

How laying people off has the potential of a silver lining



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Beyond Philosophy Services:

Beyond Philosophy is recognized as the worlds thought leaders in Customer Experience. We have written three international bestselling books on the subject. Formed in 2002, Beyond Philosophy works internationally with organizations such as IBM, FedEx and American Express to name a few, from our offices are in London, England and Atlanta, Georgia, USA.

We help improve our clients Customer Experience by harnessing our knowledge and experience of practical implementation around the globe. We have proven expertise in de-risking implementations, increase speed of project delivery and saving costs through our engagements. Our tools and techniques are renowned for their practical application and have been tried and tested in many sectors.

Our services are:

Strategic Guidance – We work with all levels of management in an organization and guide them on the decisions that need to be taken to improve their Customer Experience. We start by asking three key strategic questions:

-  What is the Customer Experience you are trying to deliver?
-  What emotions are you trying to evoke?
-  Is your Customer Experience deliberate?

Our consultants work with the organizations to answer these key questions and put in place actions that will improve the organizations revenues, retain customers and save costs.

Training – We have well developed training programs for organizations from senior leadership to front line people. We also have developed specific training for Customer Experience professionals, whom we train and certify on our tools and techniques. We believe in “experiential” training, getting the delegate to feel what their Customer Experience is really like. We use real-life case studies to demonstrate our key points.

Market Insight and research – We specialize in conducting Customer insight on the subconscious and emotional aspects of the Customer Experience. We have developed models, with London Business School, that can predict revenue benefit an organization can enjoy through improving their experience. We put in place measurement tools that can measure the total Customer Experience.

Conference speaking – We have a team of people who deliver high quality conference speeches around the globe on how to improve your Customer Experience.





How laying people off has the potential of a silver lining

Laying people off (making people redundant) is never an easy task. However, when you are faced with this task, how can you make this cloud have a silver lining and improve your Customer Experience? To answer this question let me draw a parallel with one of my business experiences and show how this unpleasant task could improve your Customers Experience.

When I was VP of Customer Experience, at British Telecom (BT), my boss set me a task that was to change my life. He said, “Colin, I want you to improving the Customer Experience at least cost”. I was targeted improve our Customer satisfaction as well as cut 15 percent of my cost base. This was a challenging task and at first examination with conflicting priorities, but the more I looked into this, the more I realized these areas were all intrinsically linked.

Over the years, I had realized that a large part of a Customer Experience was about how a Customer felt about their experience. Clearly, they wanted decent prices and the product delivered on time but these are the basics. These are the “what”. A large part of the Customer Experience is about the “How”. This was the area that really needed fixing. Effectively we were treating Customers as transactions, something to be processed and they knew it. We needed to show Customer we cared about them and valued them. To achieve this I needed people who were emotionally intelligent.

I discovered my Customer Service people basically performed two tasks:

-  Talking and dealing with Customers’
-  Processing orders

These are two different skills. One using the right brain, people skills, empathy, listening and understanding, the other using the left brain, processing, analytical and logical.

Processing orders effectively was a particular challenge as we had many highly complex products. Everyone knew how to process the simple products as these were ordered every day, but some of the more complex orders were placed infrequently and would take people hours recall the process. Clearly this was inefficient. As a result of their complexity and infrequent order pattern this also resulted many mistakes being made. This resulted in Customer problems and increased our costs in rework.

We therefore decided to become more efficient and provide better service by creating a “front office “and a “back office” environment. The front office would talk with the customer and the back office would process the order.



To gain efficiencies, in the “Back office” we established product specialism which enabled people to become experts in their product processes. This dramatically improved the productivity and the quality of complex orders, thus improving the Customer Experience and saving costs.

This change also freed up time for the front office to talk with Customers and thus improve the Customer Experience further. However, how were we to select the people who would go into the front office and the back office? Or alternatively, your question today maybe, how do I select which people to lay off or make redundant?

To enable us to make this decision we identified our top 70 people and identified their levels of emotional intelligence, their attributes and the way they dealt with Customers. Importantly we had previously defined the experience we were trying to deliver and therefore knew what the future experience looked like. With the help of a Psychologist, we combined these aspects and produced a psychometric test for the people who wanted to work in the front office. We tested this on the top 70 people, they all passed, we also tested this on some people we thought would not make the grade and they were unsuccessful and therefore we had confidence the test worked.

When we announced the organization would be split into a front and back office environment we informed our people they had the choice of where they worked, however, if they wanted to work in the front office they needed to undertake the test. We likened this to a driving test, people could take it as many times as they wished but they needed to pass it. We were confident in the structure of the test and knew it was based on the makeup of people; this was not a skill that could be learned. A case in point was one person who took the test seven times and still failed. You have to admire their persistence, but it also proved the test worked.

The results were very surprising. We had anticipated most people would want to continue talking to customers. To our surprise they didn't, in fact over 50 percent of people either choose to work in the back office or failed the test. This effectively meant previously we had 50 percent of the wrong people talking to customers a surprisingly high percentage. Once the organization settled, we provided front office people with training to enhance their natural emotional skills and focused on how we could show the customer we valued and cared for them.

The results speak for themselves. Customer satisfaction increased by an incredible 30 percent, we increased our Customer facing time by 200 percent and saved 20 percent of costs.

We then used this test for all future recruitment which enabled us to align the people to the experience we were trying to deliver.



Therefore, if you are in the unfortunate position of laying people off now or in the future ideally you will retain the people who are emotionally intelligent and best fit the experience you are trying to deliver to your customers. This means you need to understand the level of emotional intelligence your organization has today and what you want it to look like for the future.

Maybe, just maybe, this cloud could have a silver lining.

About the Author

Colin Shaw is the Founder of Beyond Philosophy, a consultancy, training and Customer research organization. They are recognized as thought leaders in the Customer Experience and are located in London, England and Atlanta, Georgia USA. Colin is an International bestselling author and widely acclaimed public speaker. For further information on the Customer Experience, and to read Colin's blog and videos, please visit Beyond Philosophy at www.beyondphilosophy.com