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Mike Sonley, UK Learning & Development Manager, ABB

The Challenge

When ABB, the global power and automation company, set about increasing customer satisfaction across its DMUK division, a bespoke drama series proved essential to inspiring the highly technical workforce to adopt a much more customer-focused approach...

Mike Sonley, UK Learning and Development Manager for ABB, explains: "Our UK Discrete Automation and Motion division (DMUK) is committed to enabling customers to improve performance through the use of state of the art automation and robotic systems. It employs approximately 300 highly skilled individuals, ranging from scientists and engineers to technical sales and customer support representatives. Although the business was performing strongly, a customer survey revealed there was definite room for improvement when it came to managing customer relationships."

He adds, "Our Net Promoter Score (NPS), which we took to be a good measure of customer satisfaction, showed that although our customers continue to rate our products and services as best in class there was still room for improvement in our customers recommending us to others. For example some customers raised concerns about the time taken to respond to emails and the tendency of employees to pass customers onto someone else if the enquiry wasn't directly related to their particular part of the business."

In response, DMUK wanted to help employees develop their desire and ability to better support customers. "When we dug a bit deeper, we discovered our technically-minded workforce were also often concerned with internal processes and procedures, sometimes to the detriment of the customer experience," says Mike. "Going forward we wanted to put the focus back on the customer. Firstly, by supporting each and every employee to be able to choose in real time the most helpful customer focussed behaviour, and secondly by helping employees to simplify internal processes."

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The Approach

"We were aware of the many generic development programmes on the market relating to diplomacy, communication and behaviour," he continues, "But we decided to invite Hunter Roberts, our 'best-in-class' people development partner, to help design a bespoke development programme for managers to deliver internally. We felt that by closely aligning the programme to our particular



challenges and delivering it ourselves, we could make it as relevant as possible and create real behaviour change.”

The Solution

ABB and Hunter Roberts worked together to design a bespoke programme, branded ‘We Care’, based on the following three principles:

1. **Responsibility:** taking ownership and not pushing customers away because it’s not your area.
2. **Respect:** celebrating differences and diversity and earning respect by showing respect.
3. **Determination:** seeing things through and striving to deliver a ‘win-win’ for everyone concerned.

“Hunter Roberts created five half-day modules, consisting of different learning methodologies, behaviour profiles, action-based learning exercises and facilitator input,” says Mike. “They also came up with the idea of using professional business actors to create a drama series, following the frustrations of a fictional customer as she tries to get a broken piece of equipment fixed without a service agreement in place.”

“Hunter Roberts trained managers to deliver the sessions to mixed teams across the business. Prior to delivering the first session a ‘Buzz Campaign’ was carried out to invite employees to take part, featuring an email trailer to advertise the drama. As a result over 95% of the workforce took part.”

He adds, “Although the characters created by Hunter Roberts were deliberately flawed and very exaggerated, they were also likeable and believable and perfectly exemplified the behaviour we needed to correct without pointing the finger at any one part of the business.

“Employees became so engaged with the fates of the fictional customer and the ABB employees that she encounters that we commissioned Hunter Roberts to produce a concluding episode. Although it would have been easy to contrive a happy ending, the story ended with a large sales opportunity being lost but the customer relationship saved, and it featured final reflections from the characters.”

The Results

“The customer service development designed by Hunter Roberts was incredibly impactful. It’s created real behaviour change, improving customer satisfaction and it has helped us to substantially increase revenues,” says Mike. “Everyone’s become mindful of how their words and actions affect the business. It also gave us the opportunity to consider and correct internal processes that were damaging customer service.”

He concludes, “We’re now planning the roll out of the programme across ABB globally. We’re also working with Hunter Roberts to develop a leadership development programme to embed the principles of respect, responsibility and determination even further.”

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