

United Utilities

'Keeping Customers at the Heart'

United Utilities supply water to the North West of England and have a contact centre in Cumbria dedicated to managing billing enquiries, payments and account information.

How we helped



As a refocus and refresh on customer service Ember Real Results was invited to design a learning intervention for 200 contact centre staff in Cumbria. The brief to Ember Real Results was to make the programme 'fun, interactive and themed around United Utilities' existing Customers at the Heart slogan, but preferably from a new angle'.

The measure of success would be a 20% improvement in agent 'call quality scores', measured by coaches using a structured assessment form.

What we did

After two days of on-site analysis to understand the role and the training needs fully, Real Results designed an accelerated learning programme called 'Pulse8' which took the 'Heart' theme into a new medical domain. 8 skills and behaviours crucial to customer service were identified and these became the main structure of the programme:

- Listening
- Confident Communication
- Ownership
- Proactivity
- Initiative
- Rapport
- Accuracy
- Respect



The Concept

It was vital to the success of the session that the principles of accelerated learning were followed to ensure everyone learned as much as possible in their one day of training and that the focus and attention of the relatively young workforce was maintained throughout.

Powerpoint was banished, instead learning was created and reviewed using printed jigsaws, recorded audio, creating posters, unscrambling anagrams and competitive team quizzes. The listening exercise involved the participants working in pairs, one person with a stick on which to spin a coloured plastic plate, the other person reading a set of non-work related facts from a list. After 3 minutes of listening (and plate spinning) the spinner would be given 2 minutes to recall as many facts as they could, and would receive one point for each fact recalled fully and accurately. A note would be made of the score before the pair would change places and begin again with a different fact card.

Afterwards they participants were asked what they felt about the exercise. Answers such as 'it was hard to do two things at once' 'it was distracting hearing lots of similar conversations going on around me' 'it felt like a memory test more than a listening test' were common and exactly what was needed to draw out the key learning points.

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The Concept Continued

The plate and stick represented the computer system and the fact sheet is the information from the customer. Participants were asked 'Which are you getting points for?' The learning being that listening to the customer is more important than navigating the system. Ideally an experienced adviser becomes able to do two things at once, but until then, participants were encouraged to focus on the customer first, system second. Hearing lots of similar conversations is just like being out on the floor – we need to keep focused – techniques for minimising distractions were then shared by the trainer. You only need to memorise when you are not able to write things down – something you can do when on the telephone. The customer may not always give information in the order that the system wants it, so rather than trying to remember everything or even worse – asking a customer to repeat themselves – use a jotter to make notes. The other 7 behaviours were explored and throughout the session 'pulse checks' were made where participants were encouraged to reflect on their learning and how they would apply it and record it on an action plan. This action plan was reviewed by their manager following the training as part of an informal debrief and then fed into their personal development plan.

The Real Results

Following the completion of the programme the target of a **20% increase** in call quality was exceeded with agents consistently scoring 100%. Follow-up coaching over the coming months ensured this was sustained and new learning became embedded.

Feedback from team managers included:

"Two of our team members have attended Pulse8 this week and have said they feel a real benefit, they said they feel a lot more confident handling calls. I have done 2 side by side call qualities on each of them this afternoon and have seen a massive improvement they both scored 100% twice and seem to have a new outlook and really positive attitude."

"I have just completed 3 side by side call qualities on Alistair and he scored 3 consecutive 100%! This is an amazing achievement for him – also 2 out of the 3 calls were not standard queries and I would class in the more difficult call category and he handled it well."

The programme sponsor, Michelle Cheeseman, concluded:

"Based on my initial observations, evaluations and feedback, the design of the Pulse 8 course & delivery by Carolyn Blunt from Real Results have both met & exceeded my requirements."

"BEST CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE PROGRAMME" AWARD

Following this project Real Results was awarded a contract to train a further 5000 employees across the wider United Utilities business in 'Customers at the Heart'. This project went on to win 'Best Customer Experience Programme' at the CallNorthWest Awards and delivered measurable improvements in regulatory league table positions, employee engagement scores and customer satisfaction scores for United Utilities.

Speaking about the experience Mike Taylor of United Utilities said "Real Results delivered tailored job specific training across our complex business that has never been achieved before. We have never had such positive feedback. I have no hesitation in recommending Real Results." (Mike Taylor, Key Account Manager, United Utilities)

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services

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