

There is no "I" in Leadership. Oh wait, there is.

Leading By Example



From left to right: Sprint's Danny Hurt; Merrill Lynch's Judy Nelson; APC's Jason Stallard; Taction's Ellie Hinds; Chanel's Leslie Nelson; and Wells Fargo's Jay Kent.

What does it take to make a successful call center? A mix of brains, innovation, gumption, creativity and the urge to go beyond expectations. In a word: Leadership.

The second annual Call Center Leadership Awards are given out by this magazine to a group of people who, through their efforts, have made a difference in the way their centers (and by extension, their entire organizations) do busi-

CallCenter
Customer Care 2003
Leadership Award

ness. They take their jobs seriously, and use their positions to push back the boundaries of the expected. They add value to their centers.

We conceived of this award several years ago as a way to recognize a set of folks that don't often get widespread recognition. Yes,

we recognize great products and services and awesome call centers. But one of the most useful things we do here at *Call Center Magazine* is provide examples of what works so others can learn from it. The only thing more satisfying than telling a success story is finding out that it influenced other call center personnel to make changes and improve their own operations.

That's why the Leadership Awards are special for us: they let

us single out examples of stellar individuals, nominated by their peers, who have been agents of change for the better.

The categories we've awarded "best" in are Agent, Manager, Senior Executive, Team and IT Analyst. In that grand sweep, we recognize the incredible diversity of talent and capability that goes into providing top-notch customer service. For a few moments, let's not think about the poor economy, about offshoring, job loss or telemarketing. Let's think instead about how these stellar performers offer instruction in how to make the most of their opportunities to improve customer service and benefit their companies. Congratulations to them all!

BEST AGENT — JAY KENT, WELLS FARGO BANK CARD SERVICES

Some might call Jay Kent the million-dollar man. Over the past year, Kent, a senior agent with Wells Fargo Bank's Card Services Group, consistently achieved high sales in balance transfers from credit card accounts placing him in the company's "Million Dollar Club" for 12 months in a row. And, he was one of only four reps to do so.

However, it's not this ranking that qualifies him for a Customer Care Leadership award but rather the valuable role that Kent has taken on with customers and co-workers.

In 2002, Kent joined Wells Fargo's Oregon call center as a bilingual agent. He uses his oral and written Spanish-language skills to quickly and effectively resolve some of the most complex calls with Wells Fargo's high-value Hispanic customers.

His skills became even more invaluable when the group was organizing an outbound welcome project for Wells Fargo's Spanish-

speaking customers. The company selected a few top individuals to pilot the new program in which Wells Fargo's representatives proactively contacted the company's new credit card customers in Spanish. Kent played an integral role by providing insightful recommendations for fine-tuning the program while making it more effective. He also assisted new members in training on systems and sales techniques. According to Wells Fargo, the program has been a success and has turned a profit since its inception.

One of Kent's biggest contributions has been his commitment to furthering the development of individuals in his direct group, as well as other bilingual agents at Wells Fargo. He takes a special interest in helping his co-workers grow in their positions by coordinating team meetings; fielding their questions; and conducting individual and group training with new hires, all of which, in the end, enables Wells Fargo to meet its company goals.

In a relatively short period, Kent rose to Senior Agent and has recently been rewarded with an expanded leadership role as a Project Team Lead, where he has taken on responsibilities such as call coaching and assistant supervisory duties.

Kent has also received numerous internal awards, including a quality service award based on quality assurance monitoring and customer survey results, and an award for employees who personify Wells Fargo's vision, mission and values.

BEST MANAGER — DANNY HURT, SPRINT

Three years ago, Danny Hurt spearheaded the creation of a training program for Sprint's then-new 1,200 person call center. Since then he's become Sprint's

"go-to guy" for developing methods and processes that make sure the center's training department comes in at or under budget — without compromising quality.

His operational improvements extended beyond the classroom. He developed or guided to fruition most of the department's tracking and reporting structure. He created a trainer scorecard, a four-tier assessment system, and a fact-based performance review system to ensure objective ratings for all trainers.

When the Workforce Management Manager asked for help with scheduling, Danny figured out how to staff the center at 120% of capacity, with an understaffed team.

His scheduling skills are considered the largest contributing factor in the success of running the center understaffed for two years, and still managing to send training staff out to sister centers for more than 6,300 hours of training in that time. By making the most of everyone's skills and schedules, Danny's center was able to provide more support to the organization than any other center.

Danny's contributions have let the training department consistently turn newly hired employees into high performers — within 90 days they meet or exceed the performance of tenured employees.

What this has translated into is a sense of positive achievement among the people who work in the center. New hires upsell as much or more than tenured reps. As one colleague said, "Danny creates an environment where everyone is accountable for his or her own performance. He has sought measurable goals and created tools to measure what seemed to be unmeasurable."

But to be a leader is about more than fair and improving numbers.

It's about building an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. Danny's success stems from the relationships he has built with everyone in the training department and the call center. He helps trainers and students through difficult personal and professional situations.

One colleague put it this way: "I trust his judgment, his integrity, his professionalism and his intent. He makes the right decisions, not the easy ones." That's all you can ask from a forward-thinking manager.

BEST TEAM — THE CHANEL 800 TEAM AT TACTION

What does a small town in the mid-coast section of Maine have in common with a purveyor of luxury goods, among them a legendary fragrance known simply as No. 5?

Eight agents from Taction, a 150-agent outsourcer based in Waldoboro, ME, have the answer. For nearly nine years, Taction has handled calls from customers on behalf of CHANEL's consumer relations department and its corporate office in New York City.

Callers to CHANEL's toll-free customer service number don't always know whom they speak with. But during these conversations, it's CHANEL's reputation that's on the line. So when CHANEL outsources customer care by phone, service must be the primary consideration.

For its dedication to serving CHANEL's discerning and, at times, demanding, clientele, the CHANEL 800 team at Taction earns a Customer Care Leadership award.

Within Taction, the team has ranked first, and no lower than second, for the past three years, in terms of accuracy, productivity and attitude. Yet for Ellie Hinds, one call best illustrates the team's consideration to CHANEL's customers.

Hinds, who heads the CHANEL 800 team at Taction, remembers a call a colleague received from a bride-to-be who sought help locating high-heeled satin ballet slippers she'd seen in a CHANEL ad. The agent told the caller the shoes would be hard to track down, given worldwide demand for them.

But the challenge did not deter the CHANEL 800 team. After placing dozens of calls to boutiques in the US and abroad during the course of three shifts, the team found a pair in a boutique in Hawaii. The shoes were on reserve to another customer who had made a last-minute decision not to purchase them. Thanks to the agents' serendipitous discovery, the bride wore the satin slippers from CHANEL on her wedding day.

The team regularly demonstrates this level of commitment to customers in answering their questions about CHANEL's clothing, accessories, fragrances, makeup and skin creams. Agents comb through magazines so they know in advance where callers are most likely to read about items from CHANEL. They view videos of fashion shows that depict CHANEL's clothing on the runway. They keep samples of CHANEL's products on hand, and get the same training on CHANEL's products as those who sell them from behind the counter.

Knowledge is only one aspect of service. As Hinds points out, the agents on the CHANEL 800 team know how to reassure customers, and come up with alternatives, if

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they call about CHANEL products that are discontinued or out of stock. We salute the agents on the CHANEL 800 team at Taction for their ability to recognize CHANEL's customers' needs, and for their expertise in fulfilling them.

BEST IT ANALYST — JASON STALLARD, APC

Ultimately sales and service are about the same thing: meeting needs. People buy products because they have a need that they believe those items can meet; people seek assistance because they have a need for it.

APC (West Kingston, RI) embraced this concept when it meshed its sales and customer support into a unified Customer Solutions Team (CST) in 2000. The team has 140 reps that sell and service the power protection supplier's North American customers.

Jason Stallard is a technically-experienced and knowledgeable rep who understands that service and sales are the same. That's why we are awarding him as our Best IT Analyst.

Jason joined APC in November 2001 as a Technical Support Engineer and is now a Technical Support Engineer III, handling escalated problems. His work consistently measures in over 100% of the firm's key performance indicators.

Jason won the monthly CST Customer Satisfaction Award in April, May and November 2002 for having the highest customer sat ratings. He then won the monthly CST Sales Award in December 2002.

The CST management team also awarded Stallard for having contributed the most to his team in May and December, 2002: the only rep to have been so honored twice.

In his current position Jason no

longer has the opportunity to sell. But that did not stop him. He single-handedly enabled the Escalation Team to reach its quarterly sales goals.

In turn, APC has escalated Jason up the ranks. He has been promoted faster than anyone else in the past five years to his current position: the highest technical support level.

Jason is also helpful off the job. APC has an employee exchange program with its Galway, Ireland center. Two employees work in the other center for six months. In 2002, Jason voluntarily drove the visiting CST employees from where they were staying to the West Kingston center for the six months.

BEST SENIOR EXECUTIVE — JUDY NELSON, MERRILL LYNCH

What is the role of a senior executive? Not day-to-day management, hopefully, but policymaking and communications. With that in mind, Judy Nelson, first vice president at Merrill Lynch's US Private Client Services Client Contact Center, oversees a diverse group of more than 1,000 employees handling millions of customer contacts.

The key to providing customers with top-level service lies in employee satisfaction, according to Judy. She adopted a grass-roots strategy to find out what front-line reps needed to do their jobs better. Through a series of townhall meetings, focus groups and intimate chat sessions, she found that agents wanted recognition, accountability, open lines of communication and career progression prospects. The challenge lay in balancing those needs with the organization's effectiveness targets.

Judy believes that employee empowerment is achieved through

employee involvement; she established committees in each department to find out what employees wanted and how to implement those desires.

She established a cross-site project team to revamp the recognition program. And she encouraged her directors to openly discuss their "scorecard" evaluations with each other, and with employees. At each step in the evaluation process people understood what they were being evaluated on, and what everyone else's role in the client service process was.

As a senior executive, she sets the tone for the managers she oversees, encouraging them to share information with their employees and communicate with them accurately and in a timely way.

In addition to offering employees the tools they need to do their jobs well, Judy also believes that an organization should have a well-defined career progression model. The career paths available within the call center are discussed regularly with employees. They are also highlighted through ongoing career fairs and job shadowing programs.

Judy has also focused on measuring the center's results throughout the organization. She's been involved in the contact center's Six Sigma Strategy, which so far has delivered nearly 80 projects worth \$20 million.

In 2002 the call center rolled out to its clients a new IVR and speech rec platform. To measure client satisfaction, Judy regularly holds client focus groups and administers surveys. Whether communicating between employees at different levels, or externally to clients, Judy emphasizes the mission of a senior executive to speak clearly, and to listen carefully. ☎