Call Center Times

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BREAKTHROUGH CALL CENTER LEADERSHIP

It's About Your Talent Leadership "Mindset" and Execution!

by John S. Mattone, M.S., Cabot L. Jaffee, Ph.D., Michael R. Struth, M.S

In today's global economy, it is critically important that all call centers truly optimize their investment in human capital. It is the human capital asset—and only the human capital asset, that provides any call center organization with any real hope for market differentiation, brand identity and commitment, and ultimately, operational success. A business strategy that is built to leverage a call centers' self-proclaimed excellence in such areas as technology, databases, etc., without adequate attention to the human capital asset—will result in a disastrous, short-lived plan that will lead to doom. All assets, except one—the human capital asset—can become commodities. Beyond this, a host of external factors such as—the aging baby boomer population, job growth, declining birthrates, and worker "unrest" are combining to make it extremely challenging for call center organizations to truly optimize their investment in human capital. After all, and this is regardless of industry and geography, it is just plain difficult to find and keep talent. Shifting world demographics, global supply chains, the aging workforce and global mobility as well as a myriad of internal challenges (i.e., limited resources, skill gaps, turnover, insufficient management skills, etc.) are forcing call center organizations to re-think their approach to talent leadership. The bottom line? Yes, call center organizations need to do a much better job executing their talent leadership systems (i.e., talent acquisition & deployment; talent development; talent benchmarking; and affirmation & differentiation), however, none of this will occur unless call center leaders: (1) possess the belief and "mindset" that talent leadership is the most critical variable in driving operational excellence and (2) accept ultimate responsibility and accountability for becoming breakthrough talent leaders.

Elements of a Winning Talent Leadership Mindset & Philosophy

At the core of creating a winning talent leadership mindset is the belief that **accurate information drives effective strategies**. In other words, a call center organization that is passionately and diligently focused on the knowledge, skills, abilities and personality factors (i.e., competencies) that drive success (both now and into the future) in their various job functions and are likewise passionately and diligently focused on the competencies of incumbents, internal candidates and external candidates, enables the organization to be more strategic and intelligent when making all human capital decisions (i.e., selection, promotion, training, succession planning, performance management, etc.). In this definition, "passionately and diligently" equates to an unwavering commitment to measure, measure, and measure again. Great call center organizations measure and assess everything: skills, abilities, knowledge, engagement and retention levels, cost-per-hire, ROI, etc. All measurement is directed at providing better information as a basis for improved decision-making. At AlignMark, we like to say: In Talent Leadership, like the field of Medicine, prescription before diagnosis is malpractice. It is not too far from the truth to say that call center leaders are engaging in malpractice when critical, strategic HR decision-making is attempted without rigorous attention to data, metrics and analytical information. If an organization can arrive at a point (through initial belief and eventual successes) where there is "passionate and diligent focus" both on the targets that will drive its future success and the competencies needed to drive that success, much progress will have been made in building this core belief. The journey an organization takes to arrive at a strong core belief is also very important. The journey itself coupled with a strong emerging belief that **accurate information drives effective strategies** provides the foundation for other critical beliefs to emerge and become solidified. These beliefs, as they appear below, are shared by all great call center organizations:

- Better Talent = Competitive Advantage
- Talent Leadership "Mindset" is the catalyst for action
- Strengthening the talent pool is every leaders job
- Talent "Gold Standard" has been established (be a role model)
- Leaders must be held accountable for Talent Leadership
- Real money must be invested in Talent Leadership
- Talent Review processes are critical

All of these beliefs should be

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the basis (catalyst) for action—positive action and execution. According to McKinsey's War for Talent Surveys (200 companies; 1200 respondents), however, we would conclude that the percentage of companies engaged in positive talent leadership action and execution is very small. Indeed, when it comes to talent leadership, most organizations are failing and failure is easily traceable to a weak mindset and belief. According to the McKinsey Surveys, the percentage of senior managers who strongly agreed their own organization . . .

• Brings in talented people……….19%
• Develops people effectively……..3%
• Retains top talent………………...8%
• Removes poor performers……….3%
• Knows the A, B and C players….16%

The External & Internal Challenges that are Raising the Stakes

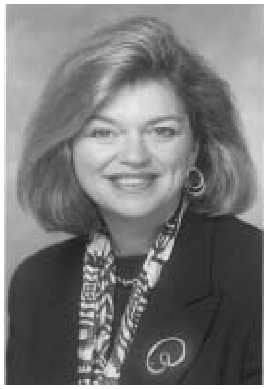
Aging "baby boomers" (i.e., Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate in 2010, 24 million people will exit the workforce), declining birthrates, job growth, low unemployment (i.e., a 2006 Manpower Study in which 33,000 employers were surveyed in 23 countries revealed that 80% were having a difficult time locating qualified candidates). Global competition for talent is intense. With the liberation of trade policies, multinational companies moving production to low cost areas and the corresponding growth of global supply chains, globalization has resulted both in socio-economic and cultural challenges. Countries work hard to develop policies to attract talent with the human and technical skills to support their own economic growth, retain talent and even reverse talent migration. However, the need for talent ultimately creates movement between countries. The United States, for example, relies on foreign talent in certain fields (e.g., science and engineering). Clearly, then, the ability to attract and retain talent is vital to an organizations success and overall sustainability.

Beyond the external factors, there are significant internal challenges that make it extremely difficult for HR, senior managers, managers and employees to believe in and execute winning talent leadership. Some of the challenges:

• Undesirable turnover
• New hire (low ROI)
• Selection mistakes
• Limited resources for recruitment
• Speed/rate of business change
• Limited time and $$ for training
• Skill gaps
• Insufficient management skills
• Legal issues (adverse impact)
• Work life balance issues
• Limited/sporadic use of performance management
• Employee disengagement
• Poor reward management
• Bench strength issues
• Downsizing

How to Overcome These Challenges . . . It's About Your Call Center Leadership Value Proposition.

A call center organization's Leadership Value Proposition is



RANTS & RAVES!

Randomly Timed Musings

Customer Experience Optimization - Building Loyalty through Brand Energy Power

By Kathleen M. Peterson
Chief Vision Officer, PowerHouse Consulting, Inc.

A recent survey published in a June USA Today issue, indicates that 45% of customers identify Customer Service as the biggest influence on remaining loyal to a company. Clearly customers will stop doing business with companies due to the quality of the experience. In the same survey, only 2% of customers rely on brand name and reputation to remain loyal. Yet companies today seem to pour more budget dollars into *traditional* brand management than into "branding" and subsequently "optimizing" the customer's experience.

Optimizing the experience means fortifying the brand "internally," from operational excellence to leadership and individual performance across all functional areas. It is about the manner in which we evaluate and execute initiatives. Within the Contact Center environment, the customer experience is so visible and so critical that it warrants a complete analysis within its own Customer Experience Optimization Program (CEOP)™. This is not simply yesterday's "process analysis." It is an analysis that begins at the top and translates the strategy and drivers that emerge from the executive office to each and every level of the enterprise.

Only then can initiatives be truly transformational and assure consistent, aligned execution that yields a customer experience and a market advantage that price, product, and traditional "brand" cannot touch. Imagine if every proposed initiative included an exercise on evaluating the customer experience - *How is what we want to do going to improve our customer's experience? How is it going to generate revenue or cut cost? How well aligned I is it with our value proposition? How does it deepen the brand in the market and in the company?* These kinds of exercises force discussion and unearth obstacles. And by the way, this is not necessarily an "executive "task." Leaders at all levels have a responsibility to place themselves in the starring role of "brand energy enabler." They must understand strategy, communicate vision, and adopt business drivers to ongoing and proposed initiatives.

Creating internal brand energy is an integral part of the Customer Experience Optimization because a key component in optimization is a having whole bunch of folks excited by the same "playbook." That means working together to provide an experience driven by pride and caring, and supported by cross-functional operations. A colleague once said to me, "We used to call that *culture* - the codes within organizations that drove not only activities of the business but also behaviors. There is amazing brand energy generated within companies that define internal behaviors and structures around optimizing the customer experience. There is a corresponding brand energy drain within companies whose business units are driven by politics and isolated metrics, divided by organizational silos, engaged in budget battles, and are cross-functionally dysfunctional.

Today's markets are transforming at a pace we could not have imagined even ten years ago. But there is one truth that remains in spite of all the whiz bang technology advances and millions of management books written. *Customers are people. People like to feel good, be appreciated, and simply be taken care of in a timely fashion using a channel of their preference.* Embracing that fact at every level of the organization builds the brand energy to optimize, to work together to iron out the wrinkles, correct the problems, fix the systems, and improve the processes.

Any successful program requires a strong stomach for facing realities, and some of them will be harsh. One of those realities may be celebrating the achievement of high scores in "customer satisfaction" which does not necessarily provide a competitive advantage. The fact that a customer is "satisfied" with having to contact you to straighten out a bill, track a missing package, or try to make whatever you sold them work - does not help achieve excellence at the experience level. You must be realistic and honest to truly assess obstacles in the way of delivering that differentiating customer experience - one driven by your company's vision, strategy, and brand energy power.

Brand energy power will be generated when communication from the top is clear, budgets are allocated around improving the customer experience, a Take action every day to evaluate and deepen brand energy and customer experience optimization in your operation

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the holistic sum of four critical Talent Leadership practices: (1) talent acquisition & deployment; (2) talent development & engagement; (3) talent benchmarking; and (4) talent affirmation & differentiation and their impact on multiple levels of business outcome, such as: building capability, commitment, alignment and then to higher levels of business outcome such as individual and team excellence, all of which are directed toward driving business outcomes in a positive fashion. Regardless of the exact words used to capture a given call center organization's Leadership Value Proposition, one thing is sure, the elements identified above need to be well thought out, believed in, communicated, executed, and measured—continuously. At its core, a great Call Center Leadership Value Proposition encompasses everything people experience and receive as they are employed by the organization—including satisfaction from the work they do, to the culture, leadership, co-workers, compensation, etc. A great Value Proposition always encompasses the ways an organization fulfills the needs, expectations and dreams of both incumbents and applicants and should provide the reason—everyday—why an agent should recommit to give their absolute best. More than anything, a great Value Proposition clearly connects winning talent leadership practices to business and operating metrics. As was discussed earlier, there exists no better way to create the belief in the value of the human capital asset, than by demonstrating the connectedness between winning talent leadership practices and operating success. One thing a great Value Proposition is not is fancy words in a brochure or motivational posters or a loose connection of HR programs and initiatives.

At AlignMark, we believe a call center organization's ability to combat the myriad of external and internal challenges listed above is in direct proportion to the strength and vibrancy of their talent acquisition & deployment practices, talent development & engagement practices; talent benchmarking practices, and how well they truly differentiate and affirm performance. An organization that utilizes creative recruiting strategies and tactics (e.g., career portals where the CEO delivers an engaging message to candidates); screens and selects only those candidates who demonstrate they have the highest probability of being successful, staying (being retained), and being committed; provides a rich, engaging, dynamic, compelling learning and performance support environment in which agents are motivated and excited to become the best they can be; provides benchmarking and certification opportunities for agents to prove—on a continuous basis—that they do possess the knowledge, skills and abilities required for success; and rewards and recognizes those agents who truly execute, are the foundational steps required for combating all external and internal challenges. In fact, great call center organizations, while mindful of these challenges, are never consumed by them.

A strong Talent Leadership foundation leads to: (1) Capability; (2) Commitment; and (3) Alignment. Great call center organizations excel in creating the belief their agents "can do" (i.e., capability), "will do" (i.e., commitment), and "must do" (i.e., alignment) what is required for success—now—and into the future. To put it in different words—when talented agents are trained and "nourished" to excel in their work, are provided a rich, engaging environment in which there is passion and excitement about doing great work and truly making a difference, and they perceive a connection and alignment between their work experience and the realization of organizational goals and metrics—great things happen (i.e., individual and team excellence). At AlignMark, we call this "Pull Magic"—where agents are passionate about being "pulled" in a direction of individual and organizational greatness. Most organizations, unfortunately, because they haven't created this type of magical environment, do the opposite, where they engage in "Push" strategies, where agents perceive being "pushed" in a direction most likely to benefit the organization—not the individual.

Building a Strong Talent Leadership

Foundation…Talent Acquisition

Regarding Talent Acquisition, organizations have a number of challenges to address. According to the Society for Human Resource Management's 2006 Talent Management Survey Report, the number one challenge for call center organizations is building a deeper reservoir of successors at every level. To attract talent and retain talent, organizations must focus on the "fit" and compatibility of candidates to job requirements and culture. Organizations with excellent reputations and strong brands are, and will continue to be, well positioned to attract top talent. Great call center organizations, as we said earlier, are passionate and diligent—through measurement— about identifying the profiles (i.e., knowledge, skills, work preferences, personality, etc.) of individuals—at all levels and positions—who are successful. Once those profiles are identified, they become targets against which recruiting resources are deployed. A variation on this theme is when an organization, as part of its recruiting strategy, taps into specific labor pools. By assessing the organization's areas of strength in its workplace programs and policies, HR may be able to identify possible segments of the labor force to target. For example, women who have either not begun their careers or are reentering the labor market from childbearing years represent a sizable talent pool.

Whirlpool Corporation, a top U.S. home appliance maker, targets women in recruiting and promotion. Some organizations focus on workers with disabilities, an excellent source of talent.

Within great call center organizations, it is typical for the HR organization to create and implement sophisticated tools and processes that enable internal client groups to do a better job executing talent acquisition. The use of technology to help source and screen talent is becoming more prevalent. Candidates can now visit an organizations' web-site, be directed to their career portal and "click" to watch a video of the CEO delivering a dynamic, compelling recruiting message that both educates and inspires. After experiencing a powerful introduction to the organization, the candidate can select from a menu of available positions. After selecting one or more, the candidate is then presented with a brief "realistic job preview", at which point they can self-select themselves out of the process prior to entering any identification data. If they decide to continue, they enter some brief identification data, and are then presented with a series of questions designed to determine if they are minimally qualified for the position. If they are deemed minimally qualified, they advance to the "work preferences" section, where they respond to specific elements of the position (some of which may not be appealing, such as: "You will be required to be on the phone for a minimum of 6 hours per day"…..are you still interested in this position….click "Yes" or "No". A candidate who has entered their identification information, has not been "knocked-out" for not meeting minimum qualifications, has not "self-selected" out because they are not interested in the position, advances to a series of questions designed to capture their education and work experience. At this point, their responses are being scored "behind the scenes" as part of the scoring algorithm. The last section of the technology-based sourcing and screening system may also include simulation questions that assess a candidate's skills. These responses, similarly, are scored.

From an organizations standpoint, the deployment of a technology-based system that can accomplish many of the steps discussed above while reducing cost-per-hire, time-to-fill, and turnover and increasing quality of hire, makes this solution a winner. Add the positive branding elements associated with an engaging introduction to improve sourcing and the legal defensibility associated with using a standard protocol to determine minimum qualifications as well as reduced risk of adverse impact (as a result of "applicant" being defined as such later in the process), adds to the overall technical strength of an application like this. Of course, when the recruiting "back-end" is added which enables an organization to extract resumes to databases, track candidates, stay in email contact, schedule interviews, etc., the system becomes more even more robust. It is important to understand, however, that these types of systems—and others, such as: assessment tools, performance appraisal systems, succession planning systems, etc., are the ways in which HR can add value, freeing managers to focus on their day-to-day operational issues., yet, these same tools and processes can, and do, backfire when managers over-rely on them or the attitude is taken that it is HR's job.

Hiring managers must assume ultimate responsibility for acquiring talent. After all, they are most knowledgeable about the culture of the organization, the work that needs to be executed, and the results required. In fact, call center leaders must assume the ultimate responsibility for "Talent Leadership", which encompasses the four foundational areas discussed earlier. It is HR's job to provide the tools, processes and systems that enable managers to execute—at the highest level—the four foundational elements of Talent Leadership.

To help organizations diagnose their strengths and weaknesses in the four foundational areas comprising Talent Leadership, AlignMark has created a Talent Leadership Index. The AlignMark Talent Leadership Index (ATLI) is a powerful diagnostic tool that enables an organizations HR department and its' internal client groups to assess the relative health of their Talent Leadership Beliefs and Practices. With respect to Talent Acquisition, best practices include:

- Ratio of interviews conducted per job opening to hire is at least 3 to 1
- Prior to interviewing, candidates are pre-screened to ensure they are minimally qualified for the position
- Prior to interviewing and/or more in-depth assessments, candidates are ranked on preferred experience and skill information
- Candidates who pass the pre-screen are able to schedule themselves for next steps
- Candidates are provided immediate feedback as part of the screening process

Building a Strong Talent Leadership Foundation….Talent Deployment

AlignMark's three-part definition of "Talent Deployment":
1. Accurately measuring, through assessment, a candidate's deep-rooted skills, abilities, interests and personality factors.
2. Accurately matching a candidate's skills, abilities, interests and personality factors to those positions (and culture) for which there is a high probability of their being successful and staying longer as a result of their being engaged and challenged.
3. Implementing the above steps at each level and position within the organization so that deployment decisions made involving both external and internal candidates are efficient and effective and, ultimately, drive individual and operational success.

Inferior deployment decisions, unfortunately, are commonplace. AlignMark focus groups with CEO's and senior call center managers clearly indicate the three most troubling deployment mistakes: (1) "quick quits" (i.e., employees who voluntarily leave within six months); (2) "fast fires" (i.e., employees who are involuntarily terminated within six months of their being hired); and (3) "bad hires" (i.e., people who are hired or promoted but do not excel). According to Spherion's Emerging Workforce Study, the average cost to replace an employee in the U.S. is 1.5 times their base salary. Those are direct costs. Indirect costs, associated with productivity, team morale and customer satisfaction, are estimated to be 3 to 5 times direct costs. Clearly, deployment decisions are of critical importance.

Back to the CEO focus groups. When AlignMark asked the senior executives how their own call center organizations could best combat the three most troubling mistakes cited above, they responded by indicating the importance of: (1) weeding-out job candidates early in the screening process who otherwise would be likely to burn-out (or not perform well) because they were not suited to the work and/or culture (as a means to combating the "quick quit" and "fast fire" issues) and (2) hiring only those candidates who clearly demonstrate (throughout the screening and selection process) they have the skills, motivation and personality to excel in these roles now—and—into the future (as a means to combating the "bad hire" issue). The focus group work done with senior managers, clearly demonstrated to the AlignMark team, the unwavering commitment, passion and focus that great call center organizations have for providing applicants, new employees and incumbents with real opportunities to unleash their passion and make a difference. This work also reinforced the importance that organizations need to place in building the core of the talent leadership mindset—the belief that **accurate information drives effective strategies**. It is very clear that no significant progress can be made, by any organization, both in creating a strong Talent Leadership mindset or in the execution of these critical foundation elements, without passionate and diligent attention to continuous measurement of people capabilities, position requirements—now and into the future as well as a commitment to assess the relative "health" of their Talent leadership beliefs and practices.

With respect to Talent Deployment, AlignMark offers some of the following best practices:

- Selection instruments yield a "probability of success"
- Selection instruments are valid and reliable
- Simulation assessments are utilized
- Assessments can also be used as a basis for development planning
- Compliance with EEOC/ADA legislation

Talent Development, Engagement & Benchmarking

Effective Talent Leadership results in increased engagement and reduced turnover. Employee engagement, in fact, can make or break the bottom line. Employees who are most committed (i.e., demonstrate the highest levels of “will do”), perform 20% better and are 87% less likely to resign. In addition, the foundation for an engaged workforce is established by the quality, depth and authenticity of communication by HR and senior management to employees as well as the quality of supervisory and managerial talent. The role of the supervisor and manager in fostering a work environment build upon rapport, trust and credibility, in which employees and teams of employees are coached and developed (i.e., “can do”), challenged and unleashed (i.e., “will do”), to execute work that enables the organization to thrive and succeed (i.e., “must do”), cannot be overemphasized. Inherent in any organizations quest to become a great Talent Leadership organization should be their unwavering commitment to measurement—the “checks and balances” orientation implicit in great coaching and performance management, so that employees understand and respect that they will be held accountable for having the knowledge, skills and capabilities that do, in fact, lead to superior performance. When organizations benchmark and certify knowledge and skill levels—using assessment—not only are they building the opportunity for “course correction”, but also they are reinforcing the importance of accountability and individual and team continuous improvement.

The process of building employee engagement is ongoing. Beyond compensation and benefits, employee engagement is best fostered through a meaningful and enriching work experience. Effective employee engagement—a mixture of tangible and intangible factors—fosters an environment of stimulation, development, learning, support and contribution. However, recent studies in the U.S., have found that less than 20% of employees are engaged and 60% are “moderately” engaged and 20% are clearly disengaged. Clearly, the opportunity for HR and senior managers is to increase the strength of employee engagement. This will require, at a minimum, strong leadership, a sense of shared destiny, autonomy, accountability and opportunities for development and advancement.

How does an organization strengthen their leadership capability as a foundation for creating an engaged workforce? AlignMark recommends the following:

- Objectively assessing supervisory and managerial skills
- Leveraging assessment results (i.e., Development Planning)
- Skill-based training programs that truly “raise the talent bar”:

—Analysis & Problem Solving
—Initiative
—Influence
—Team Building
—Situational Style of Interaction
—Change Management
—Talent Leadership

While all of these training programs help “raise the talent bar”, the single most important and immediate need—is providing all supervisors and managers with Talent Leadership training opportunities—where they can begin to shape a more positive mindset and recognize their own accountabilities for being Talent Leaders.

With respect to Talent Development, Engagement and Benchmarking, AlignMark offers some of the following best practices:

- Managers are held accountable for Talent Leadership
- Retention goals exist for every manager
- Training for each individual is based on accurate diagnostic information
- Learning sessions are brief
- Learning is simulation-based, engaging and “hands on”

Talent Affirmation & Differentiation

Earlier, we indicated that only 16% of organizations separate the “A”, “B” and “C” players. If a call center organization does not engage in a systematic approach to separate talent—both in terms of performance and potential—then it becomes impossible to make the best strategic human resources decisions (i.e., rewards, promotion, succession planning, and termination decisions). After all, those employees who consistently execute at the highest level should be rewarded more than employees who don’t execute at the highest level. Great call center organizations differentiate the pay, opportunities, and other investments they make in people. They reward their best performers with fast-track growth and pay them substantially more than their average performers. They develop and “affirm” their solid performers—always trying to raise their game. They also remove employees who are not performing—their belief, a correct one—is that condoning poor performance is destructive to the team and the underperformer themselves.

Most organizations, unfortunately, struggle with this concept. Typically, they don’t have a way to identify the A’s, B’s and C’s, nor do they have a systematic approach and process to ensure that appropriate actions are taken. Most organizations, frankly, conduct one-day succession planning exercises at corporate headquarters; however, they have little honesty and little resulting action. On the other hand, great call center organizations have a passionate and diligent focus on executing “talent reviews”. In fact, the intensity and focus of these reviews often match and sometimes exceed the intensity and focus of the budget process.

With respect to Talent Affirmation and Differentiation, AlignMark offers some of the following best practices:

• Performance Management is a joint partnership between manager and employee
• Performance Management is continuous and on-going
• The "process" is more than a "form" or "software"
• Managers are trained to separate the A's, B's and C's
• Performance criteria are valid
• Final ratings based on "what" and "how"

Conclusion

To what extent are your Talent Leadership processes (which includes a winning mindset) contributing to—or detracting from—your operational excellence? Are your processes helping you Win or Lose? As we have indicated throughout this White Paper—the answer to this question, is critical. Research clearly shows that great call center organizations: (1) enjoy higher engagement and retention levels of their most talent people; (2) experience higher quality and customer satisfaction results; and (3) realize significantly higher profit and revenue levels.

At AlignMark, we have spent over 30 years partnering with all types of organizations across the Globe. Our focus and unwavering passion has been, and will continue to be, helping our clients optimize the investment they make in human capital. Our hope and challenge to those HR leaders, senior managers, managers, employees—anyone who has taken their time to read this White Paper is to:

1. Recognize that the foundational elements of Talent Leadership execution—should be last in terms of your list of priorities.
2. If you are an HR leader, first ask yourself, "Do I believe that Talent Leadership" is the most critical variable in driving operational excellence"? If you don't believe this, then it will be impossible for you to exact positive change in your organization.
3. Second, it is critical that all managers and supervisors engage in Talent Leadership workshops, in which they can shape a positive Talent Leadership mindset.
4. Third, exercise a passionate and diligent focus on measurement—competencies, skills, abilities, personality, and the relative "health" of your Talent Leadership beliefs and practices.
5. Fourth, begin executing and measure again and again . . .

For more information-including having John Mattone or Dr. Cabot Jaffee present this topic to your management team, contact:

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QUALITY OF HIRE: THE REAL ROI FROM USING PRE-EMPLOYMENT ASSESSMENT IN THE HIRING PROCESS

By Mike Littman, VP, Marketing, Previsor

2007 BUSINESS OUTCOMES STUDY

The documented impact of making better hires – in dollars and sense

The use of screening and online testing programs has definitely evolved in the past decade. The focus used to be on increasing efficiencies in the hiring process simply by reducing cost and time to hire. Today leading employers are turning to their talent management teams to provide solutions that will give them competitive differentiation, and the answer is increasingly a selection process that identifies people who are best prepared and capable of driving their business results. PreVisor's 2007 Business Outcomes Report represents 29 unique research studies conducted by PreVisor and partner companies in 2006.

The studies were completed in conjunction with major U.S. and international corporations, and provide insight into the direct correlation between key performance indicators and the businesses' pre-employment testing initiatives. The studies span numerous industries from financial services to the retail sector, as well as various job roles encompassing sales, customer service and clerical functions.

This report summarizes the business results these companies experienced, as well as trends uncovered during the analysis.

WHO IS PREVISOR?

PreVisor, a leading provider of pre-employment assessments and employee selection solutions, helps organizations by connecting hiring decisions with business results. Following the rigorous standards of industrial-organizational psychology, PreVisor's assessment content accurately predicts on-the-job performance and supports fair hiring practices. PreVisor's solutions help streamline hiring, reduce recruiting and training costs, and improve corporate performance for clients worldwide, including more than 140 of the Fortune 500.

A NOTE ABOUT METHODOLOGY

To demonstrate the value of its assessment solutions, PreVisor conducts business results-oriented research studies together with its customers, which are designed to demonstrate the value of the program in metrics that are specific to the goals of each organization. PreVisor adheres to rigorous standards when conducting these studies. The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure that a sound study can be completed for a client so that reliable conclusions can be drawn about the value of its assessment program. These guidelines include:

- Requiring a sample size of at least 300 individuals who were assessed and hired on the basis of the assessment solution.
- Individuals must have been on the job long enough to be beyond the initial "ramp up" or training period.
- Reliable performance metrics must be available that are largely influenced by a specific individual's behavior on the job.
- Multiple months (minimally three) of performance data must be available for each individual.

These studies are conducted by PreVisor's Optimization Services team. The team consists of several Ph.D.s in Industrial and Organizational Psychology (I/O Psychologists) who are experts at conducting sophisticated studies and communicating their results in straightforward, business-focused language. Some studies have been conducted by the client company's in-house I/O Psychologists.

ASSESSMENTS HAVE DECIDEDLY POSITIVE IMPACT

In 2006, 29 Business Outcome studies were conducted for clients across multiple industries, including financial services, wireless communication, retail, and healthcare.

The summary analysis found:

- **80%** of these studies had a **favorable** or **very favorable** outcome – meaning that the assessment solution implemented had a strong, favorable impact on most or all of the clients' performance metrics.
- **20%** were found to have a **negligible** impact, or the data was found to be **inconclusive**.
- **None** of the studies resulted in an unfavorable outcome.

"We are very pleased to have been able to deliver such strong and compelling business results for our clients," states Caroline Paxman, PreVisor Senior Vice President of Professional Services. "In the vast majority of the studies that were conducted we were able to show clear linkages between high performers on the assessment and strong performers on the job – as measured by our clients' own business results. In most cases, this more than justified the cost of our clients' assessment programs and allowed the HR team to demonstrate direct ROI on an important human capital-based initiative."

Ms. Paxman explained further, "In some cases, issues with the metric data can lead to inconclusive results. However, we are committed to working with our client partners, and believe the tools themselves are still predictive of success, especially when we have other strong validity evidence as back up."

FINDING 1
High scoring agents sell $18,000 more per person per year

In a Broadband Communications Company, Customer Service Representatives who scored well on the pre-employment assessment solution completed their calls more quickly (about 20 seconds) and generated more revenue per call than their lower scoring counterparts. Over the course of one year, the company calculated that each high scoring agent will generate $18K more in revenue than low scorers. (See chart A)

FINDING 2
Turnover reduced by 50% for high-scoring associates

In a Warehousing and Distribution role, 43% of associates who scored high on a customized job-fit measure remained on the job after 90 days, whereas only 23% of those who scored low on the assessment were retained. (See chart B)

FINDING 3
Pre-screened phone bankers 48% more likely to get licensed

In the Financial Services Industry, Phone Bankers who passed PreVisor's Series 6 Licensure Exam Predictor were almost half again more likely to pass the actual exam than Phone Bankers who did not pass the test. As Series 6 licensing is required to sell financial services products, the predictor had multiple direct links to ROI. (See chart C)

FINDING 4
Sales increase by $17,000 per month

In a study conducted on several hundred Retail Sales professionals, PreVisor estimated that hiring candidates who scored highest on the assessment would generate an additional $1.3 million per month in sales revenue.

FINDING 5
Assessments identify those most likely to get promoted

Senior leaders at a major Healthcare Services Provider who scored high on PreVisor's Director and Senior Manager assessment were promoted at a rate that was 30% faster than those who scored poorly on the assessment.

FINDING 6
Turnover reduced 63%, while sales and productivity jump

In a call center in the Telecommunications Industry, Agents who scored higher on the assessment solution achieved a sales quota 24% higher than lower scorers, while also showing increased productivity through an average handling time that was 40 seconds faster. Furthermore, these same Agents were much more likely to stay with the company with turnover dropping from 33.5% for all locations to a mere 12.5% (measured as rolling 90-day averages). (See chart D)

FINDING 7
Reservation agents boost sales by $1,000 a day

Reservation agents for a resort and amusement destination who scored high on the assessment solution generated nearly $150 more per hour in reservation sales than agents who scored low on the assessments – a difference of almost $1,000 per day per agent. (See chart E)

FINDING 8
Assessments realize reduction in theft by $78 million

Retail Sales locations that were staffed with Associates who scored high on PreVisor's Conscientiousness assessment experienced less stock shrinkage – almost $50K less per year. Across the chain's 1,500+ stores, this translates into nearly a $78 million dollar difference in annual inventory shrinkage. (See chart F)

These results are just some of the most dramatic that were found, however they are not unique. The common denominator in the overall Business Outcomes Study Summary was that assessment solutions implemented did have measurable impact on client business results. Not only are the tests used in each solution backed by validity data, they have very specific correlations to each role, goal and company need. The trend toward the use of online screening and assessment should only accelerate when seen in light of these results.

THE FUTURE OF CONNECTING EMPLOYMENT DECISIONS WITH BUSINESS RESULTS

As suggested earlier in this report, more and more companies are demanding proof of ROI from their assessment platforms. Once seen only as a process efficiency tool, assessment's most key benefit is being realized in its ability to identify quality of hire. Through the Business Outcome Study analysis conducted by PreVisor, proof that leading edge corporations are using pre-employment assessment to drive their business results is quite evident:

• PreVisor experienced a dramatic increase in the number of requests for business outcome studies in 2006, and anticipates a continued growth of 45% in 2007.

• As a leader in the pre-employment assessment space, PreVisor has ready access to the marketplace, and customers like Kristopher Fritsche, Selection & Assessment Program Manager at EMBARQ, who states: "In staffing, recruiting, talent management, call it what you will, ROI has been discussed in terms of 'cost-per-hire', 'time-to-hire' and how fast a system pays for itself. Measuring quality of hire has been hard to get at, and actual on the job performance correlated to individual test score items is nearly unheard of. Now we have a way to work with our senior management in strategic workforce planning – and show them how it profits the business."

• HR executives and business owners are making the ROI discussion a key talking point early on in the sales process. They want "proof that it works" built into the review process of their overall assessment program.

Whether it is to increase sales or customer service, or to reduce turnover or inventory shrinkage, leading employers across all industries realize how critical it is to focus on the quality of candidates they select into their workforce. And with companies continuing to try to find ways to do more with less in the ever-increasing competitive nature of our global economy, finding and identifying the best people for the job is one of the fastest ways to accomplish this objective.

"It is exciting to be at the forefront of a trend that we believe has the greatest impact within the talent management arena," says Noel Sitzmann, PreVisor CEO. "We are delighted to be able to partner with such leading-edge organizations whose visionaries recognize the importance of a well-defined talent selection process that identifies those most likely to drive the key metrics of the organization."

For more information, please contact PreVisor at (800) 367-2509
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##

CTI Group's Call Traffic Analysis and Call Recording:
Offering Management and Monitoring Solutions for Call Centers

By Katie Kiser – 317.262.4687 kkiser@ctigroup.com

As in any industry, call centers are feeling the pressure to reduce costs and increase efficiency. This drive toward continuous improvement forces call centers to find more efficient and effective ways to manage and monitor their agents. Many call centers are turning to ACD reporting and call recording to measure their successes and areas of potential improvement.

In an effort to improve efficiency and cut costs, call centers are broadening their scope to include virtual, home-based agents and multi-branch agents. By doing so, these call centers are able to support customers in multiple time zones and languages, thus diversifying their customer base. This trend toward virtual and multi-location call centers is a real opportunity; however, there must be a way to manage all agents equally and effectively regardless of their geographic location. This is where VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) technology comes into play.

VoIP technology is a key component in diversifying the workforce and geography of call centers. In order to effectively manage and monitor agents in all geographic locations, call centers need to find non-traditional ways to measure performance. Since VoIP technology is internet based, it is not limited to location and, therefore, can support call traffic anywhere in the world. Since the advent of the internet, companies are finding more and more ways to expand into international territories. VoIP technology is just another example of how the internet can be used to broaden the scope of a business to encompass the international business market.

CTI Group's VoIP call traffic analysis feature, emPulse, combines ACD reporting with a variety of other management tools to deliver reports, graphs and alarms for easy identification of problem areas, trending and improvements. The reports are customizable and can be delivered at scheduled times or on demand. emPulse provides these features via an online interface. By making these management tools available from any geographic location, call centers have the flexibility without sacrificing their ability to manage the quality of service provided by their agents.

Call centers also need to be able to monitor the quality of service provided by their agents. This is where call recording is needed. CTI Group's call recording feature, SmartRecord IP, provides blanket and on-demand recording from anywhere in the world. These recordings are then available via an on line interface from anywhere the internet is available. SmartRecoard IP allows managers to effectively monitor the performance of their agents equally, regardless of their location.

Call centers are really feeling the pressure to improve efficiency and reduce costs. Many call centers are achieving these goals by broadening their geographic footprint. These call centers have two options, virtual call centers and multi-location call centers. Regardless of which path they choose, they need to find a way to effectively manage and monitor all agents regardless of their location. Using traditional management and monitoring methods would be quite costly when adding so many locations. So, many call centers are looking for alternate solutions.

VoIP technology is leading the way in geographically diverse call centers. However, VoIP technology needs to be able to provide the tools that have been available for brick and mortar call centers via traditional telephony. CTI Group's emPulse and SmartRecord IP fill in those gaps by providing ACD reporting and call recording solutions that will assist call centers in managing and monitoring their agents wherever they are located.

Businesses will continue to try to find ways to increase efficiency and reduce costs. They will have to continue to be creative in finding solutions to achieve these goals without sacrificing quality and service. With the continuous growth in VoIP technology, many companies will be looking to VoIP for solutions.

###

Writing in Simple English

By Hannah Kirk, Senior Technical Writer, Writing Assistance, Inc., www.writingassist.com

To write for all audiences is difficult. It would be nice if there was a way to write documents and emails for clients that were easy to understand and reduced confusion. This is possible!

Technical documentation teams use a form of English called Simple English when writing user manuals. Simple English (SE) is a way of writing for all audiences that is uncomplicated and easy-to-understand.

When it comes to writing about complex technical topics for the lay audience, technical writers must write in as clear and concise a way as possible. The lay audience is defined in many organizations as people that have an eighth grade education and little or no technical experience. If this is the typical audience, writing instructional documents heavy with jargon and technical language will not help them. Many users are above this level of understanding, yet this type of writing does not over-simplify, but rather gives the important information in a straightforward manner that eliminates confusion and communicates the message in the most concise method possible.

Simplified English is not just for instructional manuals, but has many applications throughout the business world. A manager who writes letters or a support staff member who must communicate messages clearly and effectively can benefit from using this style of writing.

This method of writing helps readers understand concepts clearly. Simplified English is understandable to readers of most ages and education levels. It also aids the understanding of non-native English speakers.

Businesses frequently communicate in various ways with people who do not speak English at all. For written communications, Simplified English lends itself very well to translation. In technical writing, many instruction manuals need to be translated to languages other than English. Using this simple form of English can make that translation much easier. Similarly, businesses that communicate in other languages, or translate letters or documents of any kind into other languages can make translation easier, faster, and more efficient by using this writing standard.

Businesses that share documents or portions of documents for re-use can benefit from the interchangeability of Simplified English. Ideally, paragraphs written this way can stand alone, making information contained in a document everything to everyone. For example, documents written for instruction can be used in training. Documents used in training can be re-used in marketing materials, all when written in a simple, concise, and stand-alone manner. This means that writing this way can save businesses time spent recreating the same documents by different organizations. This inevitably saves the company money and frees up time for those employees to do other things.

The principles of simple English are straightforward. In its most simplistic format, Simple English is the English that children speak. Simple English uses short phrases, avoids metaphors, large-syllable words, and words that have multiple meanings. If a 3 or 4 year old can understand a sentence without asking questions about the syntax or what a word or metaphor means, the sentence is probably in Simple English.

Here are some concepts used in Simplified English:

Concept #1. Write as concisely as possible. When writing a sentence, re-read it and think about how it can be written more concisely. For example, here is a sentence that can be written in a more succinct way:

"When you plan ahead you are able to think more clearly when you are busy."

Upon first glance, this sentence seems simple and easy to understand. True, it is written clearly. Most of the words are common and no words have double meanings. But this sentence can be written even more concisely:

"You can think more clearly when you are busy if you plan ahead."

Three words were cut out and the syntax was restructured for a clearer understanding. Yet, this sentence can be cut down even more:

"You can think clearly when you plan ahead."

The part about being busy was left out. Was this essential to the sentence? It depends on the context. If the sentence cannot be understood without adding that you must be busy in order to think clearly by planning ahead, then it should be left in. If not, this sentence has just been reduced from 15 words to 8! How short would emails be if their writers took the time to do this with every email?

Concept #2. Use active tense. Students are praised for their use of passive wording in High Schools and Universities. Journalists and academics typically write in passive voice (for example, this article is written in passive voice). However, this is not always the most clear for understandability.

Even though many people will understand passive tense, new English speakers and translators appreciate the use of active voice. For example, instead of writing, "The sign *was created* for your information" write "The company *created* the sign for your information." A good rule of thumb for writing in passive voice is putting a clear doer of the action in front of each verb. Elimate the use of the words *is*, *be*, and *are* and you are on your way. For example, instead of, "*It is* appreciated when you pick up your trash" write, "*The company* appreciates when you pick up your trash." Thinking about the subject of the sentence and who performs the verb write in as simple a manner as possible and will almost always keep you writing in active voice.

Concept #3. When writing a verb, include the subject of that verb. This goes beyond the rule for writing in active voice. This is to eliminate confusion in using pronouns. This helps New English speakers and translators determine the clear subject for each verb. For example, "Every time I drive my car to the store, *it* breaks down!" In this sentence, *it* could refer to the car or to the store, but there is no way to know for sure just by reading this sentence. This sentence can eliminate the extra pronoun and the confusion the pronoun can cause by saying what *it* refers to: "Every time I drive my car to the store, *my car* breaks down!"

Here are some additional tips for writing in Simplified English:

Put phrases next to the words that they modify words
Keep the language simple
Avoid slang and clichés
Avoid cultural references (for example, common myths or fictional references)
Avoid words that have more than one meaning (for example, account can be a verb or can refer to a bank account, etc)
Avoid leaving out verbs (or nouns) to make your sentences shorter

Using these principles will help you write clearly for all audiences—young, old, educated, uneducated, advanced English speakers, and new English speakers alike. You will even help the ability to translate for non-English speakers. Using these principles in your business documents and publications will increase understandability. Your readers will thank you for making their lives easier!

Consulted Works and Additional Resources:

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###

Evaluating Evaluations

Creating the Mission-Driven Scorecard

Prepared by Industry Analyst Dick Bucci
The PELORUS Group

Over half of all contact centers use some type of grading form to evaluate the call handling and customer interaction skills of agents. These evaluations (also known as agent audits or scorecards) help supervisors coach agents to perform his or her duties more efficiently and more effectively. Evaluations are normally performed monthly, based on established key performance indicators (KPIs).

The agent evaluation process, like other contact center programs, is evolving with the changing mission of the contact center. Contact centers are becoming complex micro-businesses within a business. Management expects contact centers to deliver memorable customer care while at the same time generate revenues; all the while keeping operating costs to a minimum. The intent of this paper is to explore ways to implement more effective agent audits in view of this highly fluid and dynamic environment.

There is a temptation in any occupation to continue doing things the same way because "that's how it's always been done." Contact center management is certainly no exception. Scorecards can easily become institutionalized. Monitors and agents are familiar with them and a vast data store of past evaluations provides for easy trend analysis. The first thing to consider should always be how do the things we measure contribute to achieving the broader goals of the enterprise? The goals of the organization are typically spelled out in a formal business plan. They include both quantitative and qualitative objectives. In larger companies these broad goals are translated into specific actions by each department or business unit and then filter down to operating groups like the contact center. For example, if the contact center reports directly to a marketing executive the goals will likely include sales targets, market share, gross margin, customer growth, customer retention, and customer satisfaction. If the contact center reports to an operations department, then the goals may be more focused on cost control and productivity. In any event, contact center management has the responsibility of identifying corporate and departmental goals then developing KPIs and evaluation criteria that directly support the achievement of these goals.

Four Basic Goals of the Contact Center

All contact centers have four basic goals, although the emphasis will change with the type of organization:

1. To delight customers
2. To increase revenue
3. To minimize operating costs
4. To provide valuable business insights

Customer Delight – Simply "satisfying" callers is not enough. A recent study reported that 80% of defecting customers were "satisfied." Delivering memorable service quality means exceeding expectations. Organizations that tout their service quality as a competitive advantage, or market high value products or services, require a higher satisfaction threshold. Customer delight is in the eyes of the customer. The only KPIs that have been empirically proven to correlate with customer satisfaction are first contact resolution and agent satisfaction. Satisfied agents produce satisfied customers. Call quality is also a reflection of an agent's soft skills, such as product knowledge, courtesy, professionalism, empathy, and clarity.

Ideally, customer delight should be measured from the caller's perspective, not inferred based on the agent's or the supervisor's opinions. Only the caller knows if the interaction met expectations. Contact center personnel consistently rate their call quality higher than the callers themselves. There are more options available today than ever before to incorporate a "voice of the customer" feedback program into the quality assessment program.

Contribution – Agents contribute to revenue growth by identifying sales leads in the CRM system and by probing for up-sell and cross-sell opportunities. Independent research shows that it costs five to ten times as much to replace a customer than prevent their defection, often by empowering agents to take actions to retain a customer like granting free minutes or waiving late fees. Customer lifetime value (CLV) is a new concept that recognizes the aggregate contribution of a consumer over the period of time they remain customers. As the first line of defense, agents can have a significant impact on customer loyalty and consequently CLV.

Performance – Performance metrics are the typical KPIs generated by the ACD and workforce management system intended to minimize operating costs. In developing the agent scorecard it is very important to choose only metrics that the agent can realistically control. Metrics including service level, abandonment rate, occupancy, time to answer, queue length, calls per hour, and time-to-answer are largely a function of scheduling, traffic volume, and adequacy of equipment. Even cost per call is largely outside the agent's control. Attendance and punctuality are (for the most part) controllable by the agent, as is handle time and screen efficiency.

The agent's ability to quickly and accurately navigate screens effects handle time and error rate. HigherGround, Inc. is among the growing number of recording vendors that enable contact center management to monitor both voice and data interactions.

Parkland Health and Hospital System has provided community healthcare services to the residents of Dallas County, Texas, since it was established in 1894. The contact center handles 3,000 calls a day – with more than 500 of them coming in the nurse advice line. When people are calling about health issues there is no room for mistakes. Nurses and cross-trained clinical personnel need to know a great deal about health issues and be able to use the database resources available to them. The hospital system records all calls on the HigherGround, Inc. Praetorian recording system. They also upgraded the system with HigherGround

Mentor™. Mentor includes a screen capture feature that tracks screen activity in sync with the call. Supervisors can live-monitor or playback both voice and screen actions. This has been very valuable to Parkland. Sheila Cook-Dolciame, director of contact center operations, said "The screen capture feature is wonderful. It has added eyes to our ears. We can now see what agents are doing on their computer screens at any point in the call."

Performance is not just about numbers. Compliance is a very important part of the equation. In sales transactions and collections there are mandatory disclosures. Agents must refrain from making commitments (delivery dates, claims settlements, financing terms, and concessions) unless they are fully authorized to make the promise. Some organizations require specific opening and closing statements and strongly encourage probing questions to identify sales prospects. Similarly, there are certain things agents should never say. Compliance is evaluated by scanning recorded interactions. No contact center has enough people or time to listen to all calls. Fortunately, there are speech engines that can quickly and accurately interrogate thousands of hours of recordings by searching for the key words and phonetic phrases that confirm an agent said what he or she was supposed to say.

Business insights are a special case. There are no established metrics like "average number of brilliant discoveries per day" or "customers saved through heroic actions by contact center agents." But this should not be a reason for omitting agent observations from the scorecard. From senior management's perspective a heads-up about potential quality problems, insights about the causes of customer defections, or fresh information about competitor actions could well be the most valuable "KPIs" to flow from the contact center. Agents should be encouraged to record or otherwise flag calls that could be of interest to others in the organization, email calls, conference in supervisors, and share insights during meetings. It is up to contact center management to make sure the information is shared with senior management and appropriate department heads.

Selecting the right metrics
Metrics can be collected for all four of these categories. Data sources are ACD metrics, voice-of-the-customer applications, quality monitoring ratings, workforce management system, CRM/sales automation, custom output produced by performance management software, pro-active agent-initiated communications, and speech analytics reports.

The following grid provides examples of measurements for each broad contact center goal. Note that the grid includes only performance measures that are controllable by the agents.

The model considers four different contact center orientations;
Cost-oriented centers are primarily concerned with efficiency. Operating at the lowest possible cost is the primary goal so performance measures get the highest weight (65% of total score). However, no contact center can ignore the other three goals so we apply some weighting to these as well.

Sales-oriented contact centers are viewed by management as extensions of the sales function. The primary purpose is to generate leads and close sales. These may be inbound, outbound, or blended environments. This category also includes collections centers. Contribution metrics are weighted at 55%.

Market-oriented contact centers typically report to a senior marketing (not sales) executive and are most common in businesses and non-profits that serve consumers. Organizations with a marketing orientation recognize that understanding the consumer is paramount to growing revenues. These companies leverage superior customer care as a competitive advantage. Since the focus is more on understanding and satisfying customer needs than cost reduction or generating immediate revenues, higher weights are applied to customer delight and business insights.

The model is based on a 10-point scale. The composite ratings for each category are derived from the individual rating scales for various KPIs and subjective ratings. Examples are customer satisfaction (third-party based or supervisor-inferred), adherence, handle time, and others. The result is a balanced scorecard that accounts for all the goals of the contact center and reflects the relative importance of each goal to the broader scheme of things.

Implementing more effective evaluations

Creating a grading form that reflects the priorities of the organization is the first step to streamlining the evaluation process. The following are some good tips for implementing and administering an agent grading system:

Record all calls

The average contact center agent handles about 1,300 calls each month. Over the course of a year a 200-agent contact center will handle 3.1 million consumer calls. What a rich treasure trove of valuable consumer information! Hidden within this massive data base are answers to questions that corporate marketing departments spend hundreds of thousands – even millions - of dollars to find out through third party market research. Consumers are telling us what they like and don't like about our products and services. They are telling agents about how they learned of new promotions, why they chose to buy, why they would buy again, or why they are switching to a competitive brand or service provider. Many callers are volunteering new ideas that could result in highly successful new products or services. Some are telling agents about problems they have experienced – serious problems that could result in litigation if not immediately brought to the attention of senior management.

Contact center managers, preoccupied with day-to-day operations, often overlook the immense strategic value of the information they are getting every day. This is information that can change or reinforce the way their employers sell, price, and support the company's products and services. The data can only be mined if it is first captured and stored. Speech mining tools can wade through thousands of hours of recordings, searching for important data and interrelationships.

Evaluate coachable calls

Even the best-run contact centers sample no more than 2 – 4% of agent calls per month for quality evaluation purposes. With such a small sample to work from it is important that the calls selected for review represent coaching opportunities. Recording systems can be programmed to retrieve calls that meet some threshold such as call length, number of transfers, wrap-up, or hold time. This is another reason to record all calls. The evaluator can draw from the entire record of agent interactions. While the necessarily small sample is still not statistically significant, at least the supervisor has the opportunity to share coaching tips and acknowledge good work from handling the more difficult calls.

Use role-grading forms

Many contact center environments use skills-based routing. Instead of one large contact center where every agent handles any query that comes their way, the contact center is actually a collection of mini-contact centers where agents have special skills, such as closing sales, understanding different languages, or in-depth knowledge of specific products and services. Scorecards for skilled agents will use different measurements but can follow the same structure outlined in Figure 1.

Enlist agent support

Whether implementing scorecards for the first time or have been using them for years you need agent support. Agent input should be solicited and good ideas implemented. They need to understand that the process is intended to help them develop their skills and is not a substitution for formal performance evaluations. It is good practice to reward superior performance with financial incentives or at least public recognition. Model calls should be added to the training libraries and used to illustrate how challenging calls can be effectively handled. Many contact centers encourage agents to perform self-evaluations. Don't be surprised if agents are harsher on themselves then supervisors. Peer evaluations should also be encouraged.

Incentives that reward superior experience are also a good way to mitigate the "Big Brother" aspect of frequent evaluations.

Virgin Mobile Ltd is a global mobile phone service provider. They have operations in the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, South Africa, the United States and France. Virgin is one of the most recognized brands in the world, most notably Virgin Airlines. The company is led by the indomitable Sir Richard Branson. Virgin Mobile is most definitely a market – oriented company. Unlike most wireless providers, Virgin does not own its own facilities. They rely on their popular brand name and exemplary customer care to gain market share against competitors. When the Australia Division launched its agent audit program managers knew they had to earn the commitment of agents. To help overcome the “Big Brother”

syndrome Virgin Mobile encouraged their agents to submit model calls for the “Champagne Moment” contest. Once a month they handed out the award and gave the agent a $150 bonus. All the agents listened to the winning calls and went on to earn their own Champagne Moment award. Finally, many contact centers have implemented an appeals process to give agents a forum for disputing what they may believe are unfair or inaccurate evaluations.

Use voice annotations
Some recording systems allow voice annotations to the calls. This is a useful tool for busy evaluators who can review calls when they have time and issue comments for later discussion with the agents.

Hold frequent calibration sessions
Quality scoring is inherently subjective. How, exactly, do you score such intangibles as product knowledge, courtesy, listening skills, and professionalism? Performance on soft skills is largely in the eye of the beholder. This leads to inevitable agent complaints of inequity and favoritism. The calibration process seeks to remove or at least minimize variation in the way that different evaluators score the same attribute. Evaluators, be they QA specialists or supervisors, meet periodically to listen to the same recordings, usually 5-6 from different agents. After listening to each call they individually complete the rating form and explain their gradings to the group. A facilitator leads the discussion of each evaluation, seeking to resolve large disparities and build consensus on the best criteria for basing these subjective judgments. These sessions should be repeated periodically until the variation between scorers meets a stated target, ideally 5–10% from the mean.

Use objective means for collecting “voice of the customer” feedback
If customer delight is a priority then it is essential to use an objective method for collecting customer satisfaction data. The best tools gather feedback immediately after the call and track feedback to specific agents. Site-based systems use automated IVR and web tools. These are highly superior to telephone and mails surveys – which are slow, expensive, inaccurate because of small sample sizes, and incapable of tracking back to specific agents. There are also a number of service bureaus that provide customer satisfaction tracking services.

Summary

Generally speaking, every contact center has four basic functions;

1. To delight customers
2. To increase revenue
3. To minimize operating costs
4. To provide valuable business insights

The relative importance of each of these broad goals varies with the nature and orientation of the enterprise. It is essential that contact center management understand corporate goals of the enterprise and marketing strategies. Businesses that sell commodity products based largely on price will want the contact center to operate at the lowest possible cost, even is that means some concessions in service quality. Businesses that seek to differentiate their products and services will be more supportive of contact centers that excel at service delivery and the collection of valuable business intelligence.

Given the dynamic nature of today’s business environment, shifts in goals and strategies are a fact of life. Agent evaluations, like every other process in the contact center, needs to reflect and support the changing priorities. Evaluation forms can be structured around corporate objectives. This has three very important advantages;

- The contact center

is on “the same page” as everyone else,

• The process is dynamic - not static, and

• Everyone in the contact center, from the director to the newest agent, recognizes

that the forms really do make sense and personal goal achievement is essential to enterprise success.

About the author
Dick Bucci is Senior Consultant for The PELORUS Group where he specializes in contact center technologies. Dick has over thirty years of experience in the telecommunications industry. He has authored seven in-depth market research reports on workforce optimization applications. His articles and observations have been published in *CRM Today, Contact Center World, Communications Convergence, CRM Magazine, Call Center Magazine, Contact Professional, Call Center News, Speech Technology, Workforce Performance Solutions* and several other trade and business publications.

About HigherGround
HigherGround, headquartered in Los Angeles, CA, is a developer of call recording software, monitoring solutions and reporting tools for call centers. HigherGround's proven solutions provide business intelligence for sound decision making and bottom-line control for compliance monitoring, risk management and performance improvement. For more information visit: www.highergroundinc.com.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Mark Your Calendar! Envision, a provider of award-winning workforce optimization solutions, is pleased to offer the following educational events free-of-charge:

Roundtable: “An Insider's Guide to World-Class Contact Centers — What You Need to Know” **Sep 18, 2007 9:30 AM - 2:30 PM at the** Governor Hotel in Portland, Oregon. Join **Connie Smith**, chief evangelist, **Envision** and your contact center colleagues for an interactive roundtable session. Guest speaker Kim Goff, quality manager for consumer services, will be on hand to discuss Nike's world-class contact center quality program. Learn more and register online at http://www.envisioninc.com/events.

Web Event: “**Is it Time for an Evaluation Form Makeover?**” Thursday, Sep 20, 2007 9:00 a.m. Pacific | 12:00 Eastern. Join **Dale Raduenz**, quality assurance analyst, **Great Lakes Educational Loan Services** and **Connie Smith**, chief evangelist, **Envision** as they share best practices in a new era of creating effective evaluation forms. Learn more and register online at http://www.envisioninc.com/events.

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September 6th – CRMXchange - Contact Center Performance Management Roundtable –The Shift from Efficiency to Effectiveness
While performance management techniques focused on agent and enterprise efficiencies will remain important, new measurements emphasizing process performance management and effectiveness in terms of customer satisfaction, quality of service and brand image are becoming increasingly vital. Join a group of distinguished industry leaders in the theory and practice of contact center performance management as they discuss the critical issues

of performance management and the optimization of contact center performance in terms of hardware, software and "peopleware". https://crmxchange.webex.com/crmxchange/onstage/g.php?t=a&d=716600517

September 7th – Island Data – Capturing Real-Time Business Intelligence in Direct Customer Feedback; Closing the Gap between the Contact Center and the Marketing Department
This webcast focuses on how best to use and exploit all of the customer feedback and insights your customers share with you in their online communications. Hear from Microsoft how it uses customer insight analytics software tools to proactively identify and address operational, product, and PR issues, identify new revenue opportunities and reduce expenses. http://crmxchange.com/webcast/islanddatasept07.asp

September 10th – Bay Bridge Decision Technologies - How to Improve Your Forecasts, Your Capacity and Hiring Plans, and Your Budget Planning Process

Optimizing each linked component of the planning cycle, from forecasting to hiring and overtime planning, what-if scenario analysis, budgeting and variance analysis, and then back to forecasting, have significant benefits to your organization.

Leading contact center professionals are expanding and improving each step in the planning process. Simply, by improving this process, you will improve the decision-making throughout your organization, and thus improve your financial and operational performance, and deliver better and more consistent service at the lowest possible cost. A solid plan reduces unexpected service failures and an accurate planning process allows management to make the explicit trade-offs between service and costs.

This webcast will discuss how improvements in the strategic planning process will yield terrific benefits in reduced center costs, more accurate and plentiful network analysis, optimized just-in-time hiring, and, more importantly, better decision-making. https://crmxchange.webex.com/crmxchange/onstage/g.php?t=a&d=714312378

September 20th – Aspect - How to Include Customers in Your Unified Communications Strategy
Listen to this webcast and learn how a well constructed Unified Communications strategy gives you the ability to access experts throughout the organization, regardless of their location, and gives the knowledge of their availability to interact with customers throughout the day for high-value sales and service interactions. We will discuss what Unified Communications mean to the contact center? https://crmxchange.webex.com/crmxchange/onstage/g.php?t=a&d=716027752

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NEWS BRIEFS…

Saaspoint Launches Mobile Field Scheduler for Salesforce.com AppExchange

Sunnyvale, CA — Saaspoint, a dedicated salesforce.com consultancy and systems integrator, announced the availability of its Mobile Field Scheduler for salesforce.com AppExchange.

Mobile Field Scheduler for AppExchange allows field service organizations to effectively manage and deploy technical support teams on the road. Users can now graphically view locations of field staff with ease, plan more productive itineraries or reschedule them dynamically using salesforce.com mobile and Google Maps technology. Data exchange between two Web services has been made as easy as if they were on the same computer, otherwise known to salesforce.com users as a mash-up. Harnessing the power of salesforce.com's on-demand platform, the Sasspoint Mobile Field Scheduler for AppExchange is available immediately at http://www.salesforce.com/appexchange.

"Salesforce.com customers who have field support personnel on the road can use the AppExchange to find excellent on-demand solutions that meet a wide range of business requirements, such as Saaspoint Mobile Field Scheduler," said George Hu, Chief Marketing Officer, salesforce.com. "The AppExchange economy continues its rapid growth with hundreds of applications from developers, partners and the salesforce.com community, demonstrating the overwhelming momentum and opportunity for on demand computing."

"By being able to better manage and be aware in real time of the location of the field support team, Saaspoint Mobile Field Scheduler helps to increase productive use of field resources and boost customer service by being more responsive to customer needs, " commented Andy Clark, Saaspoint Apex Division Manager. "We have tightly integrated mash-ups such as Google maps to create a more valuable tool for organizations."

Salesforce Platform and the AppExchange
Salesforce Platform is the on-demand platform for the next generation of business applications. Salesforce Platform reinvents traditional customization and integration and enables the creation of a whole new generation of on-demand applications that go beyond client/server computing. The Salesforce

Platform allows applications to be easily shared, exchanged and installed with a few simple clicks via salesforce.com's AppExchange directory, enabling all the innovation that the Salesforce Platform unleashes to benefit the entire on-demand community.

The AppExchange economy continues to expand as thousands of salesforce.com customers, have installed thousands of on-demand business applications available on the AppExchange, found at http://www.salesforce.com/appexchange.

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THE WATERFORD WEDGWOOD USA INC CONTACT CENTER PROCESSED OVER A MILLION CONTACTS WITH THE OMNIWORKS® CONTACT CENTER SOLUTION FROM TELTRONICS, INC.

SARASOTA, FL —- Teltronics, Inc. (OTCBB: TELT) a premier provider of communications products and services, was selected by Waterford Wedgwood USA the leading brand of premium crystal and fine china, to fulfill its diverse contact center needs with the OMNIWorks Contact Center solution. Waterford Wedgwood utilized the OMNIWorks solution and successfully reached the milestone of more than one million contacts in the form of calls, e-mails and faxes.

Michael Rossi, Telecommunications Manager for Waterford Wedgwood, said, "We are very pleased with the performance and reliability of our Teltronics OMNIWorks Contact Center Solution and excited that we reached the millionth contact mark."

Delivering superior customer service and dependability, OMNIWorks Contact Center solution quickly connects customers to the right resource, manages the interaction and provides the reports and tools needed to optimize contact center operations.

"The OMNIWorks Contact Center Solution enhanced Waterford Wedgwood's customer experience by providing unmatched contact center efficiency," Richard Begando, Executive Vice President of Sales and Marketing for Teltronics said. "OMNIWorks' robust capabilities maximize any contact centers' resources while streamlining its operations."

Rossi added that OMNIWorks' full set of multi-media capabilities makes Waterford Wedgwood's call center operation run more efficiently; resulting in a much more successful and profitable call center.

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CALL CENTER JOB OPENINGS...

Company Summary:

TNB Card Services, a division of Town North Bank, is the 3rd largest card processor for credit unions in the U.S. Providing full-service credit, debit and ATM card processing through an alliance with First Data Corporation, at TNB Card Services we are committed to finding customized solutions to meet the challenges our clients face. Originally formed in 1976, TNB Card Services provides services to hundreds of issuers and over 3 million credit union members nationwide.

Position: Customer Service Representative – Inbound Credit Card Call Center
Job Type: Full-time
Job Category: Call Center Customer Service
Location: Dallas, Texas

Job Description:
In this position you will handle incoming calls from credit card customers nationwide. Types of inquiries include, payments, statement review, problem-solving and other general information requests. Bilingual skills preferred. (English and Spanish)

Minimum requirements:
- One year of customer service experience, preferably in a call center environment
- Effective written and verbal communication skills
- Ability to deal with difficult customer situations while providing excellent customer service
- Ability to work in a fast-paced environment
- Professional telephone etiquette
- Ability to make routine decisions independently, based on company policies/procedures and working within approved limits
- Proficient computer skills (typing, MS Office Suite, etc.)

Shift: Various; Workweek will include a Saturday or Sunday.

Salary: $13 to $15 per hour commensurate with experience

To Apply:
Interested candidates should e-mail their resume to hr@tnbonline.com or fax to 972-391-6280.

Due to the volume of interest, the Company does not respond to the submission of every resume. In addition, submission of your resume to this website does not constitute the completion of an Employment Application. Candidates who the Company determines to be the best qualified for the position will be contacted to begin the interview process.

Town North Bank is an Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Employer.

Company Information:

TNB Card Services, a division of Town North Bank, is the 3rd largest card processor for credit unions in the U.S. Providing full-service credit and debit card processing through an alliance with First Data Corporation, at TNB Card Services we are committed to finding customized solutions to meet the challenges our clients face.

TNB offers a great benefit package and a supportive work environment. If you'd like to learn more about TNB, we'd be delighted to share our viewpoint on service and success with you. Visit our website at www.tnbcard.com.

Position: Call Center Supervisor – Credit Card Call Center

In this position you will be one of three supervisors responsible for the leadership of a team (approximately 10-15 representatives) in a credit card call center environment. The primary focus is to develop, coach and train customer service representations to optimum performance delivering quality service to our customers. Responsibilities include: focus on call ownership, resolving customer problem/issues gaining credibility and enhancing the customer's perception and loyalty; integrating resources to achieve team goals and business objectives; continuously looking for improvements to ensure productive, efficient, and professional service; conducting employee performance reviews; and providing ongoing coaching and counseling to improve employee performance and potential.

Education/Experience Requirements:

• Associates degree with at least 1-year supervisory experience in a call center environment.
• Without associate's degree, must have at least two to five years related experience in a call center leadership position.
• Excellent communication skills – verbal and written
• Strong organizational skills with the ability to prioritize work based on rapidly changing requirements
• Ability to coordinate with other team members for seamless customer service
• Ability to make quick and accurate decisions
• Proficient PC skills – at least intermediate level with Word and Excel
• Ability to work flexible schedules – Call center is 24/7
• Demonstrated ability to work successfully in a fast paced environment demanding self-reliance combined with team spirit, people skills, and a well-honed sense of urgency and priorities.

To Apply:

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Due to the volume of interest, the Bank does not respond to the submission of every resume. In addition, submission of your resume to this website does not constitute the completion of an Employment Application. Candidates who the Bank determines to be the best qualified for the position will be contacted to begin the interview process.

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TNB offers a great benefit package and a supportive work environment. If you'd like to learn more about TNB, we'd be delighted to share our viewpoint on service and success with you. Visit our website at www.tnbcard.com.

Position: Call Center Manager

The ideal Call Center Manager will have experience evaluating and improving call center operations; supervising and coordinating activities of a high volume call center; creating call-handling strategies; tracking call center performance data and quota levels; coaching, training and motivating staff to meet and exceed client expectations; and supporting and communicating business goals, quality standards, processes and procedures, and policies

Education/Experience/Skills Requirements:

• College degree or equivalent work-related experience
• Minimum of 5 years call center management experience
• Demonstrated knowledge of customer service metrics, demonstrated leadership, staff development and analytic skills
• Proven skills in identifying performance gaps and initiating training programs
• Excellent verbal and written communication skills with a high level of professionalism
• Proficiency in Microsoft Office (Outlook, Word, Excel, PowerPoint, etc.)

• Demonstrated ability to work successfully in a fast paced environment demanding self-reliance combined with team spirit, people skills, and a well-honed sense of urgency and priorities.

Preferred Skills:

• Experience in card services industry, familiarity with the FDR system, bilingual skills (English – Spanish)

To Apply:

E-mail your resume to hr@tnbonline.com or fax to 972-391-6280. Resumes may also be mailed to: P. O. Box 814810 Dallas, TX 75381-4810

Due to the volume of interest, the Bank does not respond to the submission of every resume. In addition, submission of your resume to this website does not constitute the completion of an Employment Application. Candidates who the Bank determines to be the best qualified for the position will be contacted to begin the interview process.

Town North Bank is an Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action Employer.

CONTACT COMPANY: Polo Ralph Lauren
CONTACT NAME: Tara Hyde
PAY TYPE: Annual
PAID RELOCATION: No
CITY: HIGH POINT
STATE/PROVINCE: NC
POSTAL CODE: 27260
COUNTRY: United States
REQUIRED EDUCATION: Four-Year Degree
REQUIRED EXPERIENCE: 2
TRAVEL: 0
PAID RELOCATION: No
CITY: HIGH POINT
STATE/PROVINCE: NC
POSTAL CODE: 27260
COUNTRY: United States

JOB DESCRIPTION:
Polo Ralph Lauren Corporation is a leader in the design, marketing and distribution of premium lifestyle products in four categories: apparel, home, accessories and fragrances. For more than 35 years, Polo's reputation and distinctive image have been consistently developed across an expanding number of products, brands and international markets.

Purpose and Scope - This position is responsible for analyzing intra-day call volume data and supporting functional management, within the Customer Contact Center, to ensure resource optimization. This includes developing accurate and effective schedules to ensure that service level targets are achieved, and real time decision-making authority to adjust activity and maximize performance productivity. Additionally, this position requires analyzing and reporting on call statistics, service levels, and customer satisfaction as well as developing performance standards and preparing performance reports to upper management and call center directors. This position will work with the Contact Center management team to ensure performance expectations are being met as well as managing and invoking the disaster recovery program

RESPONSIBILITIES:
Develop employee schedules for up to 150 agents based on forecasted volume & workload needs to ensure accurate staffing levels
Develop and prepare Performance Management reports for distribution to senior management
Ensure disaster recovery programs are in place and staff is able to invoke when necessary
Monitor ACD queue monitoring tools.
Manage daily staffing needs and allocate the workload appropriately
Forecast growth, seasonal variations, and special events affecting contact volume.
Identify contact volume trends on a monthly and quarterly basis

JOB REQUIREMENTS:
Bachelor's Degree or equivalent business experience
Minimum 2 years in service center operations as well as experience with workforce management tools, such as Blue Pumpkin and ACD technology i.e. Siemens
Experience in financial and productivity report analysis in contact centers or related fields
Technical proficiency that includes contact center technology processes and procedures
Understanding of interdependency between the systems as well as knowledge of physical connectivity of components
Strong organizational & time management skills. Must be able to multi-task, prioritize effectively,
Strong communications skills both verbal and written. Must be able to communicate effectively and professionally with all levels of the organization.
Knowledge of contact center tools including the following systems: order entry &processing, email management, quality monitoring, CMS, workforce management, etc.
Ability to thrive in a fast-paced, high-demand environment
Creative ("outside the box") thinker
Ability to work effectively within a team environment

Polo Ralph Lauren is an equal opportunity employer. We offer dynamic career opportunities with growth potential and a generous company discount.

To apply for this position, please copy and paste the following link into your browser address bar:
http://poloralphlauren.contacthr.com/8979927
or submit your resume and salary requirements through our homepage at
http://about.polo.com/careers/default.asp?jobid=975151

JOB TITLE: Telemarketing Agents/Admin Assts
CONTACT COMPANY: Rooms To Go
CONTACT NAME: Brenda Semple
CONTACT URL: http://roomstogo.contacthr.com/8775984
PAY TYPE: Per Hour
PAID RELOCATION: No
CITY: TAMPA
STATE/PROVINCE: FL
POSTAL CODE: 33601
COUNTRY: United States
REQUIRED EDUCATION: High School Degree
REQUIRED EXPERIENCE: 0
TRAVEL: 0
JOB DESCRIPTION: ROOMS TO GO, AMERICA'S #1 FURNITURE COMPANY! Quality Furniture, Incredible Service.

Rooms To Go is proud to offer quality products and services to customers who demand fashionable, quality furnishings. Come work for a company you know and trust in the Seffner area!

Full-Time & Part Time PM Shifts Available - TELEMARKETERS:

Full-Time - (TWO) ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT POSITIONS

P/T Shifts are as follows: Tues. thru Thurs, 5pm-9pm - Fri., 1pm-5pm - Sat., 9:30am-6pm

F/T Shifts are as follows: Tues. thru Thurs, 12:30pm-9pm, Fri. 8:30am-5pm, Sat., 9:30am-6pm

20% EVENING SHIFT DIFFERENTIAL PAID ON FULL-TIME & PART-TIME SHIFTS! Our top performers earn sales incentives up to 100% of their hourly pay rate!

Days Off- Sunday and Monday - No Cold Calling * One Week Paid Training * Full & Part-Time Shifts * High-Tech Call Center * Medical/Dental/Vision *Paid Vacations/Holidays * 401K Plan and More.....

JOB REQUIREMENTS: Our best Telemarketers are friendly, persuasive individuals who possess at least one year of sales experience, basic computer proficiency, excellent communication skills, and the motivation to achieve sales goals. Bilingual abilities a plus. Please apply at rtgcareers.com under Corporate Opportunities

We are proud to be an Equal Opportunity Employer, Drug Free Work Place.

To apply for this position, please copy and paste the following link into your browser address bar:

http://roomstogo.contacthr.com/8775984
or submit your resume and salary requirements through our homepage at http://www.rtgcareers.com/

Call Center Times

tin# 75-2915747

P. O. Box 118451, Carrollton, TX 75011-8451
Bus. 972-395-3225 Fax 972-395-9205

Dear Vice-President of Sales/Marketing:

Here Is How We Can Help Increase Your Bottom Line!

_______ ***'2007 Call Center Book of Lists Directory'***:

- *1,275 Call Centers Listed*
- *Each Call Center has at least One Decision Maker Listed*
- *Complete Contact Information*
- *715+ E-mail Addresses*
- *The Directory is in CD-ROM (Excel Spreadsheet)*
- *FREE Quarterly Updates* Cost: $425

______ **Resource Directory/Call Center's Buyer's Guide**: This section of our website is the most elaborate advertising program that we provide: Your company will be profiled on our website, www.callcentertimes.com, for 12 consecutive months You will be listed in the Rolling Banner for 12 consecutive months Cost: $517

______ ***Monthly Newsletter Advertisement:*** Cost: $275

______ **Corporate Logo Promotion (Website & Monthly Newsletter)**: Cost $500

Simply check the applicable column(s) and return by fax to (972) 395-9205. Please note that all transactions are final. There will be no refunds.

COMPANY NAME/ Contact/Address/Telephone/Fax/E-mail: ______________________________________

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○ MasterCard ○ Visa ○ American Express

______________________________________ ______________
Credit Card Number Expiration Date

____
Name As Appears On Credit Card (Print Please) & Signature

Regards,
Nosa Eke, Publisher