

CX Best Practice Success Story – CSR Training Program



Company Overview

In 1886, William A. Foote, a flour mill operator, teamed up with Samuel Jarvis to secure a street lighting franchise agreement with the city of Jackson. What began as the illumination of a dozen streetlights has now become Consumers Energy company.

Consumers Energy is one of the nation's largest combination utilities, providing electric and natural gas service to almost 6.5 million of Michigan's 10 million residents and serves customers in all 68 counties of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. Consumers Energy is the principle subsidiary of CMS Energy Corporation, a Michigan-based company that also owns and operates independent power generation businesses.

Our Culture

At CMS Energy, we choose to do the right thing – not merely what's required or what's most convenient. We operate safely, honestly and with accountability. We care for the environment and for the communities where we live and work. We treat everyone fairly and with respect.

These fundamental concepts have helped us successfully serve our customers for nearly 130 years. Today we are reimagining what an energy company looks like and how we can best serve our customers in the 21st century. While holding firm to our foundation and our Guiding Principles:

- We act with integrity
- We earn our customers' business 24/7
- We put points on the board
- We leave it better than we found it
- We cross the finish line together
- It's a great place to work

Headquarters:

Jackson, Michigan

CSR Headcount:

272 - 280

Contact Center Locations:

Alma, Grand Rapids, Lansing, Royal Oak, and Saginaw, Michigan

Contact Types:

- Starting, stopping & changing services
- Billing and payment inquiries
- Emergency and outage order submission & questions

Customer Types:

Residential and Landlord Small Business

Contact Channels:

Inbound, Website, Email and Text

Hours of Operation:

- Monday – Friday 7:00 a.m. ET to 6:00 p.m. ET
- Saturday, 8:00 a.m. ET to 2:00 p.m. ET
- Limited Service hours for emergency service
 - Monday – Friday 6:00 p.m. ET – 7:00 a.m. ET
 - Saturday, 2:00 p.m. ET – Monday 7:00 a.m. ET
 - Holidays

Contact Volume:

- 4.2 million live calls
- 5 million IVR calls
- 25 million website contacts

Consumers Energy MiniPODs

Employee development is a key part of improving our service delivery. When CSRs join the company, they enter into a six-month training program, which is conducted by our Learning & Development partners. CSRs rotate through three classroom segments during these first six months with each segment focusing on different call types. As CSRs graduate from their initial role of CSR-in-training, they become fully-trained CSRs and continue learning at a very brisk pace.

As part of our Guiding Principle of Getting It Right, we regularly evaluate our approach to staff development. Our goal is to foster a staff that achieves world-class performance while maintaining hometown service. To achieve this, we believe it is vital that CSRs are engaged and empowered in their own development. To this end, MiniPODs were created by a Team Leader (TL) in late 2017.

To further engage CSRs in their professional development, the TL worked with our Training Advisory Group (TAG). The TAG team is a negotiated group. As part of the working agreement, the group's purpose is to provide a platform for CSRs to formally request and advise on their training needs. In an effort to achieve this purpose, the TL and TAG team re-defined the team's role to include that of MiniPOD creators and facilitators.

What is a MiniPOD?

The purpose of a MiniPOD is to provide a 30-minute or less presentation/discussion about critical topics that will improve our overall customer experience. This is achieved through the creation of a hands-on, interactive presentation created and delivered by CSRs for CSRs. The pods are designed to act as a refresher course, providing best practices and tips for common processes and procedures that can be a challenge for CSRS; these processes and procedures often change daily in our call center environment.

Since its inception in late 2017, the TAG team has produced over 50 MiniPODs. Over 200 CSRs have completed at least one MiniPOD session. The TAG team is responsible for creating and presenting the material. This material is gathered from all available resources, including our knowledge management tool - SNAP, and job aids provided by Learning & Development (L&D) and other Consumers Energy departments.

MiniPODs are created based on CSR input. CSRs are encouraged to contact a TAG team member to share topics with which they are struggling. TAG team members will also make recommendations based on the call types they have recently taken and see as a trending topic or gap in service. Once the module topic has been identified, TAG team members evaluate the current catalog of topics and decide if this is a new topic or if a revision of an existing topic is needed.

Once a MiniPOD module is created, the material is reviewed by the sponsoring TL. The TL will correct any grammatical and formatting issues. The document then follows the final approval workflow. The approval process includes a review by our Policy, Methods, Contact Center Support (PMCCS) Team and L&D to ensure consistent and accurate content. The approval process may also include other Consumers Energy departments to ensure accuracy. L&D updates current new hire curriculum to align with the MiniPOD content ensuring all future newly-hired CSRs receive the most accurate information.

Participation in MiniPODs is strictly voluntary. CSRs can sign up to take a MiniPOD at their discretion. By making these sessions voluntary, CSRs own their development and only sign up for course work, in which they feel they need additional support. By not training all 280 CSRs on every module created, we effectively maintain costs. Modules are scheduled once there are at least 2 or more CSRs requesting a specific module. The topics covered to date include: Low Income Express, Budget Plan Basics, Handling High Bill Calls, Pay My Way, Refunds, Gas Emergency, and many more.

Annual certifications are also a part of our overall development platform. Any MiniPOD that is deemed necessary for an annual review is made a requirement for all CSRs. These include High Bill Call Handling Summer and Winter, Gas Emergency refresher, and Moving In & Moving Out. Annual certifications require successful completion of an assessment and/or call evaluation.

Results

Over the past year, the impact of MiniPODs has been astounding. Not only has employee morale greatly improved, but employee engagement scores increased in November 2018, after seeing a lift in 2017. Our customers have also benefited from the introduction of MiniPODs with customer satisfaction, percentage of calls resolved, and world class calls increasing.

Our CSRs spend 10 to 20 hours per year involved in continuing education classes. These hours can be obtained through MiniPODs, online course work or in a classroom setting. Here are a few CSR comments on the value of MiniPOD sessions:

"The MiniPODs have been priceless to our day to day job. Sometimes I learn new information I had never heard before that changes the way I do something on a call. Other times it's nice to get a refresher on information I might've heard before but have forgotten over time."

"High impact...we learn things that have changed that we sometimes didn't know. Also, sometimes we are just wrong in how we do things and it's a good way to correct that."

"It can be anything from clarification of a process to being able to bounce ideas off of other CSRs. I really like hearing how my peers handle situations. That to me is invaluable and helps me SO much!"

Conclusion

We recognize MiniPODs to be a best practice that is delivering in multiple areas: continuous improvement, career development, and standard operating procedures. The impact of MiniPODs is evident both internally and externally: Employee Engagement has increased while our call resolution for 2018 has moved into a 1st Quartile performance level. Consequently, we fully embrace this best practice and strive to realize its full potential as we continue to commit to driving First Call Resolution, delivering world-class performance, and creating a customer-centric culture.