

SERVICE 800
www.service800.com

“Teleworkers are the way of doing business for SERVICE 800.”

A unique company using telework to meet its business needs and simultaneously impact its community. SERVICE 800 designs and administers “real time” customer satisfaction measurement programs They help service organizations of all sizes with their customers within hour or days of service events. The company utilizes a distinctive follow-up telephone interview process, along with email, web and other techniques.

SERVICE 800 pioneered the use of remote service agents in order to decrease employee turnover rates and to provide job opportunities to persons needing flexible work options. We capture the talents of unique labor pools such as persons with disabilities and single parents, while also meeting their needs.

Overview

SERVICE 800 was founded in 1989 to help service organizations measure the quality of the services they deliver and to collect data in a short time from customers on services they have been provided. SERVICE 800 has offices in Minneapolis, Minnesota and London, England. The large majority of the company’s employees are customer service representatives who work from their homes as teleworkers. Indeed, when the company was founded, one of the guiding principles was to provide employment for mothers who wished to stay home and work and persons with disabilities. Currently 250 service representatives are employed 20 to 40 hours per week. SERVICE 800 provides a competitive wage structure and a 401K program for employees.

Business Incentives

- Decreased costs: Because most representatives work from their homes, SERVICE 800 has achieved significant cost savings from not having a large infrastructure and occupancy costs.
- Loyalty and commitment of customer representatives—turnover is low and some representatives have been with the company for over 10 years.
- Working toward the greater good, SERVICE 800 is a fairly unique company. At the heart of their mission is their pride in knowing that their approach allows individuals unable to leave their homes to become employed again. Management is very satisfied with the results to date, and the plan is to expand the number of teleworkers.

Because of the telework culture at SERVICE800, there are no supervisors who

are lukewarm about telework. Nor are there issues with promotions and career paths being affected negatively by teleworking--teleworkers have been promoted to supervisory positions and some supervisors telework.

Agent Selection and Training

SERVICE 800 has a formal recruiting and selection process. Candidates must pass a set of initial minimum requirements and are then selected by a recruiting coordinator. Representatives receive training about process and procedures, probing techniques, adherence to scripts, and phone etiquette; essential for effective performance.

Communications

Networking among the representatives and regular team telephone and web-based meetings promote a “we are family” philosophy. There are four calling teams in North America, with each meeting typically covering a variety of topics such as reviewing process and procedures, submitting telephone bills for reimbursement, discussing unique problems related to a calling program, introducing new members, and making personal announcements such as an engagement or birth of a child with minutes distributed among employees.

Customer representatives are encouraged to contact their supervisors/team leads as necessary. Supervisors and team leads are responsible for sending a daily message to their teams in regard to work available for the day or specific work direction for the team to follow that day and a “thought for the day”.

Performance Management

Monitoring and oversight of the representatives is always a work in progress. Everyone is required to log into a website to start work and to log off when done. Data regarding the representatives’ interviews are monitored through a web-based application. The company currently has the ability to see how many attempts are made and interviews completed by a representative for different time periods (per hour, per day, per week). Quotas per se are not established, although there are expectations about how many interviews a representative should conduct for a specific time.

Challenges

SERVICE 800 has significant challenges as well with having a workforce that is almost entirely off-site. The two primary challenges has been (a) communication with the customer representatives and (b) supervision of the representatives. The latter has been especially challenging.

In addition, many of the representatives are required to record every interview conducted but this has proven ineffective due to some incompatibilities from instant messaging programs and screen savers. SERVICE 800 is currently working on a VOIP solution that will allow all calling resources to record every interview they conduct.

The Future

Company management believes that teleworking will become more common in the future. They have noted that increasing numbers of individuals possess the tools and equipment and capabilities of working remotely, and there are improvements in the technology of measuring the performance of remote workers. More individuals, particularly stay-at-home mothers, and persons with disabilities are seeking part-time employment as well.

Teleworker Satisfaction

Just hear about the opinions of some of their employees

“Our company is a perfect example that anyone, disabled or not, is able to work from home. It’s how the company started.”

“I am more focused at home. When I worked for (large company) I was talking to other co-workers. I still performed my job duties, but I feel I am 100 percent focused working from home. I don’t have distractions

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