

CX Best Practice Success Story - CSR Selection Process



MASSACHUSETTS

Company Description

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts is a community-focused, tax-paying, not-for-profit health plan headquartered in Boston. We are committed to working with others in a spirit of shared responsibility to make quality health care affordable. Our corporate promise is to *always put our members first*. We are rated among the nation's best health plans for member satisfaction and quality.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts

Contact Center Description

Locations

Quincy, Massachusetts, USA

Hingham, Massachusetts, USA

Call Types

Calls from members inquiring about their benefits, claims, and eligibility

Customer Types

Members enrolled as individuals or part of a group plan

CSR Headcount

237 CSRs

Contact Channels

Inbound and outbound phone calls, email, IVR, website, and social media

Hours of Operation

Monday to Friday, 8:00 am to 9:00 pm ET

Contact Volume

Approximately 140,000 calls per month on our Member Service lines

Background

At Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, we work hard to make sure that our nearly three million members have access to the high-quality, affordable health care they expect and deserve. For more than 80 years, our company has focused on making our vision a reality for the individuals, families, and businesses we serve.

By the numbers:

Workforce Size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3,700 employees
Members Served	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.8 million
Customers Include	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 of 13 Fortune 500 companies headquartered in Massachusetts • 75% of Massachusetts cities and towns • More than 25,000 businesses across Massachusetts • Nearly 115,000 federal employees • 818,000 dental members
Customer Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 48 million claims processed annually • 2.8 million calls answered annually
Community Commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% of employees participate in BlueCrew volunteer program = 33,000 volunteer hours • \$5.7 million invested in more than 459 nonprofit organizations throughout the state
Member & Provider Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 237 customer service representatives • 17 managers • 2 supervisors • 17 business experts • 12 quality assurance evaluators • 15 support staff (non-frontline) • 10 trainers

The Challenge: Improving the CSR Selection Process

Many Blue Cross employees enter the company through Member Service. We make a considerable investment – both in time and money – to train them. Then, once the 18-month commitment period is over, many take jobs elsewhere in the company. This is good for other departments because our CSRs are solidly trained, but the attrition rate in Member Service was higher than we liked, and we frequently struggled to maintain enough experienced staff.

To address this issue, we developed a three-pronged approach: interview training and development for leaders, implementation of hiring software, and a new recruiting process.

#1 – Interview training and development for leaders

Member Service leaders know their staff better than anyone. Hiring is far more than simply getting a warm body in the chair to answer calls. CSRs must have the right personality, the ability to learn, adapt, and change. Therefore, it makes lots of sense to include leaders in the interviewing process. Historically, new leaders were paired with more experienced leaders to learn how to interview. The problem was that there was never any formal interview training for leaders, so even the experienced leaders lacked professional development in this area.

We partnered with our Human Resources department to develop leader training on how to conduct successful interviews, focusing on selecting the best candidates that possess the critical competencies we're looking for and are a good fit for the job. We delivered interview training for all hiring leaders focused on behavioral, situational, and structured questions.

Leaders were invited to attend an interactive workshop with the objectives of training them on different forms of interviewing, interviewing tips, and how to conduct a successful interview. After the workshop, leaders were able to assess talent based on competency, fit, and potential, and felt empowered to select the right candidates for the job.

This training was so successful that Human Resources began offering the training module to the rest of the organization.

#2 – Implementation of hiring software

Select International is a Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania company specializing in pre-employment testing software. To help us more accurately and efficiently identify successful CSR candidates, we purchased two assessment programs that evaluate behavioral and technical skills for contact center roles. These assessments are sent electronically to candidates who apply for CSR positions.

The Select International two-phased electronic assessment includes pre-screening and in-depth assessments:

1. We used Select International's pre-screening tool (*ServiceFit*) to assess candidates for us, based on behavioral competencies to determine candidates who would be the right fit for a CSR position. This assessment can be done on a candidate's mobile device or computer and takes approximately 20 minutes to complete.

2. Candidates who successfully pass the pre-screening assessment are invited to complete Select International's Realistic Job Preview (*Select Assessment for Customer Service and Sales*). This 40-60 minute call center simulation helps us identify the best, most productive candidates based upon the critical competencies of the CSR position.
 - The competencies are *customer-focus, ownership, positive attitude, problem-solving, processing speed, quality focus, and multi-tasking*.
 - The Realistic Job Preview assessment provides scores for each competency, an overall score, and suggested interview questions based on individual responses.
3. From the pool of candidates who pass both electronic assessments, the Blue Cross recruiter and Member Service senior manager review résumés and invite a select group of candidates to attend a hiring event.

#3 – New recruiting process

Our approach to interviewing has completely changed to be more efficient, less formal, and more intensive. The value of the social dynamic in this interviewing process cannot be underestimated. Traditional interviews tend to give a very limited view of candidates. Because our new process involves many people, we are able to get a much more comprehensive view of each candidate. When potential employees interact with current employees, leaders, and other candidates, we get an accurate picture of their potential for working at Blue Cross with success.

Further, the efficiency of holding one or two events per hiring class and the flexibility of holding scaled-down versions, when needed, is helpful.

In preparation for this new process, we revised the interview evaluation form to incorporate Select International interview questions and allow for feedback to be captured easily while interviewing multiple candidates.

- For each new hire class of 10-12 CSRs, we host one to two interview events, inviting 18-25 candidates who passed the assessment.
- Hiring events are scheduled from 4:30 – 7:30, reducing the time managers spend away from their teams conducting interviews. As a token of appreciation for their after-hours time, we provide leaders with one compensation day per year.

- This new process reduces interviewing time by 78%. Instead of 36 hours of individual interviews using the old traditional hiring process, a new class is hired through group interviews in less than eight hours.

Hiring event details:

Time	Events
4:00-4:30 p.m.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates are greeted by Blue Ambassadors and escorted to the conference room. Blue Ambassadors are experienced CSRs who mentor newer employees and can share what it's like to be a CSR. • They sign in with their arrival time and are invited to network with leaders and other candidates. Appetizers and drinks are available, and highboy tables add to a relaxed and social atmosphere.
4:30-5:00 p.m.	<p>Group presentations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Resources talks about the company and benefits • We play a video that talks about the job and shows the call center environment in action • Member Service director discusses our service vision, including first call resolution • Training manager reviews the training program • Blue Ambassadors share "a day in the life of a CSR," talking about what it takes to be successful in the role and what they like about their jobs
5:00-6:00 p.m.	Smaller groups of three or four candidates participate in group interviews with two interviewers – one a senior leader or HR recruiter and the other a Member Service manager.
6:00-6:30 p.m.	After the group interview is concluded, each candidate is provided with one-on-one time with the hiring leaders.
6:30-7:00 p.m.	Immediately following the hiring event, the leadership team makes on-the-spot hiring decisions with feedback from all those in attendance.
7:00-7:15 p.m.	The leadership team takes time at the end of each hiring session to discuss opportunities for process improvement and also solicits feedback from candidates and new hires on the recruitment process. We talk with new hires after they join our company, and informally ask candidates for their feedback during the hiring event. This means that we have the opportunity to learn and improve continually.

Results:

The benefits of these changes are many. Candidates get a consistently realistic view of the company and the job, including benefits, so that they can better know if it's a good fit for them. We are given more of a complete view of candidates, having the opportunity to observe them interact with Blue Cross employees and other candidates in a relaxed and social setting. The final decision to hire or not to hire is made, not by one or two people, but by a group that knows the business well and has a strong incentive to hire the right people for the job.

From an efficiency perspective, leaders end up dedicating less time to the overall hiring process whereas, in the old model, each interview would take them away from their teams for an hour and a half. The total time commitment for managers, including interview prep time, was reduced 56% with this new hiring process. And, these are "off hours" when team support is less critical.

As a point of interest, for our most recent new hire class (October), there were 298 applicants. Of these, twelve were hired. The new selection process allowed us to fill our class smoothly, efficiently, and in far less time than ever before.

By the numbers, our new hiring process for CSRs has been a complete success.

- Interviewing time reduced by **78%**
- Time commitment from managers (including preparation) reduced by **56%**
- Attrition has been reduced dramatically:
 - We saw a decrease of **39%** in turnover, and our overall turnover rate dropped 10% (number of all CSRs who left the company):

	# of CSRs leaving the company	%
2016*	68	25.6%
2017*	41	15.6%

*year to date (through October)

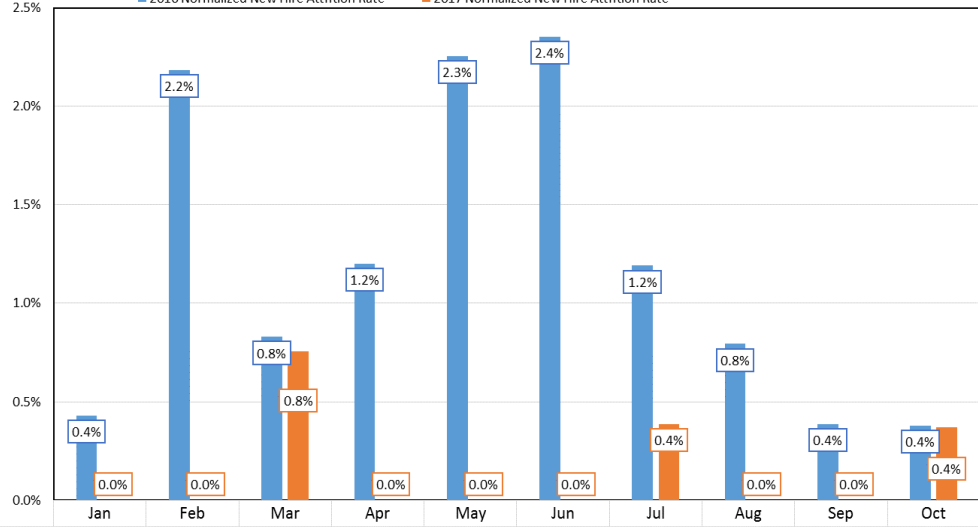
- There has been an **87%** reduction of new hires who left the company within six months or less:

	Attrition Rate of CSRs leaving the company within 6 months
2016	12.1%
2017*	1.6%

*through October

2016 vs 2017 MS New Hire Normalized Attrition Rate

■ 2016 Normalized New Hire Attrition Rate ■ 2017 Normalized New Hire Attrition Rate



■ 2016 Normalized New Hire Attrition Rate	0.4%	2.2%	0.8%	1.2%	2.3%	2.4%	1.2%	0.8%	0.4%	0.4%
■ 2017 Normalized New Hire Attrition Rate	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%