



WE CAN BE HEROES



Ember

**“
BY EMPOWERING
OUR PEOPLE
TO TRAIN AND
COACH EMBER
HAS LEFT A
LASTING LEGACY
THAT WE CAN
BUILD UPON.”**

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Championing Team Leaders to embed a skills development culture at the heart of Three's customer operations

Three is one of the UK's leading mobile networks, covering 97% of the country's population, carrying almost half (42%) of its mobile data and supporting the mobile lives of 8.8 million individual customers. Since it was founded in 2003 it has determinedly championed the interests of consumers, becoming the first provider to introduce all-you-can-eat data and to deliver 4G and international roaming at no extra cost. Determined that the quality of its customer experience should match that of its network, Three asked Ember to initiate a customer service training programme for 1,100 frontline staff across its Indian contact centre operations. Ember went one better, embedding service training and skills development at the heart of the contact centres' culture. The programme was championed by Team Leaders, embraced by advisors and supported by Three's leadership team.

One year on, Three has seen a 7 point rise in first contact resolution and an 11 point rise in customer satisfaction with advisor performance. NPS, indicative of customer advocacy, is up 8 points. In 2014 it won the 'Amazing Customer Experience' category in the UK's prestigious Customer Experience Awards and was named by Ofcom as the UK industry's least complained about operator (improved from being the most complained about two years earlier). Its employee engagement scores have surged ahead of industry benchmarks and the company has entered the 'Best Place to Work' top 10. Ember's Xcel initiative has been part of a long term programme, championed by Three, that has transformed the mobile operator's customer experience performance.

CREATING CHAMPIONS

Ember was initially asked to design and deliver a short training course that would focus Three's advisors on the essential elements of excellent customer experience delivery.

However, based on a close analysis of Three's operation, its culture and service challenges, Ember identified an innovative way to deliver training that would deliver both immediate impact and long term value by embedding skills improvement in Three's contact centre culture. By making Three's Team Leaders the heroes of service performance, and empowering them to deliver training & coaching to their advisor teams, the Xcel Skills Delivery programme would embed habits of coaching, mentoring and team building. In short, it would change the contact

centre culture from one of 'command and control' to empowerment and continuous improvement. In practice the Xcel programme reinforced learning through positive reinforcement, highlighting and celebrating examples of best practice and exceptional service within the operation and using them to build blueprints for advisor behaviours.

Skills transfer is an important element of Ember's approach to training.

"We believe training has the potential to support long term change," says Ember Director, Paul Mackenzie.

"Our aim is not just to impart information or teach new skills, but to deliver real culture change. We encourage personal responsibility for learning and empower individuals and teams to maintain training activities and benefits long after our work is done."

"AT THE END OF THE PROGRAMME OUR TEAM LEADERS HAD THE SKILLS THEY NEEDED TO DESIGN AND DELIVER TRAINING FOR THEIR OWN TEAMS TO MEET WHATEVER CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE CHALLENGE THEY FACE NOW OR MAY FACE IN THE FUTURE." says Gurpreet Gujral,

DELIVERING ON A BIG STAGE

The complexity of delivering consistent training for over 1,100 advisors in an offshore, outsourced environment shouldn't be underestimated. Tech Mahindra, which has operated Three's contact centre operations for four years, recognised that change was needed and that the benefits arising from its own in house training programmes had plateaued.

However, it struggled to find time for intensive training within a large organisation challenged to deliver exacting service standards at a time when multiple process changes - each designed to improve customer experience - were being introduced. Ember was mindful of the day-to-day challenges the operation faced to meet the exacting service standards Three is determined to deliver for its customers and the regulator. Small movements in staff availability - due to training as much as any other cause - can have a dramatic impact on service performance and, indeed, commercial results.

Ember achieved this by streamlining training delivery and incorporating it

into the regular weekly meetings each Team Leader had with their advisors teams. "This meant training could be delivered effectively within an already established framework," says Paul Mackenzie, "but scheduling was still a challenge across locations in two cities, Mumbai and Pune, supporting sales, service and technical support."

In addition, of course, Ember had to prepare Three's 290 Team Leaders to support its new approach and deliver the training. **"It meant they had to think differently about their role,"** says Paul. **"They had to step up to being authoritative, expert, and supportive leaders of their teams. Instead of being buried in administration and paperwork,**

they needed to provide coaching, constructive criticism and motivational praise. And, of course, they needed to be confident in their ability to provide answers and advice."

Ember embedded a seven-strong training team into the Three operation. Its first task would be to design a series of eight skills coaching modules; each based on a key customer experience theme, and then prepare Three's Team Leaders to deliver them. Its next task would be to set the scene for advisors, impressing upon them the importance of the training, the role of their Team Leader, and the change in the relationship between them that this would herald. Next it took on the onerous task of scheduling the training and evaluating its effectiveness. To do so Ember worked closely with Tech Mahindra's planning team to ensure a clear roll out plan for each training session and a weekly programme of skills reinforcement.

"EMBER UNDERSTOOD THE MANY DRIVERS WITHIN THE OPERATION, INCLUDING THE MOTIVATION OF THE ADVISORS, THE EXPECTATIONS OF TEAM LEADERS, TECH MAHINDRA'S NEED TO MANAGE ITS COSTS AND THREE'S COMMITMENT TO SERVICE EXCELLENCE. SAYS GURPREET GUJRAL, "THE XCEL PROGRAMME SUCCESSFULLY BALANCED THEM ALL."

TRAINING AT SCALE AND TO TIME

- A two-day skills development workshop gave Team Leaders the teaching and coaching skills that would enable them to deliver effective training and support ongoing skills development within their teams.
- An introductory briefing session with advisors by Ember set the scene and introduced Team Leaders as 'service heroes'.
- Ember's trainers provided Team Leaders with a framework and facilitation guide for each of the eight individual training modules. They then worked with them to put Team Leaders' personal stamp on each one.
- Ember established processes that helped Team Leaders access and download exemplary calls from the call recording system, which they could then use to celebrate 'great service' in training sessions and highlight key coaching points to be used in feedback sessions.
- Careful scheduling ensured all training was delivered within a twelve week period, that feedback was captured and changing behaviours monitored.

Three's Team Leaders are now creating and delivering their own skills training modules, responding to the needs of their teams and Three's commercial environment.

Ember worked closely with Tech Mahindra's Resource and Planning, Quality, Training and Management teams. Thanks to this collaboration, the Xcel programme was successfully delivered as a rolling programme over five months, with each advisor completing all eight modules of

training within a 12 week period, even though it coincided with one of Three's busiest times of the year. The launch of the new Apple iPhone 6, which typically drives contact volumes up by as much as 20%, was managed without disruption during the height of the Xcel programme.

COUNTERING CULTURE

Ember is experienced at working within international operations and offshore environments and is sensitive to the challenges facing advisors beyond obvious language barriers.

"DURING ITS PRE-TRAINING ANALYSIS EMBER WAS ABLE TO IDENTIFY THE DIFFICULTIES OUR OFFSHORE ADVISORS FACED RELATING TO UK CUSTOMERS,"

says Clare Hatchwell.

"Much of the training focused on recognising and overcoming those difficulties and, when the Xcel programme ended, advisors had acquired valuable communication skills that would help them understand, empathise with and resolve customer issues regardless of cultural barriers or nuances of language."

THE CULTURE CHANGE THAT DROVE RESULTS

Ember achieved its objective of empowering Team Leaders as mentors and trainers who, in post-training evaluation, achieved an average score of 4.8 out of 5 from their advisor teams.

Supported by Ember's team, Team Leaders were personally responsible for delivering 98% of all training activity. And the skills they have acquired by doing so will stand them in good stead for the future.

Within six months of the Xcel programme, Three's NPS scores, its key customer experience measure, jumped 5 points. It has since gained a further 3 points, giving an 8 point rise in total. Customer satisfaction with advisor performance has improved by 11% and first time resolution by 7%. All of this, plus a significant reduction in average handle time (AHT), could deliver a long term efficiency gain of around 8% of overall operating cost, according to Ember's estimates.

In addition, these improvements have helped to tackle one of the perennial challenges faced by all mobile operators; customer churn. Disappointment with customer service quality as a reason for customers to leave Three was more than halved between 2013 and 2015.

And life is better for Team Leaders and advisors too. Employee engagement at Three now stands at 76%, 20 points higher than the Ipsos MORI benchmark average.

"EMBER'S TRAINING HAS HELPED US ACHIEVE MANY OF OUR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AMBITIONS," concludes Three's Gurpreet Gurjal.

"BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY, IT HAS ESTABLISHED A NEW CULTURE OF ENTHUSIASTIC SERVICE AMBITION ACROSS OUR CONTACT CENTRES THAT WILL DRIVE A BETTER EXPERIENCE FOR OUR CUSTOMERS AS WELL AS BUSINESS VALUE FOR THREE."

Nor is this an isolated initiative, Gurpreet confirms.

“THREE IS INNOVATING ON MANY FRONTS AND PUSHING TO EXCEED THE ACCEPTED (SOMETIMES MEDIOCRE) NORMS OF OUR INDUSTRY WHEN IT COMES TO CUSTOMER STRATEGY, OPERATIONS AND EXPERIENCE. IT’S GREAT TO HAVE EMBER ENGAGED WITH US AS A STRATEGIC ADVISOR.”

RESULTS SUMMARY

- NPS up 8 points
- Customer satisfaction up 11%
- First time resolution up 7%
- AHT down
- Estimated efficiency gain 8%
- Employee engagement leaps ahead of industry benchmarks
- Service quality as a reason for churn halved

All of this has contributed to an award-winning customer experience for Three.



Three is a leading UK mobile operator that strives to make life better for its customers. It has

over 8.8 million customers and carries 45% of the UK’s mobile data over its 3G network, which covers 98% of the UK population. Three employs more than 4,400 people in the UK and is rated ‘The UK’s most reliable network’ by YouGov, the ‘Best mobile network’ by TrustedReview’ and the ‘least complained about operator’ by Ofcom.

www.three.co.uk

Ember. Know what better is.

Ember is a business services group providing customer management consultancy, analytics, recruitment and training services. Our Training, Coaching and Mentoring practice provides highly bespoke services for frontline staff, first line managers and customer management leaders operating in single or multi-channel sales, service and technical support environments across industry and the public sector.

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