FIRST CALL RESOLUTION

TOP 10 CALL CENTER BEST PRACTICES FOR IMPROVING FCR

Case Studies from Award-Winning Call Centers

Part II

Authors:

Leaders from FCR Award-Winning Call Centers Wrote the FCR Best Practices for Improving FCR Case Studies used in this Whitepaper.

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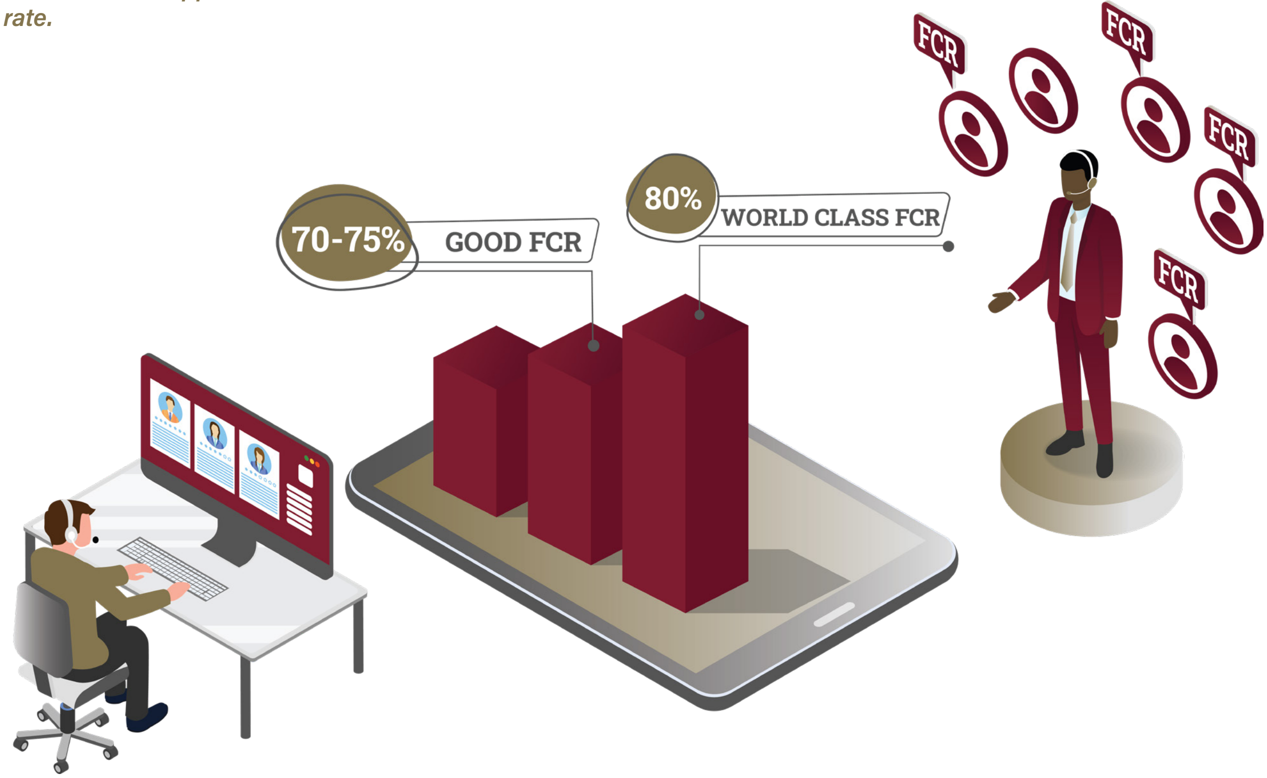
This First Call Resolution Whitepaper, Part 2, focuses on the Top 10 Call Center Best Practices for Improving FCR. Part 1 Whitepaper focused on FCR Importance, Defining, Measuring, Goals, and ROI.

WHAT IS A GOOD FCR RATE?

At SQM, we benchmark the First Call Resolution (FCR) rate with over 500 leading North American call centers annually and have been conducting FCR benchmarking studies for 25 years. Our Voice of the Customer (VoC) FCR benchmarking research is one of the most extensive research studies of FCR performance. For our VoC FCR benchmarking studies, all call center participants must provide SQM a list of all calls they handled to ensure the customer surveying is a random sample of all calls their call centered handled. Making all calls eligible for a customer survey ensures that the FCR rate is accurate. ***We use a standardized approach to determine the call center's FCR rate.***

Our standardized FCR benchmarking approach allows us to accurately benchmark a call center's FCR rate against their specific industry, the call center industry as a whole, and world class call centers. SQM's research shows that when an organization uses external VoC FCR measurement methods (e.g., post-call survey, etc.), ***the call center industry average for FCR rate is 70%.*** This means that 30% of customers have to call back the organization about the same inquiry or problem. ***A good First Call Resolution rate is 70% to 75%.***



Of the 500 leading North American call centers that SQM benchmarks, only 5% are at the world class VoC FCR performance level standard of 80% or higher. Achieving the world class standard of 80% or higher VoC FCR performance is the most popular FCR improvement goal that SQM clients strive to achieve and maintain. Most call centers that consistently measure FCR and use the best practices described in this Whitepaper improve their FCR rate.

In fact, SQM's research shows that ***70% of clients who consistently measure their FCR and utilize some of the best practices described in the Whitepaper improve year-over-year.*** The FCR gain by these call centers ranges from 1-20%. ***Improving FCR is very difficult; only 5% of call centers improve their FCR by 5% or more in a given year.*** Using the top 10 best practices described in this Whitepaper have a proven track record for helping call centers improve their First Call Resolution.

FCR Measurement ▶

BENEFITS FOR MEASURING AND IMPROVING THE FCR RATE

As the old saying goes, "you need to measure FCR to improve FCR." **FCR is the KING of all call center metrics** because it helps reduce operating costs and customers at risk of defection, improves customer and employee satisfaction, increases selling opportunities, and improves Net Promoter Score®. Below is an infographic of the 6 Benefits of Measuring and Improving First Call Resolution.

Two great examples of benefits of measuring FCR are ***"every 1% improvement in FCR, there is a 1% improvement in customer satisfaction" and "every 1% improvement in FCR increases transactional Net Promoter Score® by 1.4 points."***

SQM Business Case ▸

TOP 10 CALL CENTER BEST PRACTICES FOR IMPROVING FCR

The top 10 call center best practices for improving First Call Resolution (FCR) are based on our customer and employee FCR research. Based on benchmarking leading North American call centers, we identified organizations with best practices that helped them deliver world class or significantly improved FCR performance. SQM conducted site visits with most of those call centers used in this Whitepaper to validate that their practices have a proven track record for improving FCR or maintaining world class FCR performance.

What makes SQM's identification of the top 10 call center best practices for improving FCR unique is that the VoC FCR, customer satisfaction (Csat), and employee satisfaction (Esat) results are used to determine if it is a best practice. The below figure shows the Top 10 Call Center Best Practices for Improving FCR.

The Top 10 FCR Best Practices for Improving FCR focus on people, process, and technology practices controlled by the call center function. The reason for this approach is that our experience shows that, in most cases, when FCR improves, the improvement comes from functions the call center owns. ***SQM's research shows that the source of error (SoE) for non-FCR calls is due to the agent 38% of the time, the customer 13%, and the organization 49%.*** Furthermore, our research shows that most FCR improvement comes from reducing agent and customer SoE. The quickest way to improve FCR for call centers is to reduce agent SoE. We have clients who have experienced FCR improvement due to reducing the organizational SoEs, but this FCR improvement approach tends to be the exception and not the rule. Also, when FCR improvement comes from lowering organizational SoE, it takes a long time in most cases.

However, given that the organizational SoE is 49% for non-FCR calls, it is essential to collaborate with other functions to identify the FCR failure points and develop the necessary action plans to improve. ***If your call center is looking for quick wins, in most cases, it is better to focus on agent and customer SoE opportunities and then organizational SoE opportunities***.

This section shows high-level details of the Top 10 Call Center FCR Best Practices for Improving FCR. The best practice list is not ranked by importance. The importance of the best practices varies depending on the call center's performance and needs. The call center leaders wrote the best practices in this Whitepaper and some of them felt more uncomfortable sharing their entire best practice story they submitted to SQM. The following is a list of SQM client's FCR top 10 best practices:

1. FCR Measurement

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts treats FCR as more than just a metric; FCR is an operating philosophy. They have incorporated the “FCR operating philosophy” into their core people, processes, and technology operating practices to ensure that they are focused on FCR accountability and delivering FCR to their members.

2. Desktop Applications

Comcast consolidated more than 20 unique desktop applications into one universal employee application that would be consistent, simple, smart, and agents would love to use it every day. They call their desktop application Einstein.

3. Agent Recognition

Regence BlueCross BlueShield has a Service Hero program that is their most successful and longest-running employee recognition program. The Service Hero program recognizes agents that provide exemplary service.

4. Customer Quality Assurance (CQA)

407 ETR agents have a holistic view of customer experience because the CQA evaluation form embeds customer survey and call compliance results. For the same call, agents are accountable for customer survey and call compliance results.

5. Call Handling

Canadian Tire Financial Services uses Chordiant, TSYS technology systems, and skill-based routing to ensure calls are routed to the right agents. The Interactive Voice Response system (IVR) takes care of most customer inquiries without transferring to the agent, such as account balance inquiry, minimum payment due, and card activation. CRCC has a proven 70% customer fulfillment rate within the IVR.

6. Escalation Agent Support

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts uses a Service Solutions Line to handle escalated calls. Escalation call tracking identifies which agents called and why, allowing them to identify training opportunities at both the individual agent and department levels.

7. Performance Management System

Scotia iTRADE VoC results (e.g., Csat, FCR world class calls, etc.) are the primary metrics used for measuring performance at all levels throughout the call center. Agent performance appraisals, compensation, and improvement plans are based on VoC results.

8. Agent Coaching

Mr. Cooper uses a coach-the-coach approach. They use a coaching feedback grading form to evaluate and score their coaches’ effectiveness by rating them on very specific criteria. The coaches are observed by their VP weekly and given a score of 0%-100%.

9. Agent Training

Premera Blue Cross agents attend a call resolution training workshop. Agents receive feedback based on VoC surveys. After each agent reviews their VoC results, they meet with other agents to discuss what they have learned and then develop a call resolution improvement plan.

10. Agent Selection

Canadian Tire Financial Services management prides itself on hiring the best Agent candidates who fit their culture and provide excellent customer experience. Cultural fit is key to a candidate’s success, and the effect on FCR and Csat can be directly linked to this fit. Their average agent tenure is 12 years, and a high percentage of them are certified as world class FCR performers.

FCR MEASUREMENT

FCR Measurement Best Practice Case Study Written by Blue Cross Blue Shield Massachusetts Leadership

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. Consistent with our corporate promise to always put our members first, we are rated among the nation's best health plans for member satisfaction and quality.

Problem/Opportunity

At Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts, our frontline Member Service employees put a premium on excellent service. We take pride in delivering our corporate promise to put our members first. Part of this promise is to ensure First Call Resolution (FCR) wherever possible. How do we do this? By integrating FCR into every aspect of our business, every day, across the whole company, involving everyone from the CEO down. Put differently; ***we treat FCR as more than just a metric; FCR is an operating philosophy at all levels within the organization.***

FCR Governance Structure

To help encourage company-wide awareness, we created an FCR governance structure to ensure the member (e.g., customer) experience is always top of mind for all company areas. Infusing the voice of the member (VoM) into everyone's work by playing back calls regularly during meetings at all levels demonstrates the impact of FCR on those who aren't normally involved in member experience. It also shows company employees why FCR is essential. Feedback from other areas has been tremendous because they didn't realize how their jobs impact members downstream.

One leader says, "The calls we listened to made me appreciate the challenges our members and agents experience in trying to navigate the healthcare system and how important it is to have the right tools and resources available to both."

The FCR governance structure looks like this:

Group	Employee Level	Function
FCR Council	Executive leaders	Sponsors and supports all activities.
FCR Workgroup	Senior leaders and directors from across the division	Responsible for developing annual department-level FCR work plans and goals to support the member experience.
FCR Champions	Member Service leaders and agents	Develop and execute initiatives that support department-level FCR plans. Review member survey responses from non-FCR surveys. Simplify processes to increase FCR

A director of Health Management Operations says, "It's great to be part of the FCR cross-functional workgroup for many reasons! It is great camaraderie seeing everyone get together and improve their operational areas, all for 'the greater good.' The information and data I receive in those meetings help tell the story to my colleagues in the health and Medical Management team. The least we can do to support Member Service to answer the questions they receive from members effectively is to ensure we are doing our part to decrease barriers wherever we can. FCR goals give us a great map for initiating process improvements in our area."

We use the external and internal FCR measurement methods to deliver a great member experience (MX) cost-effectively.

External – Measurement of First Call Resolution

We use SQM for the external (e.g., VoM) measurement of FCR and have done so since 2008. For the external post-call survey measurement method calculation, a survey is conducted within one business day of a member's call. FCR rate is based on two survey questions. A call is considered FCR if a customer answers 'yes' to the question, "Was your call resolved?", and in 'one call' to the question, "How many calls did you make to resolve your call? Here's a look at our current member experience surveying suite and how those surveys are used:

- ***Phone Surveying Method*** – to benchmark FCR across all BCBS Plans. The sample size quota is 2,000 per year and is conducted daily. The BCBS Association requires this FCR data.
- ***Phone Surveying Method*** – to track FCR across all business units within our organization. The sample size quota is 1,000 per month and is conducted daily. The FCR data is used for trending and process improvement opportunities.
- ***IVR (Outbound) Surveying Method*** – to track agent call resolution and member satisfaction (Msat). The sample size quota is 4 surveys per agent per month, and surveying is conducted daily. The data is used for holding agents accountable for call resolution and Msat performance, coaching, and recognition purposes, along with mid-year and annual performance reviews.
- ***Action Alerts*** – are based on survey results. An action alert occurs when a member rates their call center experience as dissatisfied and the call as unresolved. Action Alerts surveys are always a top priority. We ask our leaders to handle these surveys as soon as possible, provide feedback and coaching to the agent, and follow up with the member if necessary.
- ***Agent Recognition*** – based on survey results, we recognize all agents certified by SQM as World Class FCR/MX Performers each year. Every month, we recognize agents who have achieved 100% call resolution and use member's direct 'Agent Verbatim Feedback' to highlight great member experiences to keep the agents motivated.

Internal – Measurement of First Call Resolution

We use our internal data within our customer relationship management (CRM) tool to measure the closure rate of documented calls by our frontline agents for added perspective. While this measure does not consider the member perception of the interaction, it does allow us to gauge performance, identify trends, and provide account-specific feedback. We can also compare and contrast our FCR results from SQM's external measurement of FCR to see where there are areas of alignment and if there are any performance gaps.

Speech Analytics is another way to monitor repeat calls and call category types to ensure we validate fluctuations and address call drivers' trends.

In addition, we consistently report on call types and volumes through our CRM and Workforce Management systems to ensure we have enough staffing for seasonality changes in volume. This reporting also allows us to identify account-specific trends and issues that arise.

Using External and Internal FCR Measurement Data to Drive Change

We understand that our overall member experience survey sample is a small percentage of our call center's overall incoming call volume. Therefore, we use external measurement data as a starting point for investigation and use internal data elements to ensure we are getting the full scope of the issue when changing a workflow or procedure to improve the member experience.

A great example of this is our workflow change for subscribers to submit claims. Here is a quick outline of the steps we take to use external (e.g., VoM FCR) and internal (e.g., big data) insights to support our initiative before acting:

- From our SQM surveys, we learned there was an opportunity to enhance our internal processes and decrease the turnaround time of subscribers submit claims.
- We used our internal call data from Speech Analytics, our CRM, and our claims area turnaround time to get the full scope of the issue and validate call patterns for subscribers to submit claims.
- A business case was developed through a collaborative effort across departments to expedite processing in our claims department for subscribers to submit claims.
- Previously, some of these subscribers submit claims that required members to submit attachments. Through the new streamlined process, an attestation model was developed, decreasing the need to review lengthy claim attachments and make the submission process easier for members.
- As a result of the improvements made, we experienced a reduction in repeat calls while providing a better member experience.

First Call Resolution Results

Again, our view is that FCR is more than just a metric; FCR is a proven company-wide operating philosophy for our people, processes, and technology operating practices for cost-effectively delivering a great member experience. ***In the last five years, our call center has consistently been in the first quartile or at the world-class level for FCR and member satisfaction performance*** compared to SQM's FCR/CX benchmarking over 500 leading North American call centers. We have achieved world class FCR performance in our call center because we have incorporated the ***"FCR operating philosophy"*** into our core people, processes, and technology operating practices to ensure that we are focused on delivering FCR. ***Our FCR operating philosophy helps us deliver on our corporate promise always to put our members first.***

For the last five years (2016 to 2020), ***our Retail Sales and Retention call center has been certified by SQM as a world class FCR performing call center.*** The criteria to be certified as a world class FCR performing call center is your FCR rate must be 80% or greater. Of the 500 call centers SQM measures, only 5% of their clients perform at the world class FCR/CX standard of 80%.

SQM Awards

2020

Best Practices: FCR Measurement

2016 to 2020

Call Center World Class FCR Certification

DESKTOP APPLICATIONS

FCR Desktop Best Practice Case Study Written by Comcast Leadership

Company Description

Comcast Corporation (Nasdaq: CMCSA, CMCSK) is a global media and technology company with two primary businesses, Comcast Cable and NBCUniversal. Comcast Cable is the nation's largest video, high-speed Internet, and phone provider to residential customers under the XFINITY brand and provides these services to businesses. NBCUniversal operates news, entertainment, sports cable networks, the NBC and Telemundo broadcast networks, television production operations, television station groups, Universal Pictures, and Universal Parks and Resorts. Visit www.comcastcorporation.com for more information.

Opportunity Statement

We're using our technology expertise to create innovative products and services for providing service and support for our customers. To that end, we truly believe that you simply can't have a great customer experience without a great employee experience. And since our thousands of employees are our organization's face, they need the right tools and answers at their fingertips to provide a great customer experience. Therefore, the more we invest in our employee solutions, the better we can influence our customers' experience. Because of this fundamental belief, Comcast began a game-changing initiative that will ultimately span more than 5 years: ***To consolidate more than 20 unique desktop applications into one (1) universal employee application.*** This approach would allow us to be consistent, simple, smart, and, most importantly, that our employees would love to use it every day. We call our unified desktop application – Einstein.

A Time of Transformation

While the cable industry is well-established, our services and the way people use them have changed more in the last five years than in the past five decades. Moreover, initially, the cable product offering was just a simple video service, but our products and offerings have grown in breadth and complexity to meet our customers' changing needs. This growth and innovation meant that we needed to ensure we had internal systems to both sell and support these products and services. That led to many disparate applications employees had to maneuver between depending upon the type of customer inquiry and the customer's geographic location and the employee. We knew that to achieve our goal of creating a best-in-class universal user interface (UI) would require not only technology innovation and investment. Also, considerable focus on process standardization, governance, and change management to help our employees through this transformation.

Building a Better Solution

As we first contemplated our objectives and business requirements, we vetted existing applications from well-known vendors. It would have been far easier to buy an existing application versus build a custom application nearly from scratch. Still, in the end, all of the off-the-shelf applications we evaluated would have needed significant customization to meet our objectives. So, we decided to build our application: Einstein. At the core of Einstein is the concept that all of the information we present to our employees should be context-driven to the greatest extent possible to be relevant to our employees and customers. This means that unlike traditional desktop applications that tend to silo functionality into different applications (e.g., a sales application vs. service application vs. knowledge base), we integrate all functions an agent needs to do their job in one universal application. For example, we deliberately do not have a standalone knowledge base.

Instead, it is integrated with customer account information and other tools and information to support customer inquiries. We have expanded the concept of "knowledge" to include ANY information an agent needs to support a customer – not just a help article. And, we firmly believe that with the right solution, a "search" will hopefully be the last thing an employee needs to do because we've effectively presented the information they need when they need it. In this way, we use our knowledge base strategically to save time for both employees and customers.

Working Smarter

Beyond that, because of the way we've architected Einstein, we have far more sophistication around intelligence and automation than we've ever had before. For example, we can use correlated information about calls and customer satisfaction to understand which of our troubleshooting process flows are most effective when a customer calls. We can also see which process flows we need to take back to our technology teams for improvement - or where we need to provide more direction to our employees about the next steps. We can also automate specific steps in the process flows, save time, and improve our customers' and employees' experience. This is a great example of leveraging both science and technology to create smarter solutions.

Enabling the Omni-Channel Experience

We also are deliberate about ensuring we are leveraging the same capabilities across all of our internal and external applications and channels. For example, we share Einstein with our technicians so that they can have access to the same information and tools our call center agents do. And we are able to share the same content and information across other support channels. Our website, Comcast.com, shares our same knowledge base as does our Business Class channel. We are leveraging the same content and troubleshooting tools in our new self-service apps like MyAccount as well, so that we present consistent answers across all our channels. The integration with our self-service content was very important. By doing this, we provided employees the ability to email help and support articles from Einstein that reference a link to the page on Comcast.com, thereby driving customer adoption of self-service – another critical goal.

By Employees, For Employees

A large part of our strategy is to manage our internal customer care applications and apply product development management principles, including engaging UI designers and performing usability research and testing. All kinds of practices that you would normally just hear about in external consumer-facing product development, we've applied internally as well. This means that the same teams that have developed our Emmy-winning X1 Guide are now helping to evolve the Einstein UI design to make it even more intuitive for our employees.

We spend a lot of time with our field organization and call center employees to get a feel for what's going on right now. They have so many ideas, and we mine that information and bring forward the ones that will be revolutionary in this space. And we spend a great deal of time with our sales and service channel leadership across the organization to ensure we are building a solution that will deliver on our business's needs - now and in the future. In fact, because employee engagement is such a fundamental part of our solution, our tagline is "Einstein: Designed by and developed exclusively for Comcast Employees."

Employee Satisfaction Results

Since we know employee engagement and empowerment are ultimately the long-term keys to success, one of our tactics is to conduct an Annual Einstein User Survey. When we surveyed our employees, we had a 12% response rate, *and 87% of our agents surveyed believed Einstein is effective at helping them do their job, and 91% of agents trust the information they find in Einstein.* We are far from done, but these results allow us to know we are headed in the right direction.

SQM Awards

2015 and 2016

Best Practices: Agent Desktop Applications

AGENT RECOGNITION

FCR Agent Recognition Best Practice Case Study Written by Regence Leadership

Company Description

Regence serves more than two million members through Regence BlueShield of Idaho, Regence BlueCross BlueShield of Oregon, Regence BlueCross BlueShield of Utah, and Regence BlueShield (select counties in Washington). Each health plan is a non-profit, independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. Regence is part of a family of companies dedicated to transforming health care by delivering innovative products and services that change the way consumers nationwide experience health care.

Opportunity Statement

We needed a recognition program to motivate frontline specialists (e.g., agents) to deliver exemplary service. ***Our Service Hero program is the most successful and longest-running recognition program. It not only recognizes the specialists that provide exemplary service, but it also provides a way to highlight the barriers our members face every day for our most senior executives.*** We identify calls that exemplify our team members' high-quality service by removing barriers and helping members navigate health care complexity. The winning calls are heard across the company and are used to make changes that enhance our members' experience. Our sales executives also leverage them during presentations for new or renewing groups to demonstrate the level of service their employees will receive as a Regence member.

How our Service Heroes Works

Any call can be nominated to be a winning Service Hero interaction. Often calls are nominated by a leader as they listen to calls and identify a situation where the specialist is truly going above and beyond their job responsibilities. Still, at times peers nominate each other, and a specialist could even nominate themselves. In some cases, the issue is complex and can involve multiple conversations, so the calls are edited to remove PHI and no more than 15 minutes in total length.

The leadership team first reviews the calls in their respective locations to determine which calls will be passed on to the next level review. After vetting within each location, the best nominations are sent to the next level review every quarter.

The second level of review is held face-to-face in one of the service locations. A day is set aside for the session attended by the VP, Director, Managers, a selection of local supervisors, and other guest leaders within the company. This group will listen to as many as 20 calls, discuss and rank each one, and select the top 5-7 calls, which are sent to the next level.

Our four Plan Presidents and other senior executives make the final selection. The calls are distributed in advance of the selection meeting. The senior executives listen to the calls and rank them based on the specialists' ability to create a truly outstanding experience for our members. They consider tenacity in resolving issues, compassion in difficult situations, and successfully helping members understand complex information, often when members are faced with challenging costs they need to manage. During these calls, the Plan Presidents often debate their logic in who they recommend as winners, which leads to great conversations around what types of experiences our members receive and what is at the root cause of customer challenges. In some situations, that results in executives taking responsibility for driving change. By the end of the session, three quarterly winners are selected.

How We Recognize Our Service Heroes

Each service location celebrates the quarterly winners during an all-employee meeting, and one of the winning calls is played to allow the entire customer service team to hear an example of excellent service to inspire them to be a Service Hero. The winners are recognized in front of peers with an enlarged check personally signed by our CEO for five hundred dollars and a personally engraved gold star statue. All runners-up who make it to the executive level receive a gold star and one hundred dollars. All quarterly winners are highlighted on our intranet site with their inspiring stories. The article includes the recorded call, and every employee in the company is able to hear the call and read the article highlighting the specialist. This engages all departments to work towards enhancing the member experience by resolving the behind-the-scenes issues.

At the year's end, the twelve quarterly Service Hero winners are flown to Portland for a two-day trip. The first day shows appreciation with a fun activity day, gifts, and dinner. The winners can share their successes and build a stronger comradery with different locations. On the second day, the executive leadership team hosts a luncheon in the executive boardroom, where the winners hear admiration directly from the CEO, VPs, and Plan Presidents. Prior to the annual event, the executive team listens to the twelve quarterly calls again to select the annual Service Hero winner, and it is announced during the luncheon. The annual winner is awarded a prize of four thousand dollars, and their story is showcased on our company intranet site.

FCR and Employee Satisfaction Results

The Service Hero program keeps the focus on our customers, and it shows in our results. ***Our internal employee satisfaction is consistently strong, and 87% of our employees stated they are satisfied with their job.*** Our call center's FCR performance has consistently been in the first quartile level when compared to SQM's FCR benchmarking of 500 leading North American call centers. We have several ***call centers that have been certified by SQM as a world class FCR performing call center.*** The criteria to be certified as a world class FCR performing call center is your FCR rate must be 80% or greater. Of the 500 call centers SQM measures, only 5% of their clients perform at the world class FCR standard of 80%.

SQM Awards

2020

World Class Employee Satisfaction Experience

2019

Call Center World Class FCR Certification (BlueShield of Washington)
Best Practices: CSR Recognition Program
Highest Employee Satisfaction Experience for the Call Center Industry
World Class Employee Satisfaction Experience

2018

Call Center World Class FCR Certification (BlueShield of Oregon)
Call Center World Class FCR Certification (BlueShield of Idaho)
World Class Employee Satisfaction Experience

QUALITY ASSURANCE

FCR Quality Assurance Best Practice Case Study Written by 407 ETR Leadership

Company Description

407 ETR is the world's first all-electronic toll road of its kind, and from the day it was opened up to the present day, it continues to fulfill its mission of relieving traffic on local highways and roads. Drivers take about 380,000 trips on the highway each workday. Customers tell 407 ETR that the number one reason they use the highway is to save time. Customers also report that they feel they make a good choice in using 407 ETR.

Opportunity Statement

We recognized that to elevate 407 ETR to a World Class Call Center status, reduce operating expenses, and implement independent evaluation of our customer service interactions' quality, there was a necessity to implement the Call Quality Assurance (CQA) best practice program.

Over the past 11 years, SQM has offered us invaluable feedback, benchmarking, and workshops, which provided 407 ETR employees with the tools to continuously improve our Voice of the Customer (VoC) results. To raise our standards, we looked at where we were, where we desired to be, and what actions we would need to get there. From an efficiency and budget perspective, it was easy to see why partnering with SQM would benefit us.

First and foremost, our mission was to increase Csat and improve FCR. It was also important that we balanced customer feedback with our agents' work and provided an unbiased assessment of our work and compliance with our processes. To inspire employees daily to be committed to demonstrating company values, it is necessary to align the CQA program to our company values.

We compared the cost per survey and QA evaluations conducted internally versus by SQM and discovered a significant saving per CQA if SQM conducted the evaluations. This budgetary saving allowed us to explore further how we would prepare such a substantial change in moving from an internal to an external focus that would impact our agents, team managers, application audits and administration, training, and more.

Best Practices Used

A call list of customers who have called the call center is compiled and sent to SQM daily. Customers are surveyed within one day of their call to the call center. The SQM call quality evaluator reviews customer survey ratings, listens to the customer feedback and to the recording of the interaction between the agent and customer, and reviews screen captures to assess call compliance. The CQA evaluation form embeds customer survey results, customer audio feedback, and call compliance results. An agent has access to view VoC feedback, call compliance metrics, and links to the audio. Comments provided by the evaluator are very detailed. This is viewed positively both from a team manager's perspective, as it helps them prepare for coaching sessions, and from the agent's perspective, who views the evaluator comments in mySQM™ FCR Insights reporting tool.

A new evaluation form was created internally with Customer Service and SQM Group. The CQA evaluation form has 60 of the possible 100 points based on 3 parts of the customer surveys conducted by SQM to generate the score (30 for call resolution, 15 for Agent Csat, 15 for customer Continue to Use). The other 40 points are allocated for the call compliance metrics (broken down as 65% customer focus and 35% organization focus).

For the first month, we ran the new program alongside the old program, which provided valuable insights into the new program's effectiveness. This also allowed us to determine the new program's impact, refine the form and guidelines developed, and make any changes without negatively impacting our customers and employees.

The Customer Service Department, Applications Audits and Administration (previously responsible for call quality evaluations), and SQM's Development Team created a combined program and form to further assist Agents in achieving their world class certification goal through the new Call Quality Assurance program. Teamwork and collaboration were imperative in the planning stages with SQM's team, our internal CQA team manager, the customer service manager, our training department manager, and the manager of technical services. This teamwork and collaboration resulted in developing the new CQA program, cultivating agent growth, and fostering agent development.

Our 407 ETR training facilitator traveled to SQM to conduct all necessary training for the SQM team of call quality evaluators, furthering our strength in a partnered endeavor. Ongoing calibration sessions were conducted to ensure consistency in scoring and still continue to take place today.

Through the change, supporting agents was an absolute necessity and number one on our list of priorities. A communication plan was developed, providing frequent small updates about the new program to allow our employees to absorb the information, ask questions, and incorporate the change.

Our performance improvement plan was reviewed to establish an accurate three-month rolling trend for the new call quality standards and Agent Csat. The new call quality three-month trend began four months following the new CQA program's implementation, providing employees with the opportunity to get fully acquainted and comfortable with the new program.

There are critical components that comprise customer interactions that significantly impact our customers and organization and, in turn, FCR, such as failure to adhere to policies and workflows. The new CQA process includes a critical component section, and should a critical component be missed; the CQA evaluation receives a score of zero. This integral piece of the evaluation provides us with common themes where opportunities for improvement have been successfully identified. This information has enabled us to continuously work toward implementing changes so that agents continue their drive to own the call and create a world class experience. Agents have online access to results immediately once a call quality evaluation is complete. The customer survey is conducted and then reviewed by a dedicated CQA evaluator. Once evaluated, it is available in the mySQM™ FCR Insights reporting tool and can be viewed by the agent. Having the ability to view feedback right away provides the agents with an understanding of what they are doing to create a positive customer experience. It also encourages the agents to continue their behavior and continue to learn what they can do differently in the future to create that memorable customer experience while following appropriate policies and procedures. Essentially, it creates a desire to exceed the purpose of one's job and responsibilities.

It is very important that regular employee feedback is provided from agents on the CQA program. Focus groups were conducted to learn how agents viewed the new CQA Program and their recommendations for continuously improving the program. When employees feel they have been listened to, have a say in the program, and have contributed to improving the program, they believe in the program and its benefits to them. This keeps the agent engaged and working to strive for world class results. A connection is made between what a customer is told and its completion. Previously, a call could be scored 100% by the customer, but processes may not have been followed through in reality. This current process ensures all calls are completed within recommended standards. Hearing such feedback reaffirms our agent's place's significant importance on the desire to own the call. By giving the customer survey the weight of 60% of the CQA score, the new call quality program serves as an additional tool that emphasizes the importance of ensuring that our customers receive the best customer service that our agents can provide. This supports our desire for agents to create a world class experience.

FCR/Csat Results

There has been a visible improvement in results since the implementation of the new CQA program. Results are positive, with 84% of CQA evaluations exceeding and meeting expectations. "The results are truly indicative of the perception of the customer interaction with our employees as well as our employee's ability to provide First Call Resolution! I recommend the CQA program that SQM offers!" says Shantell Edwards, a call center team manager.

After implementing the new CQA Program, our end-of-year VoC improved in the following areas: world class call results showed a 3 point improvement, call resolution improved from 93% to 95%, which increased the department's FCR from 82% to 85%. This improvement was made within 6 months. Most of the improvement was driven by the top performing agents in the first and second quartile, improving by 7% points. The last quartile, as expected, showed a small decline. The CQA program further reinforced the importance of call resolution to our agents.

Our call center has been certified by SQM as a world class FCR performing call center for the last five years. The criteria to be certified as a world class FCR performing call center is your FCR rate must be 80% or greater. Of the 500 call centers SQM measures, only 5% of their clients perform at the world class FCR standard of 80%.

SQM Awards

2016 to 2020

Call Center World Class FCR Certification (Commercial)
Best Practices: Customer Quality Assurance

CALL HANDLING

FCR Call Handling Best Practice Case Study Written by Canadian Tire Leadership

Company Description

Canadian Tire Financial Services (CTFS) is the financial services arm of Canadian Tire. It offers credit, loans, insurance products, and services and is the second-largest MasterCard issuer in Canada with its Canadian Tire Options® MasterCard. CTFS is a significant contributor to Canadian Tire performance, representing 8% of overall revenues but nearly 25% of profit in 2011. Canadian Tire Options® MasterCard continues the customer loyalty program tradition by awarding electronic 'Money' to cardholders when purchases are made at Canadian Tire stores.

Opportunity Statement

At Canadian Tire, delivering consistently high-quality service experiences is a philosophy that is woven into the fabric of the organization's "Customers for Life" culture. At our award-winning Customer Relationship Call Center (CRCC), every agent is fully aligned with the mission to deliver world-class customer service and is accountable for FCR and Csat.

The Way We Work

A look inside the CRCC reveals a best-in-class call center with consistently high FCR performance and employee engagement. Some of the elements that contribute to this customer-driven environment include:

- ***A solid employee connection***. The average tenure for a call center rep is 12 years. Employees tend to stay because their input is valued and acted upon, especially when dealing with process improvements that involve customers and efficiency.
- ***Highly empowered frontline.*** First call resolution is a core component of the customer for Life culture. Call center agents understand that taking care of the customer's needs is the top priority, and they are empowered to take the time to satisfy their customers.
- ***Employees drive process improvements.*** Frontline staff is also actively involved in improving FCR and reducing customer effort. They participate in process improvement project teams from the initial idea, general, and input stages to the solution design.
- ***Customers for Life culture*** are reinforced daily through team and peer recognition activities. One of the most visible mechanisms is the Customers for Life awards, which serve as both an individual commendation for promoting the culture and a company-wide reminder of the importance of making the customers' right choices. It is a peer-nominated award, open to both customer-facing and back-office staff.
- ***We have a strong connection to the local community.*** As one of the Niagara region's major employers, the organization extends its Customers for Life culture to the local community. In fact, the focus on investing back into the community is another key contributor to its high employee satisfaction and longevity.
- ***It's a winning combination***, to be sure. Yet, the CRCC is not one to rest on its past achievements. The center continuously improves its performance year after year by reviewing and recharging processes and programs.

- ***Exceptional call handling practices.*** CRCC has a sophisticated telephone system to support call routing and an enhanced technology system equipped to store all of our customer information securely. Canadian Tire also has a great team of employees who go through extensive, state-of-the-art training and coaching on soft skills where they learn how to acknowledge, question, confirm, and respond appropriately in every customer situation. There are dedicated teams to handle account retention, insurance retention, disputed transactions, fraud, collections, and customer escalations. The exceptional staffing and technology make it very easy to resolve our customer concerns at the first point of call.

Best Practices Used

Canadian Tire uses Chordiant, TSYS technology systems, and skill-based routing to ensure that calls are routed to the right agents. Our agent's average tenure is 12 years, and the majority of them are certified as world class FCR performers. The Interactive Voice Response system (IVR) takes care of most customer inquiries without transferring to the agent, such as account balance inquiry, minimum payment due, and card activation. CRCC has a proven 70% customer fulfillment rate within the IVR.

Customers can be authenticated through the IVR, where they go through a validation process before routing to the desktop. When the call is routed to the desktop, the agent can see on their monitor that the customer has been authenticated through the IVR. As a result, they can move right into helping the customer with the reason they called. The IVR also routes customers to agents with the right skill sets to assist them, which avoids the customer having to be transferred. For example, if a customer is calling to apply for a credit card, they will be routed to an agent with the appropriate skillset who can take care of them at the first point of their call.

CRCC can use our Chordiant technology system to target customers with marketing offers. Chordiant is loaded with "next best offers" that will appear as a "pop-up" when the account is accessed through an inbound call from the customer. When speaking with the customer, a "pop-up box" is presented to the agent, who will then make the offer to the customer. By clicking "yes or no," the agent can execute the promotion. Customers are targeted based on their account history. Chordiant is also used for call tracking to improve efficiency. Agents can click on specific call types, and it will stamp the account, which eliminates the need to note the file for every call reason (e.g., balance inquiry, purchase inquiry, and address change). This function allows the agent to focus on the customer's needs completely. Chordiant also provides the agents with a tool for tracking important customer feedback, called "Voice of the Customer." A report of all "Voice of the Customer" feedback is generated and contributes to implementing positive changes to improve the customer experience, which in turn builds loyalty and creates customers for life.

CRCC provides exceptional soft skill training that focuses on essential communication skills empowering agents to be authentic and customize how they engage our customers based on their specific needs. They are not scripted unless legally required. Agents are empowered to use their good judgment for retention and goodwill adjustments. Thresholds are set to allow agents to apply monetary adjustments when necessary to resolve customer concerns at the first point of call. It is not too often that they need to escalate further. However, there is a clear escalation process from agent to team lead to supervisor to manager, and further if necessary. An escalation service level agreement is in place to ensure that every customer is called within 72 business hours. The escalation process is outlined in the knowledge management system, which all agents have access to, as well as a printed copy is posted at each workstation for quick reference.

Agents can use the CISCO phone system to warm transfer customers in real-time to any department. Agents are highly trained and capable of resolving a customer's concern at the first point of the call. Dedicated teams are in place to handle account retention, insurance retention, loyalty, disputes, fraud, and collections. Our agents can complete a three-way conference call for a dispute call type, where they connect our customers with the merchant for immediate cancellation.

FCR and Employee Satisfaction Results

Our call center has been certified by SQM as a ***world class FCR performing call center for the last six out of seven years***. The criteria to be certified as a world class FCR performing call center is your FCR rate must be 80% or greater. Of the 500 call centers SQM measures, only 5% of their clients perform at the world class FCR standard of 80%. We have been performing at the ***world class agent satisfaction level for the last nine years.***

SQM Awards

Call Center of the Year Winner (CRCC): 2005, 2006, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016
Highest Customer Satisfaction – Credit Card Industry (CRCC): 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020
Highest Omni-Channel Customer Service (CRCC): 2015, 2016
World Class FCR Certification (CRCC): 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019
Highest Employee Satisfaction in Call Center Industry (CRCC): 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017
World Class Employee Satisfaction (CRCC): 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2020
Best Practice - Call Handling: 2014, 2015
Best Practice - Agent Training: 2017
Best Practice - Omni-Channel: 2018

MASSACHUSETTS

ESCALATION AGENT

FCR Escalation Agent Best Practice Case Study Written by Blue Cross Blue Shield Massachusetts Leadership

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. Consistent with our corporate promise to always put our members first, we are rated among the nation's best health plans for member satisfaction and quality.

Opportunity Statement

Our Member Service call center was faced with several challenges inhibiting our ability to improve First Call Resolution (FCR) results. Our managers were responsible for leading teams of 30 plus agents with one supervisor to assist them. At the same time, we were right-sizing our staff, which lead to the constant addition of new team members. All told, we added 157 new agents from the 4th quarter this year. Our leaders increasingly found themselves with significant responsibilities to manage the team's day-to-day operations and find ways to support and develop team members. We had an internal hotline that served as a Q and A resource, but it was staffed by a small number of Business Experts (BE) that could not keep up with the volume of questions they were receiving. To offset the hotline staffing shortfall, we were forced to use our supervisors daily, which took away from their ability to complete their tasks and placed additional stress on their managers. It was clear we needed to find a solution. To address the situation, we assembled a project team and charged them with the following goals:

- Rename and rebrand the hotline
- Determine appropriate staffing levels
- Build a methodology for data collection and analysis
- Determine how data collected on the hotline could be used to inform decisions and improve education
- Redefine the roles and responsibilities of the BE role
- Rewrite the BE job description to match those changes
- Develop a progression model to include the BE role on the path to leadership
- Develop a hiring strategy and bring on the right people to make it all work
- Communicate the new strategy to the service center
- Implement all changes to improve FCR and Csat

The result of our work has radically changed the efficiency of our service center and how we share information. The rebranded hotline was renamed "The Service Solutions Line" or SSL.

Thanks to an in-depth collaboration and staff model analysis with our Workforce Planning Team, we determined the need was 19 BEs, a number that we planned to augment with top-tier agents. Equally as important was our SSL Tracking Tool's development, an internally built application that allows us to track which agents called and why allowing us to quickly identify training opportunities at both the agent and department levels. The reporting created by the database helps us improve efficiency, quality, and FCR in our service center. Our SSL reports to the Multi-Channel Team within our customer service center. This structure allows the BEs to remain objective as leaders and retains their status as a part of the department. The basic concept of our SSL is two-fold:

- Behave like a miniature call-center unto ourselves in which the telephone agents are our customers.
- Collect data and use it to inform training both at the aggregate level and at the individual level. Whenever someone calls us, they volunteer their problems, concerns, questions, strengths, and opportunities.

In other words, we will make use of every interaction to improve the confidence level of our most important resource: our frontline agents. Out of this concept was born the monthly BEat. The BEat is a monthly newsletter produced by the BEs and based entirely on trends captured on the SSL. Many agents say they often refer to it when they are stuck on a call. The BEat is written entertainingly and has served as a great source of timely and relevant information for our department. It has also helped solidify the SSL brand as a helpful group of leaders whose goal is to spread knowledge, encouragement, and fun throughout the department.

We wanted our team to be viewed in the same way that captains are considered on a sports team. They should be part leader, part coach, part team member; that is precisely what we have achieved. Each BE is assigned to a team to bring reporting and SSL insights to that particular team's leaders. Above all, they support our service center quickly and efficiently on the SSL, always taking the time to identify coaching opportunities in real-time and reviewing SSL data.

Our BEs also handle all escalated member calls. To ensure that they are properly equipped to handle escalated issues, we provide our BEs with advanced claims adjustment training and have an available team group chat to tap their fellow leaders for support. Furthermore, we have given them the power to override and pay pharmacy claims to help members who have encountered difficulty filling a script and need assistance quickly. The expertise of the BEs has proven to be an asset when handling these escalated issues, as they have significantly improved our ability to resolve member complaints and clear roadblocks in real-time. The process also helps us identify and address opportunities to impact FCR positively.

Best Practices Used

Agents can reach the SSL by calling in and selecting the prompt for the type of team they are on. Once on the line, BEs will use various methods to help the agent, including screen sharing and even instant messaging after the call is over to provide extra help. In addition to this, the BE can take the call over. Whether it is an escalated request for a supervisor or otherwise, any call that is taken over is warm transferred from the agent to the BE. Moreover, any call that the BE takes on is owned by that BE. Any research and follow-up needed to arrive at a resolution is the BE's responsibility once the call is transferred.

BEs are stationed both in a central group in our call center as well as a part of our remote workforce. This allows the team to work closely together while remaining relatable to office-based and remote agents.

We have a rule on the SSL: Track every interaction. We adhere to this rule because we understand that our data integrity is the foundation that allows us to build upward. We have several levels of reporting and analysis. These reports show trends for the previous month, overall numbers, challenges, training, and coaching opportunities at the aggregate level, team by team, and by an agent.

The BEs themselves develop much more personalized and team-tailored reporting for the leaders of the teams for which they are assigned. This reporting is generated weekly and supplies leaders with a snapshot of the types of issues prompting questions within their teams. While we do track the usage, trends, and even behaviors of the agents calling in, we do not hold that information against them, nor does it have a negative impact on their metric goals.

We are using the SSL information to identify trends and coaching opportunities at every level. This supports our mission to empower our service center staff by sharing knowledge and building confidence. Our goal is to use hard data to get out in front of those challenges and give our agents the tools and confidence they need to get the job done.

FCR Results

The development of our Service Solutions Line has dramatically impacted our service center's landscape in a positive way. We have become an invaluable, efficient, and knowledgeable resource for our team members and a development area for future leaders. We are extremely proud of what our team has accomplished in a short period, and we look forward to cultivating our hotline model to even more innovative levels in the future. ***For the last five years, our Retail Sales and Retention call center has been certified by SQM as a world class FCR performing call center. Clearly, our SSL has played a significant role in helping our call center's performance at such a high level.***

SQM Awards

2016 to 2020

Call Center World Class FCR Certification (Retail Sales and Retention)
Best Practice: Real-Time Agent Support Queue

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

FCR Performance Management System Best Practice Case Study Written by Scotia iTRADE Leadership

Company Description

Scotia iTRADE is a self-directed investing business and one of the groups of companies that make up Scotiabank, Canada's most international bank. Our goal is to bring our clients value and easy, state-of-the-art investing and online trading solutions with specialized support. We fulfill this mission through our product innovation, exceptional service, competitive commissions, easy-to-use website, and powerful trading platforms.

Opportunity Statement

Our clients have a wide range of investment knowledge and needs, from those who are new to self-directed investing and require assistance with education and technical support to highly sophisticated, active traders. Many active traders demand top-of-the-line customer experience from investment agents with advanced knowledge of financial markets and the skill and licenses to execute their trades as quickly as possible. For these clients, time is money.

Active, self-directed investors are among the most demanding client base in the financial services category. They manage their wealth and take great pride in their investment knowledge. They can also be uncompromising when it comes to client care. Anything short of an extraordinary customer experience is considered disappointing – and a possible reason to switch to one of the dozens of competitive brokerages.

The opportunity to become Canada's preeminent client care expert to all investors in this fiercely competitive industry is one that Scotia iTRADE has enthusiastically embraced at every level, from client care agents to top executives.

Recent years have been uniquely challenging for Scotiabank, our parent company, as shifting customer trends and new disruptive competitors in the digital banking space have necessitated a transformative cultural shift and an increased focus on cost containment. Scotia iTRADE has been impacted, operating with a reduced headcount in our Call Centre and Operations departments.

Despite these challenges, and because of our ongoing focus on a Voice of the Customer (VoC) Performance Management System, our SQM benchmarks have remained strong. VoC is used as our primary measure of success throughout the call center, from agents to senior leadership. We are committed to raising the bar with every client interaction, every time.

Before the implementation of our VoC-based Performance Management System, Scotia iTRADE had many challenges such as:

- KPIs were driven by productivity and efficiency and did not include VoC measures.
- Too many performance metrics at the agent and Team Manager level challenged their focus.
- Measures that weren't productivity-driven tended to be subjective and didn't capture client feedback.
- Performance issues and trends weren't being addressed in a timely manner.

As we have moved along the SQM journey, we have identified some additional challenges that have resulted in the ongoing evolution of our Performance Management System, such as:

- The need to evolve our coaching models to address VoC results.
- We are improving our reporting to elevate transparency and accountability.
- We are evolving reward and recognition to align with customer feedback and KPIs.
- We are elevating the performance and creating ongoing training for long-tenured agents.

Accountability Metrics

VoC feedback is our primary means of measuring performance at all levels throughout the call center. Csat, FCR, World Class Call (i.e., Csat & call resolved), and Scotia iTRADE's Client Loyalty Index comprise individual customer KPIs.

In addition, our Director of Trading and Client Service is measured on WCC, agent and call center Csat, as well as Firm-level FCR and World Class Calls. This ensures a commitment throughout the organization to boosting these results.

By prioritizing these measures and placing an agent and manager level focus on becoming World Class Certified by SQM, we have fostered a culture that promotes the following:

1. Agents need to work collaboratively with their colleagues across Scotia iTRADE to ensure that client needs are being addressed and deliver a World Class Experience.
2. Increased call ownership as agents are directly accountable for doing everything they can to resolve the client's needs the first time.
3. Coaching has evolved between agents and managers towards regular, observational coaching, with the customer experience being the central theme and primary objective.
4. Agents and team managers are actively engaged in ongoing training and development around our client care models (iCARE and Customer Experience Model) as they see a direct benefit as to how it will impact their results.

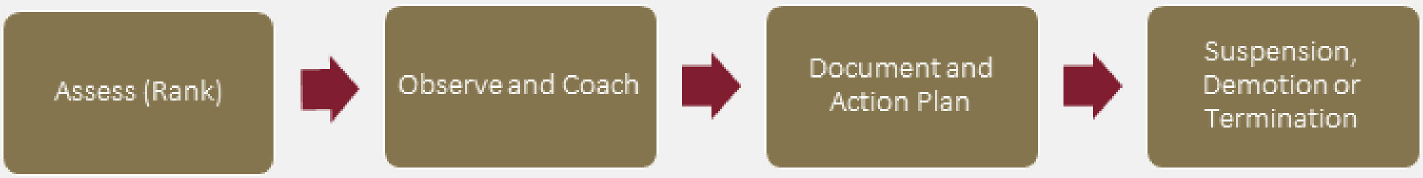
Performance Reporting

Over the past year, Scotia iTRADE has further refined our VoC reporting by providing greater access and more frequent discussions around results and action plans. Reporting these KPIs has also been woven into team meetings and one-on-one coaching sessions to continually reinforce this focus. VoC results are shared with all employees to ensure commitment and transparency. These reports also form the backbone of coaching discussions with agents and managers.

Report	Delivery Method	Who	Frequency	Impact
SQM Dashboard	Online	All Employees	Daily	Provides ongoing performance status, trends, etc.
Team Huddles	Team Meeting	Manager and CSR Team	Daily	Recognize successes, discuss challenges, and share best practices
Call Center Results	Manager Meetinf	Sr. Managers, Managers	Weekly	Discuss coaching strategies, trends, successes, and challenges
Call Center Results	Sr. Manager Meeting	Director, Sr. Managers	Weekly	Discuss high level results, trends, and action plans
Call Center Results	Mass Email	All Employees	Weekly	Share YTD results vs Plan and highlight World Class Reps/Managers
Survey Review	1 on 1 Coaching	Manager and CSR	Bi-Weekly	Listen to calls and discuss survey results / impacts
YTD Trending vs. Plan	Sr. Leadership Meeting	All iTrade Directors+	Monthly	Share VoC results with other iTrade leaders (Ops, Sales, Mkt)

Improvement Plan

To align with our primary objective of assessing performance based on VoC feedback, Scotia iTRADE has the following steps for agent improvement:



Agents are bucketed into categories based upon their percentage of World Class Calls. The current breakdown of these tiers is as follows:

- # Certified World Class Champions (85% to 100%) and < 25 surveys
- World Class Champions (85% to 100%) Not Certified < 25 surveys
- High Performers (76% to 84%)
- Average Performers (66% to 75%)
- Low Performers (65% and under)

Those who fall under the "Average" or "Low Performers" categories are given the additional focus on VoC measures during one-on-one and observational coaching. Managers will use their 3-month WCC rolling average to assess trends, identify progress, and set clearly defined achievable targets and timeframes. All non-World Class surveys and Action Alert calls where there is a risk of client attrition are reviewed by managers and listened to with the agents to coach for future success regarding Csat and FCR.

If an agent continued to show an inability to move up to an acceptable tier, they would be placed in our "Performance Improvement Program" (PIP). This is a formal process whereupon agents receive a written Notice to Improve that would identify specific gaps in their VoC results and require them to complete an action plan on how and in what timeframe they will improve their results. If performance does not improve in the agreed-upon timeframe, consequences may include suspension, demotion, or termination.

Performance Appraisal

Performance metrics (as previously outlined) are provided to all employees (agents, managers, senior managers) at the beginning of each fiscal year to be reviewed, discussed, and signed off on. These measures are continuously reinforced throughout the year in team meetings and, most importantly, individual coaching sessions. Managers have three bi-weekly coaching sessions with each agent (side-by-side observational, individual touch base, and SQM call reviews). At each of these touchpoints, performance measures are discussed and reviewed. Agents are also provided with regular updates on how they are trending towards SQM World Class Certification and the number of WCC surveys they will require to achieve this status.

Bonus Compensation

Year-end bonus compensation is tied directly to performance appraisals. Scotiabank sets parameters for base salary increases and bonuses based on a weighted scorecard of bank-wide performance, business-level performance, and individual employee rating. As FCR, WCC, and Csat form a significant portion of an agent's and team manager's performance rating, they directly impact agent compensation. We have also introduced several Rewards and Recognition programs, such as our annual Best of the Best and Quarterly iCare winners, where additional rewards (gift cards, merchandise, etc.) can be won based on outstanding contributions from employees.

FCR and Customer Satisfaction Results

The impact of a clear, objective, and transparent Performance Management System has been significant. By placing VoC feedback at the center of our meetings, coaching, and reporting, we have seen steady increases since we embarked on our World Class journey. ***We have used the VoC performance management system for five years, and as a result, our FCR and customer satisfaction have improved every year.***

We also continue to see positive trending with the percentage of agents that fall into our top World Class tiers and decrease low performers. While our agent headcount has decreased and several of ***our World Class agents have moved on to other parts of the organization, there is still a strong upward trend in our World Class tiers versus the three years ago (percentage change of 340%).***

We continue to receive positive feedback from agents and managers alike on the powerful impact of clear, objective, client-driven performance measures. Here are some examples:

- "I like that the client, who stands to be the one most directly impacted by our service delivery, gets to have a voice in judging our performance."
- "It helps us, as managers, to identify coaching opportunities."
- "I like that I have a clear, set performance objective to strive for – to become World Class Certified."

SQM Awards

Best Practice: VoC Performance Management System

AGENT COACHING

FCR Agent Coaching Best Practice Case Study Written by Mr. Cooper Leadership

Company Description

Mr. Cooper is one of the largest and fastest-growing mortgage servicers in the United States, with a servicing portfolio in excess of $400 billion and more than 2.4 million customers. Mr. Cooper offers servicing, origination, and transaction-based real estate services to all of our customers, including homeowners, homebuyers, home sellers, investors, and other real estate market participants.

Opportunity Statement

Our call centers have a relentless focus on providing quality service to our customers. Our primary call center is located in Irving, TX, with partner call centers across the US and Manila.

With the rapid growth at Mr. Cooper over the past few years and the high number of new hires on our roster, the need for an effective coaching program is essential to our continued success. Our company's coaching culture has never been stronger, and it's become a way of life for us. The amount of time that we have our supervisors, AVPs, and VPs in coaching sessions or call listening sessions has increased over the past two years, which helps us have a consistent coaching process from the top down.

Coach-the-Coach

We use a coaching feedback grading form to evaluate and score our coaches' effectiveness by rating them on specific criteria. The coaches are observed by their VP weekly and given a score of 0%-100%. Below are the steps that must be followed in every coaching session, and the VP checks Yes or No for each one:

1. The facilitator was prepared for coaching
2. The stated purpose of the discussion
3. Recapped the previous session and updated on the progress of the action plan
4. Played the call and then let the agent summarize the call
5. Determined strengths
6. Reinforced strengths
7. Reassessed opportunities from the previous session
8. Identified areas for improvement (new or same)
9. Shared customer feedback (using SQM Surveys/Verbatims)
10. Gathered assessment of possible results of the behavior
11. Formulated action plan

12. Facilitated identification of needed resources and/or support
13. Checked for understanding and confidence
14. A determined measure of success
15. Facilitated identification of follow-up dates and immediate next steps
16. Documented agreed action plan

In addition to the required steps, there are also overall effectiveness qualities that the VP must assess:

1. Did the coach display full control of the coaching session?
2. Was the coach able to enhance or maintain the agent's self-esteem during the coaching session?
3. Was the coach able to determine the root cause of the behavior?
4. Was the coach able to lead the agent to generate a sound action plan?
5. Did the coach and representative come up with the most impactful action plan?
6. Was the coach successful in getting the commitment of the representative?

Once the agent has been dismissed, the VP and supervisor walk through the form and agree on the session's final score. During this discussion, opportunities from the prior session will be revisited, and updated action plans will be decided upon. The coach is always held accountable to improve their technique, no matter how good they are.

These activities are logged into a database, and reporting is used by the leadership, which details the scores, strengths, weaknesses, and action plans for each supervisor/coach. The coaching score combined with the manager's overall SQM Csat determines their ranking (i.e., The supervisor with the best SQM results and the highest Coaching Effectiveness rating is considered our most valuable supervisor).

Call Listening Sessions

We conduct routine call listening sessions at all of our sites that follow a prescribed formula. There are 3 different versions:

1. Agents listening to themselves and coached by their supervisor (led by VP) – Twice a week
2. Supervisors listening to their own escalated calls (led by VP) – Weekly
3. Agents listening to themselves (led by their Supervisor) – Weekly

In these sessions, we have a rotation to ensure every agent and supervisor gets their turn, no matter their performance. We pull a call that SQM has surveyed, and we listen to and critique it in sections:

1. Greeting and authentication process
2. Customer's problem and the agent/supervisor's confirmation of understanding
3. The information is given, the solution provided, and expectation set with the customer
4. Closing of the call

Between each section, we pause the call and give it a rating of 1 - 4 (1 – Unacceptable, 2 - Needs Improvement, 3 - Meets Expectations, 4 - Outstanding) on the following metrics:

1. Voice Quality (Tone, confidence, call control, energy)
2. Language (Proper scripting, grammar, accent, sentence construction)
3. Accuracy (Did the agent do everything correctly? Did they provide complete and accurate info?)
4. Csat (What did the customer have to say about the experience?)

The agent or supervisor will first grade themselves (or their agent). The rest of the attendees are then asked to share their observations if it differs. The final score is decided by the VP (or the highest-ranked person in the session), and if it's anything lower than a 3, a follow-up session with that same person is scheduled for the following week. Upon receiving a failing score, the top coaching opportunity is identified and agreed upon amongst all in attendance. The agent or supervisor is expected to spend the next week working on an action plan to correct their biggest weakness. In the follow-up session, the coaching opportunity identified in the previous session is highlighted, and if there's still no improvement, additional follow-up sessions are scheduled. We do not move on until the agent or supervisor fixes the issue and achieves a passing score.

There are two reasons why these sessions are always practical:

1. Once we find a problem, we do not stop working on it until it is fixed; if that results in disciplinary action leading up to termination, so be it. We do not compromise our standards, and we provide ample support to the individuals to help them succeed in improving their performance.
2. These sessions are led by senior management (AVP/VP and sometimes SVP). The VP not only leads the discussion but participates in grading the calls, demonstrating their product knowledge to the people that report to them. By rolling up their sleeves and paying attention to the details of each call, they not only earn credibility with their staff, but they have a direct influence on the things that move the needle for their area of responsibility. If you are a fresh manager and don't know how to coach an agent, all you have to do is attend this session to watch your VP show you how it's done.

Process Improvement in Supervisor Calls

As stated above, we have a weekly session where supervisor calls are played in a meeting, and the supervisors are coached on how to improve their escalation handling skills. In addition to coaching them on their technique, we also spend time addressing potential process improvement opportunities that become apparent while listening to these calls. In most cases, customers choose to escalate things because of a process failure (e.g., something went wrong; their expectations weren't met, etc.). So, we use these sessions to have an in-depth discussion about what processes we could change/fix to prevent these escalations from happening in the first place.

For example, one of our top escalation categories has been our slow refund process. Oftentimes, customers end up making duplicate payments and are in need of an immediate refund, but our turnaround time for returning the money to them was 2-3 days. This was unacceptable for most customers, and our managers were dealing with these escalations on a daily basis. Customers would follow up, refuse to hang up until the money was back in their account, etc. It was a major source of frustration for everyone involved. Then we implemented a new tool on the front lines that allowed our agents to execute a same-day electronic refund, and we've been able to resolve most of these with the first agent they spoke with. Now it's just as easy as making a payment over the phone. Ever since this tool was implemented, the volume for those refund escalations dropped significantly.

These are the types of things we look for when listening to supervisor calls, and every week we come across something new to add to the list.

Coaching Sessions

Our agents are scheduled to meet with their supervisor for a 1-on-1 coaching session for one hour per week. The same prescribed formula from our Call Listening Sessions is used in our 1-on-1 sessions. The supervisor does the following in each session:

- ***Prepare*** – Reviews the Coaching Tracker for previous notes and listens to previous calls if needed. Makes sure that before the agent enters the room, they are up to speed on their strengths/weaknesses. They have a call prepared to play. They have taken time to preview and have a clear understanding of precisely what they're going to be listening for and what they want to accomplish. The Coaching Tracker is an internally designed online tool that the supervisors use to track all coaching activity. This online tracker is a great tool to ensure any part of the management team has knowledge of the coaching and could pick up where the previous supervisor left off.
- ***Coach*** – They listen to the call together and grade it using the Call Listening Sessions formula. Instead of telling the agent how they did, we ask the agent questions about their performance, letting them tell us how they think they did. We lead them to specific topics if they don't address it on their own and always spend extra time on whatever opportunity was identified in the previous session to decide together if it's improved, worsened, or stayed the same.
- ***Follow Up*** – Once a final score has been settled on, the supervisor asks themselves, "Is there follow up needed with a customer?" if poor information was given. If so, they call the customer with the agent to set things right, document the call's strengths/weaknesses, and the agreed-upon action plan for improving the agent's performance in the Coaching Tracker. This will be referenced in the follow-up sessions, and the process repeats as there are always going to be coaching opportunities, no matter how good the supervisor or agent thinks they are.

WOW Words

Our call center soft skills include using WOW words. Some examples of WOW words are: Perfect, Fantastic, Definitely, Absolutely, and Excellent. WOW, word cards are at every agent's desk, graded on QA forms, and reviewed on coaching forms. Agents receive real-time recognition from supervisors and management when WOW words are heard on the floor and in coaching sessions.

Building on the Best/Targeted Training

Twice a week, we conduct a meeting with a rotation of supervisors and floor coaches to discuss targeted training opportunities. One of our Subject Matter Experts (SME) led these meetings. We identify these opportunities through items observed in Call Listening Sessions, SQM Dissatisfied Verbatims, Quality Monitors, and FAQs we see on the floor. The supervisors and floor coaches are encouraged to bring their own topics to these meetings and expose their weaknesses. If there is a certain supervisor call they're afraid to take because they're not comfortable with the product or topic, this is the session where they confront this fear with their peers (who are likely struggling with the same thing), and they work on it together. The SME will walk them through these items step-by-step until everyone understands and is comfortable. The SME also incorporates fun games, pop-quizzes with prizes, and role-playing. Senior management is intentionally excluded from these meetings so that everyone feels like it's a safe place to learn and not be criticized for their knowledge gaps.

Performance Scorecards

Employees at all levels (agents, supervisors, trainers, AVPs, VPs, SVPs, etc.) are given a scorecard and held accountable for their metrics individually (SQM Metrics, AHT, attendance, adherence, sales leads, QA, etc.). Just like with our Coaching Sessions, everyone is expected to know their strengths and weaknesses, and they must commit to an action plan to constantly improve their performance. These performance reviews are held weekly, and if metrics don't meet expectations, no matter what level they are at, they will be coached up to meet expectations, or they will be coached out.

Calls of Fame Library

While we coach the agent on how to improve, we are providing them a real-life example of how it should be handled. In order to share the experience with the masses versus just the individual, we created a "Calls of Fame Call Library." Agents are able to self-nominate a call which they believe they have handled particularly well. This allows the agent to be involved in the process and feel they have a voice. The nominations allow us to highlight a particular aspect of a call and allow supervisors easy access to coaching examples for specific call behaviors. Examples of best practice call behaviors are Tone, WOW Words, empathy, and active listening. The Calls of Fame committee reviews the call. If the call is accepted into the Calls of Fame, the agent receives a Calls of Fame certificate, Calls of Fame announcement email. The call is made available for coaching review with fellow agents and made available to upper management.

FCR Results

In conclusion, the key to an effective coaching program is hard work. If you want your FCR to improve, and if you want to move the needle, you have to be willing to put in the work to make it happen. There's no easy way to do it, and there's no magical change that a site can make that will cause their scores to improve overnight. We've kept our heads down, treated the SQM scores as the ultimate measurement, trusted in our strategy for the past seven years, and have seen significant FCR improvement. It happened because we worked hard and stuck to doing the right things, one day, one agent, one customer, one call, and one coaching session at a time. ***Our FCR results have almost improved by 50% in the last seven years. We have improved our FCR performance every year since 2013. We started our FCR journey in 2013 being a fourth quartile FCR performer, and in 2019 we became a first quartile FCR performer.*** We have several ***call centers that have been certified by SQM as a world class FCR performing call center.*** The criteria to be certified as a world class FCR performing call center is your FCR rate must be 80% or greater. Of the 500 call centers SQM measures, only 5% of their clients perform at the world class FCR standard of 80%. The bottom line is that our agent, coaching, played an essential part in helping us achieve our fantastic FCR improvement results.

SQM Awards

2019

Call Center World Class FCR Certification (Customer Service and Private Label)

2018

Call Center World Class FCR Certification (Assurant)

2016 to 2018

Best Practice: Agent Coaching

AGENT TRAINING

FCR Agent Training Best Practice Case Study Written by Premera Blue Cross Leadership

Company Description

At Premera, we serve 1.8 million people – from individuals and families to Fortune 100 employer groups. Our mission is to provide peace of mind to our customers about their healthcare. As one of the Pacific Northwest's largest health plans, we provide comprehensive, tailored services to customers in Washington and Alaska. This includes innovative programs focused on wellness and prevention, disease management, and patient safety – delivered through health, life, vision, dental, stop-loss, disability, workforce wellness, and other related products and services. We are committed to controlling rising medical costs while ensuring access to quality care for our members.

Opportunity Statement

Premera started using "SQM Workshops," which is a three-day program that all agents go through annually. Every other week, five agents are selected to attend the workshop. A dedicated area on the call floor, where the workshop will be held, is decorated to create a fun environment. One Team Leader and one Call Coach are assigned to manage the workshop, for which they completely clear their calendars and provide 100% focus to the agents attending the workshop. ***The intent of the workshop is to provide agents with increased dedicated time with a Team Leader and a Call Coach to focus on call resolution and the member experience.***

Day One

Each agent receives a report that consolidates every comment a member has ever given them that is broken up into three sections:

1. Satisfied
2. Not Satisfied
3. Repeat Call Reason

Every agent receives this feedback as surveys happen throughout the year; however, it is a powerful exercise to consolidate all the comments, which often allows agents to identify trends in behaviors. After each agent reviews their comments, they get together as a group to discuss what each person has learned from their report. This turns into a great conversation.

In the afternoon, call calibration is conducted. Typically, the group listens to random calls from an agent that is in another location. Each agent is given a sheet of paper to write down from their perspective:

- Was the call resolved?
- Was it a World Class Call?
- What did the agent do well?
- What could the agent have done better?

After the call is played, each person has an opportunity to talk about the four questions. This also turns into great conversation and best-practice sharing. At the end of the day, they fill out a very simple three-question online survey before they leave. The questions asked are:

1. I learned something new today that will help improve my calls resolved. True/False.
2. The information I received today from the Team Leader and Call Coach was consistent. True/False.
3. I am looking forward to coming back tomorrow. True/False.

Results thus far: 100% of responses from workshop attendees have been "true" for all 3 questions.

Day 2

In the morning's first activity, each agent listens to three of their calls picked randomly. The agent is then asked to fill out the "Knowledge / Confidence Self-Check" form for each call to score the call from the member's perception.

After the exercise is completed, they are brought to a room where they can share their findings in a group setting. We will often play one or two of the group's calls to see if the agent's form matches the rest of the group's opinion. This activity seems to be the most eye-opening for the agents, and the feedback received is that this is their favorite activity.

Day 3

On the last day of the workshop, the group continues through more call calibrations throughout the morning. In the afternoon, lunch is provided, and managers meet with each group to get their feedback about what worked well, what didn't, and what was the most impactful / best activity. We've received great feedback from these sessions and have incorporated numerous suggestions into the following week's workshop.
During the afternoon, agents complete one last activity, which is to write down an action plan they can use to improve their call resolution and member satisfaction performance. Each agent completes a final survey about their experience, where they are asked:

- The SQM Workshop was a good experience for me. True / False.
- I believe my SQM scores will increase going forward. True / False.
- I would recommend that other agents struggling with FCR attend the SQM Workshop. True / False.
- Do you have any ideas on how we can improve the SQM Workshop experience?

FCR Results

Each agent is provided with a certificate of completion, and they all celebrate the end of the workshop. As a result of the agent Training, 70% of agents who have completed the training have improved their call resolution. On average, call resolution has improved by 8%. ***We have significantly improved our FCR rate and customer satisfaction performance in the last five years.***

SQM Awards

2017
Best Practice: First Call Resolution Improvement

AGENT SELECTION

FCR Agent Selection Best Practice Case Study by Canadian Tire Leadership

Company Description

Canadian Tire Financial Services (CTFS) is the financial services arm of Canadian Tire. It offers credit, loans, insurance products, and services and is the second-largest MasterCard issuer in Canada with its Canadian Tire Options® MasterCard. CTFS is a significant contributor to Canadian Tire performance, representing 8% of overall revenues but nearly 25% of profit in 2011. Canadian Tire Options® MasterCard continues the customer loyalty program tradition by awarding electronic 'Money' to cardholders when purchases are made at Canadian Tire stores.

Opportunity Statement

At Canadian Tire, delivering consistently high-quality service experiences is a philosophy that is woven into the fabric of the organization's "Customers for Life" culture. Every representative at its award-winning Customer Relationship Call Center (CRCC) is fully aligned with the mission to deliver world class customer service and is accountable for FCR and Csat.

The Way We Work

A look inside the CRCC reveals a best-in-class call center with consistently high FCR performance and employee engagement. Some of the elements that contribute to this customer-driven environment include:

- ***A solid employee connection***: The average tenure for a call center rep is 12 years. Employees tend to stay because their input is valued and acted upon, especially when dealing with process improvements that involved customers and efficiency.
- ***Highly empowered frontline:*** First call resolution is a core component of its Customer for Life culture. Call center reps understand that taking care of the customer's needs is the top priority, and they are empowered to take the time to satisfy their customers.
- ***Employees drive process improvements:*** Frontline staff is also actively involved in improving FCR and reducing customer effort. They participate in process improvement project teams from the initial idea, general, and input stages to the solution design.
- ***Customers for Life culture*** are reinforced daily through team and peer recognition activities. One of the most visible mechanisms is the Customers for Life awards, which serve as both an individual commendation for promoting the culture and a company-wide reminder of the importance of making the customers' right choices. It is a peer-nominated award, open to both customer-facing and back-office staff. A strong connection to the local community: As one of the major employers in the Niagara region, the organization extends its Customers for Life culture to the local community. In fact, the focus on investing back into the community is another key contributor to its high Esat and longevity.

It's a winning combination, to be sure. Yet, the CRCC is not one to rest on its past achievements. The center continuously improves its performance year after year by reviewing and recharging processes and programs.

Canadian Tire has exceptional call handling practices. CRCC has a sophisticated telephone system to support call routing and an enhanced technology system equipped to store all of our customer information securely. Canadian Tire also has a great team of employees who go through extensive, state-of-the-art training and coaching on soft skills where they learn how to acknowledge, question, confirm, and respond appropriately in every customer situation.

There are dedicated teams to handle account retention, insurance retention, disputed transactions, fraud, collections, and customer escalations. The exceptional staffing and technology make it very easy to resolve our customer concerns at the first point of call.

Our culture at Canadian Tire is to hire the best people who will see Canadian Tire as a career destination. It is evident when newly hired employees complete their training and begin their new role to notice that everyone around them has worked here for 10 plus years.

Best Practices Used

We hold approximately three to four job fairs throughout the year, soliciting candidates for all positions within the call centers. The majority of our job fairs are explicitly held to solicit friends and family from our current employees who know our culture, understand our values, and live by them every day.

Our employees know the different roles at Canadian Tire and what it takes to be successful in that role. We consistently look to our employees to refer candidates for job opportunities. If their referred candidate is successfully hired, the employee will receive a referral payout bonus anywhere from $500-$1,000.

Our job fairs are announced through local media and newspaper advertisements. Resumes are accepted through our online website, through referrals from existing Canadian Tire employees, and through the mail.

We attract thousands of interested candidates and have the utmost respect for their time. Our job fairs are structured to efficiently screen and interview a large number of candidates over the shortest amount of time. We accomplish this by having our human resource team pre-screen candidates prior to the job fair and provide them with a time slot to appear for a personal interview. This method has proven to be very effective and ensures that our potential candidates receive a response quickly.

The interviewing team consists of managers and supervisors from each hiring department. Our human resource department organizes all the necessary documentation and provides training to the interviewing team in advance. The team will gather an hour before the job fair begins and are given details on what businesses are hiring, what roles they are hiring for, what availability they expect, and the procedure when you feel the candidate should move on to the next level. The team is given the opportunity to ask questions and clarify information.

A supervisor's first interview candidates, and if deemed a good fit, are immediately sent to the manager for the next level of interviewing. Our strategy places the candidate where they best fit for the business hiring (i.e., a credit service manager may recommend a candidate for the sales team based on their experience, responses to the questions, or disposition).

Our bilingual candidates must complete a French assessment before being considered bilingual hires. We have a French professional on hand to complete the assessment right at the job fair.

At the end of the job fair, all managers gather to debrief. Managers select candidates that are best suited for their business. Selected candidates are notified after their interview and given a start date. We pride ourselves on hiring the best candidates that fit within our culture and have the ability to provide excellent customer service. Cultural fit is key to the candidate's success, and the effect on Csat can be directly linked to this fit.

FCR/Csat Results

Our tenure speaks volumes about the success of our hiring. ***Canadian Tire has a tenure average of 12 years for representatives, 15 years for supervisors, and 18 years for management. Our overall agent attrition rate of 8% is significantly lower than our industry average.*** Our hiring practice has played an essential role in our ***world class FCR performance that we have consistently achieved for the last ten years and winning SQM's call center of the year award 7 times.***

SQM Awards

Call Center of the Year Winner (CRCC): 2005, 2006, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016
Highest Customer Satisfaction – Credit Card Industry (CRCC): 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020
Highest Omni-Channel Customer Service (CRCC): 2015, 2016
World Class FCR Certification (CRCC): 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019
Highest Employee Satisfaction in Call Center Industry (CRCC): 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017
World Class Employee Satisfaction (CRCC): 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2020
Best Practice - Call Handling: 2014, 2015
Best Practice - Agent Training: 2017
Best Practice – Agent Selection 2014

CONTRIBUTING COMPANIES

MASSACHUSETTS

COMCAST

Regence

407 ETR Express Toll Route

CANADIAN TIRE BANK®

SCOTIA iTRADE®

mr. cooper℠

PREMERA BLUE CROSS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike Desmarais, MBA is the Founder and CEO of SQM Group. Mike received his MBA from Athabasca University in 2020. Mike has over 25 years of FCR and CXM experience working with leading North American companies. Mike is the inventor of VoC First Call Resolution measurement and has written five thought-provoking call center FCR books (i.e., World Class Call Center, First Call Resolution, FCR Best Practices, One Contact Resolution, and most recently One Contact Resolution 2nd Edition.) Mike is a popular call center industry FCR thought leader with over 20,000 LinkedIn followers and is considered one of the most influential contributors for FCR and CXM in the call center industry.

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