. Avoid the temptation to “compete” internally. When you do your competition will take care of your customers. That is not a recipe for success.



Serve each other well and your customers will know!

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editor@NationalCSA.com
www.NationalCSA.com
866.315.NCSA (6272)