

INTERACTION



KICK-ASS CUSTOMER SERVICE

HBR ARTICLE BY MATTHEW DIXON, LARA PONOMAREFF, SCOTT TURNER, AND RICK DELISI, JANUARY-FEBRUARY

Consumers are often unhappy with the help they get from customer service. The authors say this is because companies don't hire the right people as frontline reps or equip them to handle complex challenges. Every rep can be classified as one of seven types. Supportive Empathizers constitute the largest group, and managers prefer them. But take-charge Controllers, who make up only 15% of all reps, actually do best at solving customers' problems.

As the authors explain, companies that transition to self-service options leave frontline service reps with problems that are increasingly tough to solve because they're the ones customers can't solve on their own. They cite one manager who woefully admitted that his contact center has for this very reason become "a factory of sadness."

Spencer Davis, finance student, Texas A&M University

The Controller type seems less valuable than, say, the Innovator, who is much more likely to provide feedback to influence the product or service and to drive lasting solutions for customers. Customers don't just want a great customer-service experience; they want a product or service that works. The only way to get that is through incremental

continuous improvement based on frontline feedback. The biggest problem with customer support in most organizations is that it's treated as a cost center rather than as a valuable source of product feedback.

Warren Johnson, principal program manager, Microsoft

"Many executives have tuned out the contact center by hiring managers who don't complain or make waves."

—KATHLEEN M. PETERSON

This idea applies beyond contact centers. For example, I believe that the Controller mindset also proves effective when consulting with clients to design tech solutions or processes. Empathy is an important component of a Controller's motivation. Controllers genuinely care about solving the customer's problem.

William Oshodin, advisory manager, PwC

This article provides comprehensive insight into customer service today. Service recovery is becoming a core customer-service skill, as companies push toward greater self-service and automation. I like that the authors identify the need for a shift in how coaching is conducted. The "meeting in the principal's office" approach does little to improve behaviors in a live environment.

Shaun Belding, CEO, The Belding Group

I have been consulting with contact centers for 30 years, and this article truly represents the challenges many organizations face today. I would add, however, that efforts to get the best frontline reps are frequently stymied by management. Contact-center leaders are often promoted from within, so the dominant Empathizers advance to leadership roles where their focus is on making do with what they get rather than arguing effectively for what they need.

Many executives have essentially tuned out the contact center by hiring or promoting managers who don't complain or make waves. **Kathleen M. Peterson**, chief vision officer, PowerHouse Consulting



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