



## CX Best Practice Success Story – Career Development Program

### Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama

#### Company Description

Since 1936, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama has been providing high-quality affordable healthcare coverage to their customers, at every stage of their lives. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama is the largest provider of healthcare benefits in the state of Alabama.

#### Contact Center Description

##### Locations

Birmingham, Alabama

Huntsville, Alabama

##### Contact Types

Calls, emails, chat, and correspondence from members and providers inquiring about benefits and eligibility.

##### Customer Types

Members enrolled as part of a group plan or individuals

##### CSR Headcount

375 CSRs

##### Contact Channels Offered

Inbound, outbound, IVR, website, email, mobile app, chat

##### Hours of Operation

7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Central Time, Monday-Friday

##### Contact Volume

Approximately 425,000 customer contacts per month

#### Background

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama is considered to be a premier employer in the state of Alabama and strives to live up to its longstanding reputation as "The Caring Company." We provide coverage to over 3 million people and employ over 3,600 associates.

Our seven corporate values are visible, practical, and are integrated at every level.

- Respect our Customers
- Achieve Excellence
- Retain Financial Strength
- Realize Full Potential
- Pursue Knowledge
- Act with Integrity
- Give back to the community

## **Our Culture**

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama has a distinctive corporate culture. Our unique Performance Management philosophy is an example of how managing behavior can contribute to success. All employees are trained on Performance Management and encouraged to apply the principles.

We recognize that our company's outstanding performance benefits both our employees and our customers. We care about our employees and offer an environment that encourages career growth, a healthy lifestyle and work-life balance.

The Customer Service department often serves as a gateway for the company, and many of our most successful associates began their careers in this department.

The CAP (Customer Achievement Program) is an intensely focused program for trainees new to the company. Classes are held three to four times every year to prepare associates for a very demanding role. Only the top 3% of applicants are selected for each class.

The first phase of training consists of eight weeks in the classroom, which includes an introduction to the company and culture, how to quote benefits, analyze claims, and resolve a variety of customer questions and problems. The second phase is known as Benchmarking. Trainees take live calls during this time with close supervision and frequent feedback. They must meet minimum performance criteria (benchmarked) to qualify for a permanent position in Customer Service.

Once an associate has 'benchmarked' any applicable specialty, he or she will be assigned to a particular area of customer service.

The Customer Service Department (CSD) has both a formal development program and an informal path for career growth.

### **Formal Development Program:**

*Career Pathways program:*

Associates progress through four different positions on its career ladder:

1. Customer Service Trainee
2. Customer Service Representative
3. Customer Relations Associate
4. Customer Relations Specialist

An associate is eligible for a promotion every six months, based on performance during the previous six months. Qualifying for a promotion to the Associate level provides for an increase in bonus pay potential. Promotion to the Customer Relations Specialist qualifies the associate for a promotional salary increase, grade level increase, and an increase in bonus pay potential based on performance for the past twelve months.

Performance measures for our customer service areas include the following:

- Quality Assurance scores
- Average Handle Time
- Net Sign-on percentage
- Schedule Compliance percentage
- Service Quality Measurement (SQM) Group survey scores

Coaching is an essential component of associates' development, and it is provided throughout their careers by managers, team leaders, and the Quality Assurance team.

The surveys received from SQM provide critical insight into the customers' experiences interacting with our associates.

Associates must have a minimum of 18 months experience before potentially qualifying as a Customer Relations Specialist. Becoming a specialist allows for other informal development opportunities.

### **Informal Career Development:**

#### ***Specialist Resource Line (SRL)***

The SRL team is a select group of 21 high-performing individuals who operate as the 'help desk' of sorts for associates throughout the call center. When a member of CSD has a question, problem or escalated call, they will contact the SRL team for guidance.

Only Customer Relations Specialists are eligible to join the SRL team. This role does not require bidding – SRL team members remain Specialists. However, the SRL role is viewed as an opportunity for the most highly ranked specialists in the call center.

The Specialist Resource Line role can seem intimidating, and for that reason, we host an Open House periodically throughout the year. They are invited to visit the SRL area, observe team members in action and take some calls with an SRL team member plugged in to provide assistance. This provides an opportunity for specialists in the call center to work closely with the SRL's and Team Leaders to sharpen their CSD skills.

The visiting specialist develops self-awareness of their own research abilities, gain a better understanding of how to resolve issues, formulate questions and diffuse escalated calls. This experience not only builds confidence but also sparks interest when future openings become available.

When there is an opening, managers in the call center nominate top performing specialists who are interested in growing professionally. The SRL manager meets with each SRL candidate to define expectations and answer questions. Final selection is based not only on performance but also the willingness to 'step outside one's comfort zone' in order to develop knowledge and skills.

A new SRL is not expected to know everything but must be receptive to feedback and willing to learn. Training, support, and regular guidance is provided as the new SRL learns how to assist others using a coaching approach.

Development opportunities for SRL team members include, but are not limited to:

- Attending meetings and classes as representatives for the team
- Providing summary documents with key takeaways for the benefit of team members
- Learning to prepare for and facilitate training sessions for peers
- Peer coaching
- Participation in the ACE leadership team
- Participation in the Aspire program

The skills developed as a member of the SRL role prepare them for promotion to the next level – the role of Team Leader.

#### ***Team Leader***

The team leader position is a promotion to an exempt level with greater responsibility, including extensive coaching and mentoring with associates throughout the call center.

Successful performance in the team leader role may lead to opportunities for the next level – Customer Service line-level manager.

Example: 10 out of 25 current line-level managers were previously team leaders.

## **Best Practices**

Our talented employees choose to continue their careers with us year after year. Our growth allows tenured and new employees opportunities to take on new assignments and responsibilities.

## **Career Resources**

- [Internal Career Resource Library](#)
- [Onsite Learning and Performance Development Center](#) that offers a wide selection of instructor-led and online courses. Both job-specific and professional skills are emphasized. Our certified instructors have years of practical experience as well as an understanding of adult learning.
- [Online Courses](#) are available to provide employees greater flexibility in professional development endeavors. These courses are available on-demand and include training on a variety of topics, from PC skills to coaching for improved performance.
- [Career Coaching sessions](#) are available to equip employees with the knowledge and skills needed to reach their career goals, career development, and personal growth.

## **Internal Job Postings**

- An internal Careers system is available that allows employees to apply for positions within the Company. Employees can apply conveniently from their workstation through an internal HR Self-Service system.

## **Support for Growth and Development**

- Tuition Reimbursement